Scrutiny Annual Report
2016/17

Contents

1. Chair's Foreword

Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Every year that I have been chair of the scrutiny programme committee I have been proud of the work that scrutiny has done and last year was no exception.

Despite the fact that this was the last year of a five year council, and a local election year, we continued to keep activity levels high and continued to make the difference that our citizens expect. I want to give my thanks to all of the councillors who have contributed this year but particularly to those who have been able to get involved in a number of activities.

Several in-depth reports on key topics were completed over the last 12 months on school readiness, poverty, supporting communities to run services and child and adolescent mental health services. I was convener for the last of these and was really pleased that we were able to raise the concerns that we heard from many parents through this work.

I have also been pleased about the increased use of pre-decision scrutiny and how this has helped us to engage with the commissioning review process. Another area that I am pleased about is the increased coverage that scrutiny work has had in the media and I hope this will continue.

Once again we have maintained our record of holding each of the Council's 10 Cabinet Members to account in a formal question and answer session with the Committee. I am grateful to our Cabinet Members for taking the time to provide us with information and for being so constructive in their sessions with us.

As we are at the start of a new municipal year and a new council I want to end by looking forward. I am looking forward to working with all of the backbench councillors as we continue to make a difference through the work we do. I hope the returning councillors will bring their knowledge and experience and I hope that the councillors will bring new ideas and fresh enthusiasm. Scrutiny is a challenging and ever evolving area of work and I look forward to seeing how we can make scrutiny even better than before.

2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2016-17

	A. How much scrutiny did we do?	B. How well did we do it?
Scrutiny Practice	1. Number of committee meetings = 13 ↓ (15) 2. Number of panel meetings/working groups = 91 ↓ (105) 3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4 ↔	4. Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 97% ↑ (93%) 5. Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 45% ↓ (96%) 6. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 67% ↓ (68%) 7. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 76% ↓ (79%) 8. Councillors who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 88% ↑ (81%) 9. Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 63% ↓ (71%) 10. Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 89% ↑ (83%) 11. Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 39% ↓ (75%)
Scrutiny Outcomes	C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council? 12. Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 77 ↑ (71) 13. In depth inquiries reported to Cabinet = 4 ↔ 14. Action plans agreed = 4 ↑ (3) 15. Follow ups undertaken = 3 ↓ (5) 16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 9 ↑ (6) 17. Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee = 100% ↔	D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny? 18. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet=81% ↓ (97%) 19. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 93% ↑ (77%) 20. Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 69% ↓ (76%) 21. Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 41% ↓ (55%) 22. Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 77% ↑ (74%) 23. Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 34% ↓ (60%)

↓↑ = significant change, ↓↑ = small change, ↔ no change

3. About the Indicators

A. How much scrutiny did we do?

3.1 Number of formal committee meetings = 13

Formal committee meetings for scrutiny are held in public and give councillors the opportunity to hold cabinet members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues.

The committee meetings for 2016-17 were as follows:

- Scrutiny Programme Committee (12 meetings)
- Special Scrutiny Programme Committee – Crime and Disorder Scrutiny (1 meeting)

Comparison with previous years:
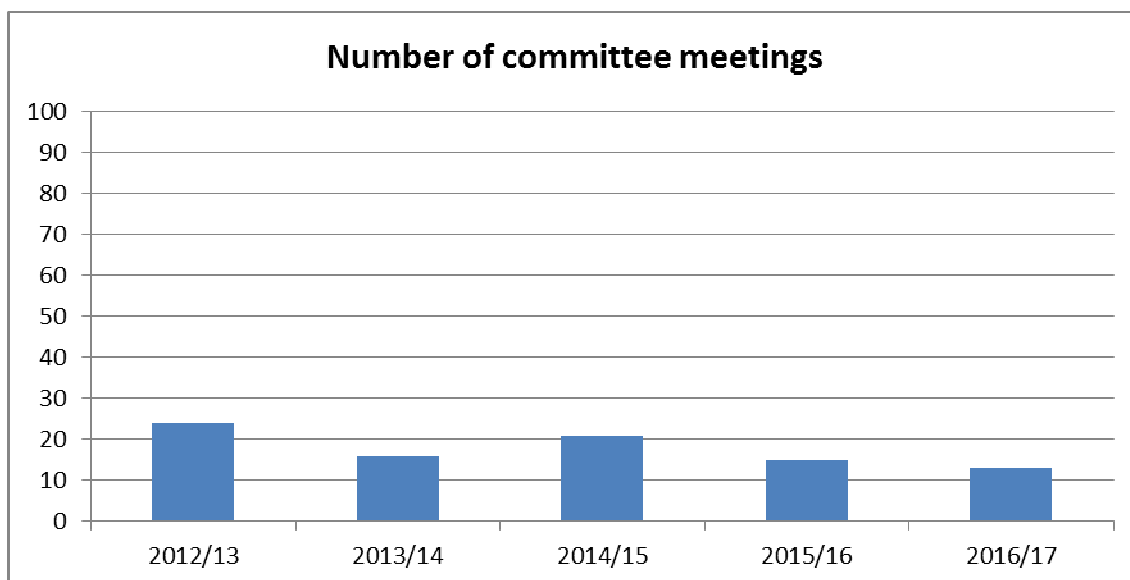
(Note: During 2012/13 before the Scrutiny Programme Committee was established three Scrutiny Boards were operating)

3.2 Number of panel meetings/working groups = 91

Panel meetings and working groups are established by the Scrutiny Programme Committee with an appointed convener. There are two types of panels:

Inquiry panels - these undertake in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis.

Performance panels - these provide in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas.

Working groups are one-off meetings established when a matter should be carried out outside of the committee but does not need a panel to be set up.

Comparison with previous years:

Number of panel meetings/working groups
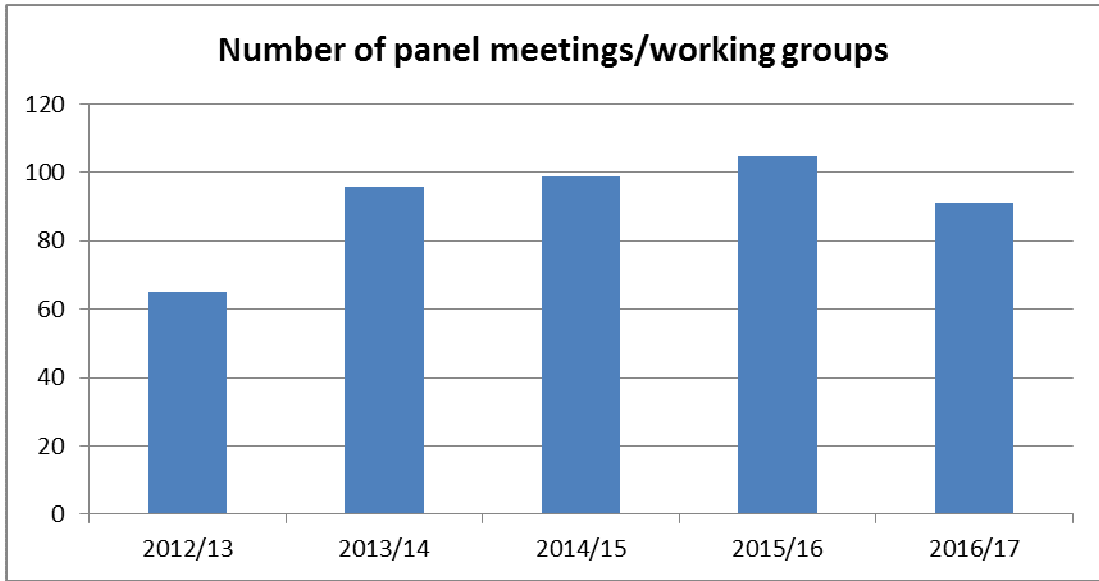
3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4

Work on the following in-depth inquiries was completed during 2016-17:

Inquiry	Panel
School Readiness: *How can school readiness be improved in Swansea?*	School Readiness Inquiry Panel
Action, partnership, participation: *How can the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy be improved?*	Tackling Poverty Inquiry Panel
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: *How can the Council work with health and other partners to reduce demand for child and adolescent mental health services?*	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Inquiry Panel
Community Action: *How can the Council best support residents to run services in their own communities?*	Building Sustainable Communities Inquiry Panel

Comparison with previous years:

Number of in-depth inquiries completed

A bar chart titled "Number of in-depth inquiries completed" with values: 2012/13 = 4, 2013/14 = 2, 2014/15 = 4, 2015/16 = 4, 2016/17 = 4.
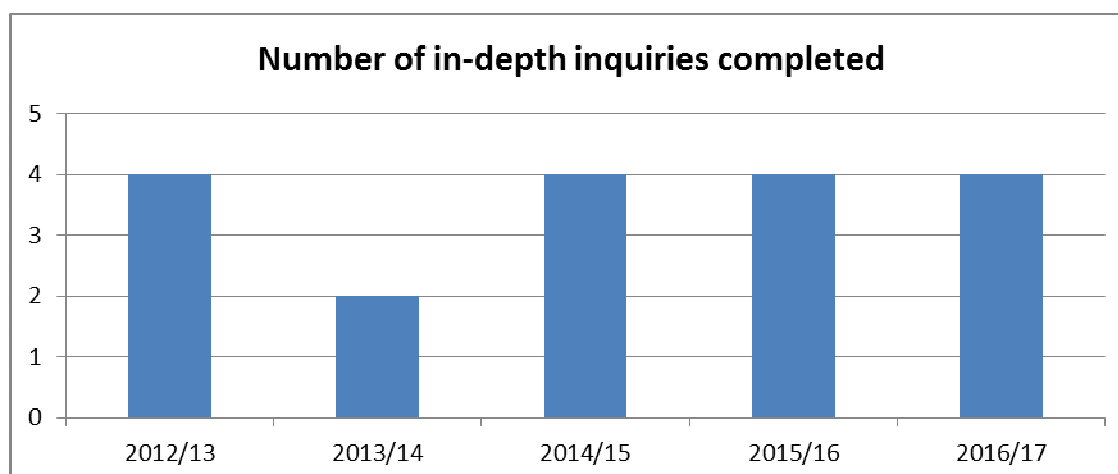
B. How well did we do it?

3.4 Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 97%

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of Councillors. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 35 (49% of all councillors).

Comparison with previous years:

Councillors who have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny

A bar chart titled "Councillors who have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny" with values: 2012/13 = 89%, 2013/14 = 97%, 2014/15 = 91%, 2015/16 = 93%, 2016/17 = 97%.
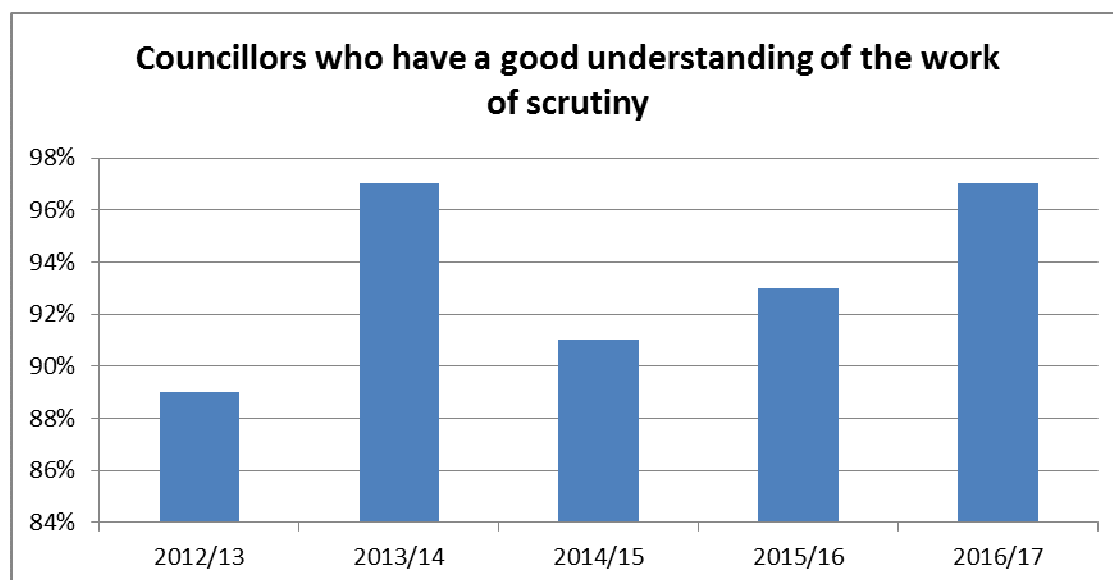
**3.5 Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 45%**

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of staff and partners. The number of people answering this question was 67 which is a low number from which to draw meaningful conclusions.

Comparison with previous years:

Staff who have a good understanding of scrutiny
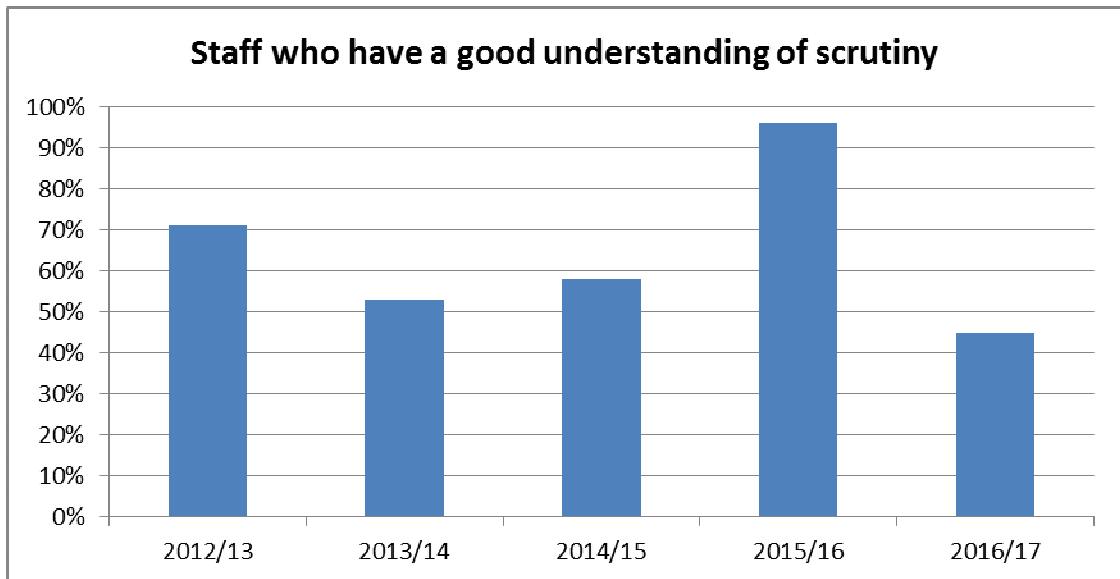
3.6 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 67%

The rate of councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process. Attendance figures for councillors attending formal meetings are collected by the Members Support Team and published on the Council's website. 2016/17's figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panel meetings and the working groups.

Comparison with previous years:

Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings
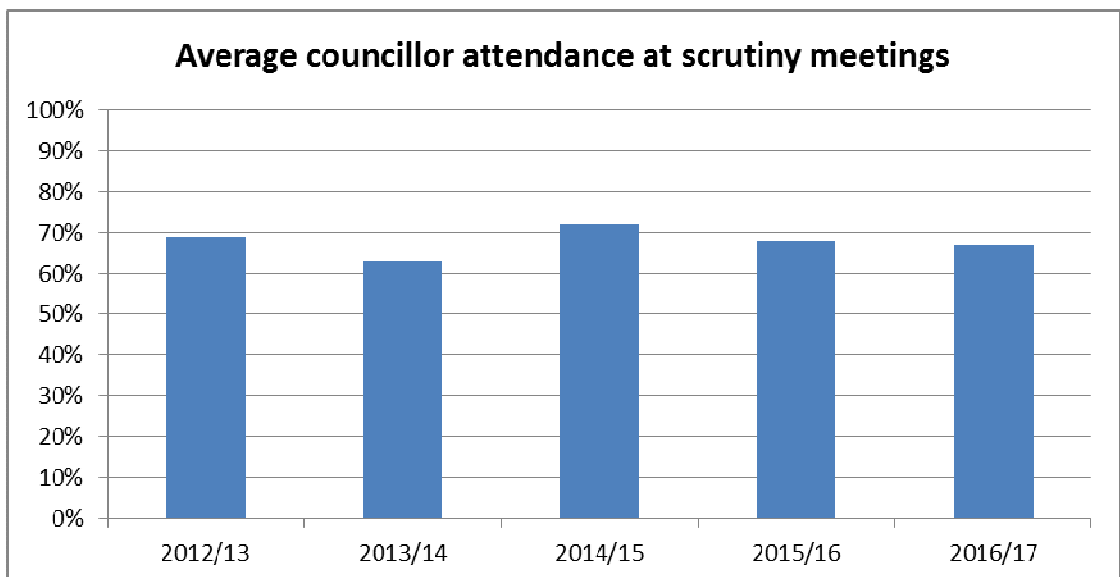
3.7 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 76%

The large majority of backbench councillors were involved in scrutiny either through the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panels or working groups.

Comparison with previous years:

Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny
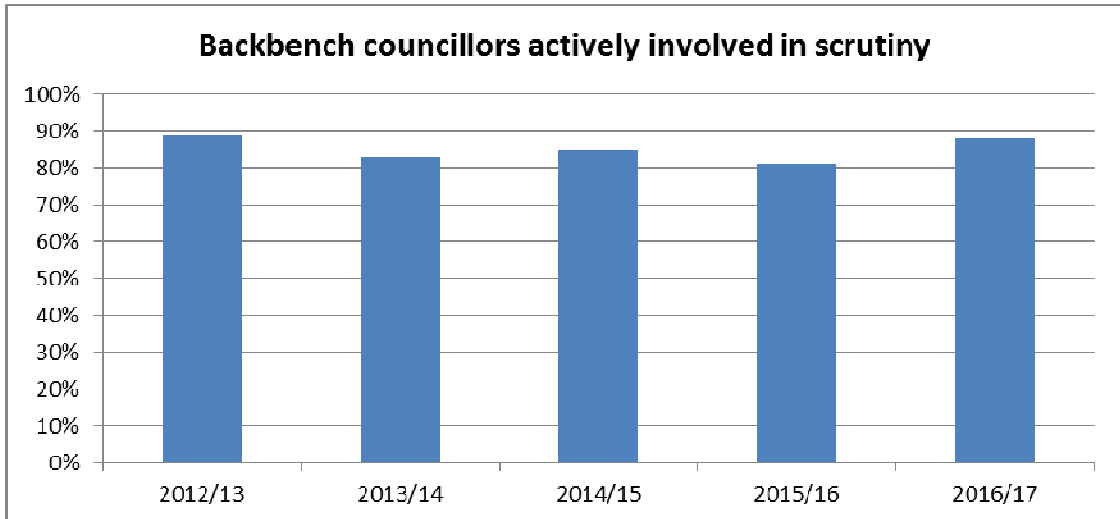
3.8 **Councillors who have used the service who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 88%**

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data is collected via an annual survey of councillors. The number of councillors answering this question was 35.

Comparison with previous years:

Councillors who agree that support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent of very good
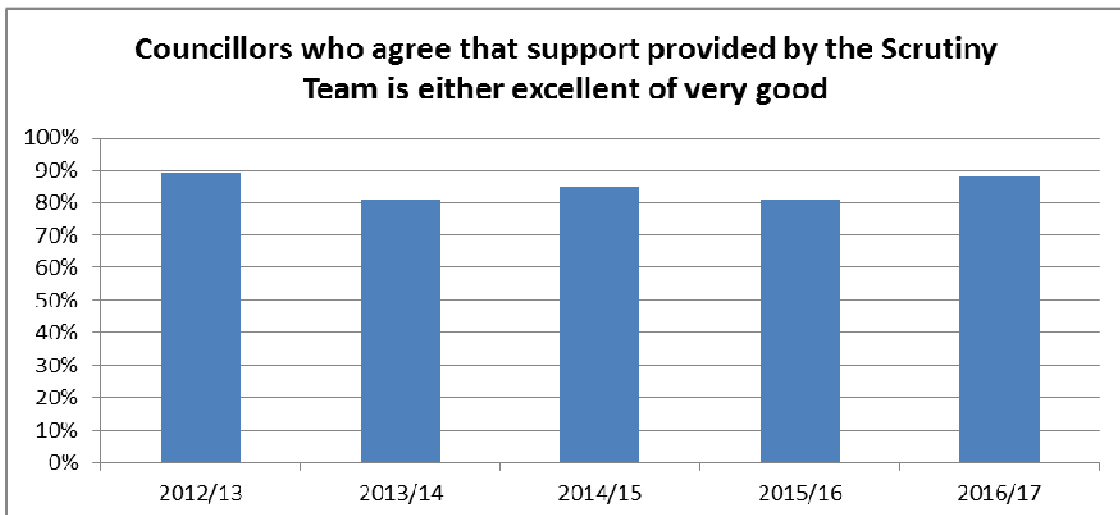
3.9   Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 63%

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data is collected via an annual survey of staff and partners. Only those who have used the service are asked this question. The number of people answering this question was 19.

Comparison with previous years:
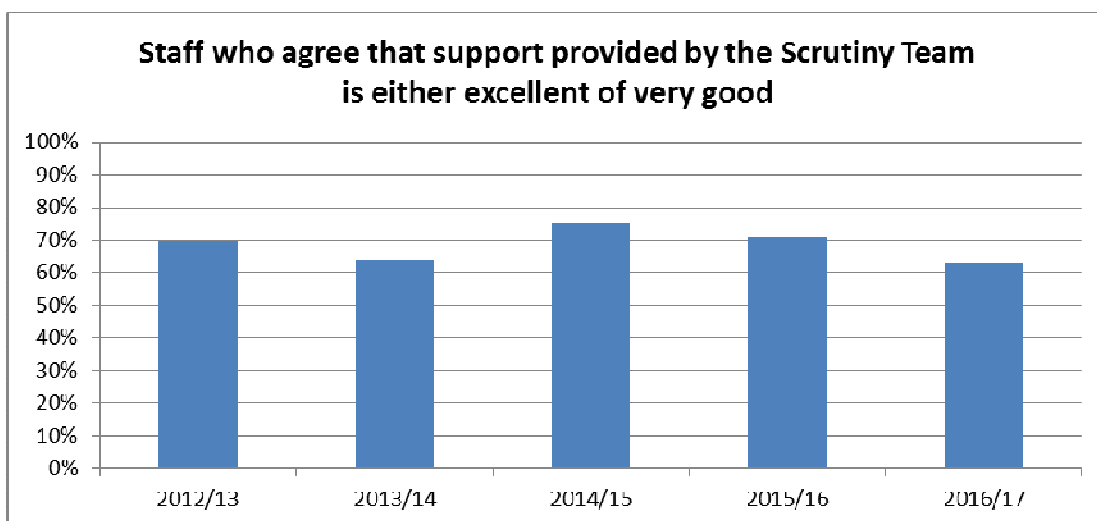
3.10   Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 89%

As part of an annual survey, councillors are asked whether they feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. The number of councillors answering this question was 35. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.

Comparison with last year:
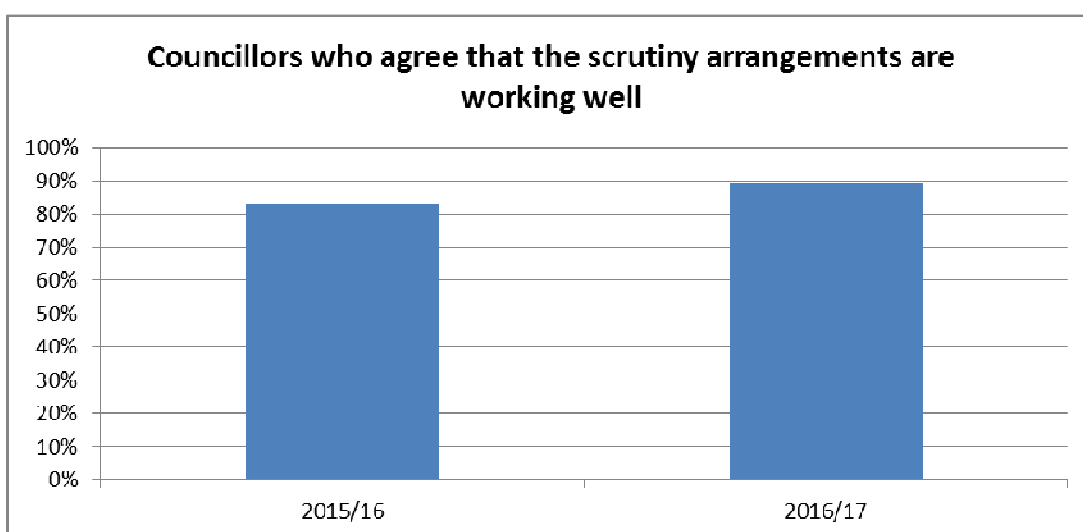
3.11 Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 39%

As part of an annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether the feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. The number of people answering this question was 67 which is a low number from which to draw meaningful conclusions. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.

Comparison with last year:
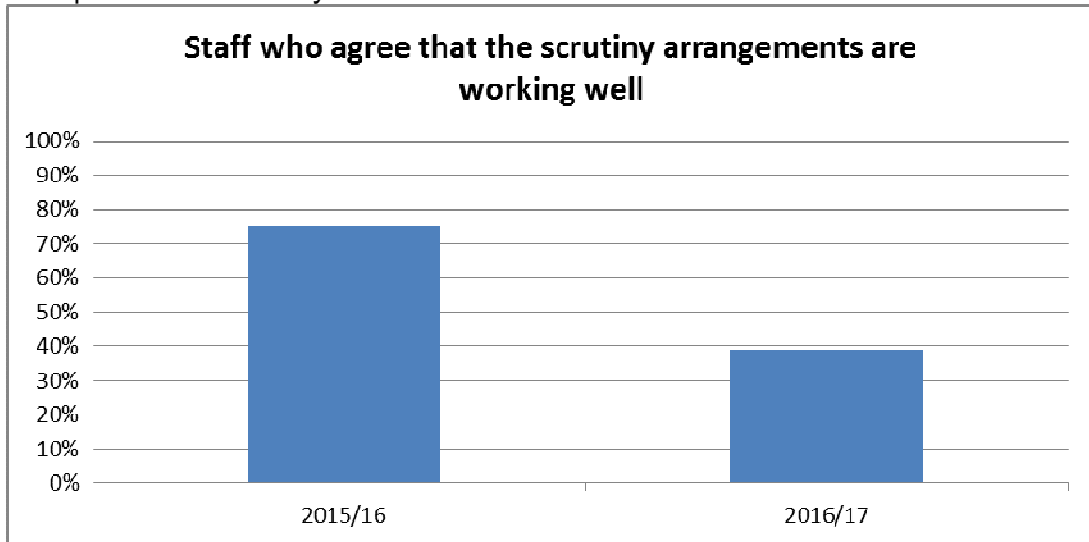
C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?

3.12 Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 77

Chairs letters allow the committee and panel meetings/working groups to communicate quickly and efficiently with the relevant cabinet members. They use these letters to raise concerns, highlight good practice, ask for further information and make recommendations.

Comparison with previous years:

Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members
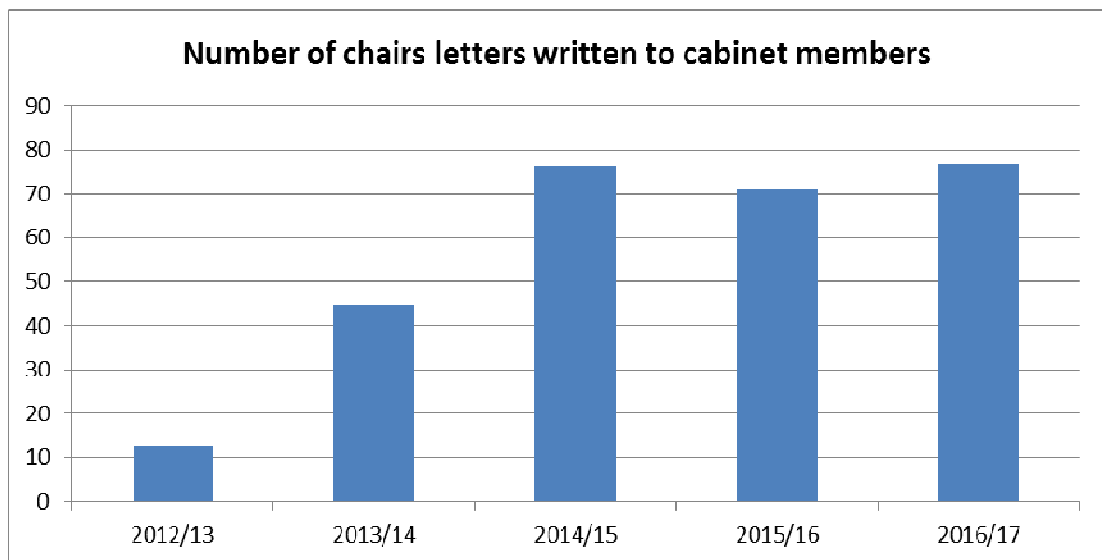
3.13 In-depth inquiries / reviews reported to Cabinet = 4

In depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations agreed by scrutiny and action plan on how the recommendations will be implemented. The following in-depth reviews were reported to Cabinet from scrutiny with the number of recommendations from each shown in brackets:

- Readiness for School (9)
- Tackling Poverty (15)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (15)
- Building Sustainable Communities (10)

Comparison with previous years:

In-depth inquiries reported to Cabinet

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	3	6	4	4	4
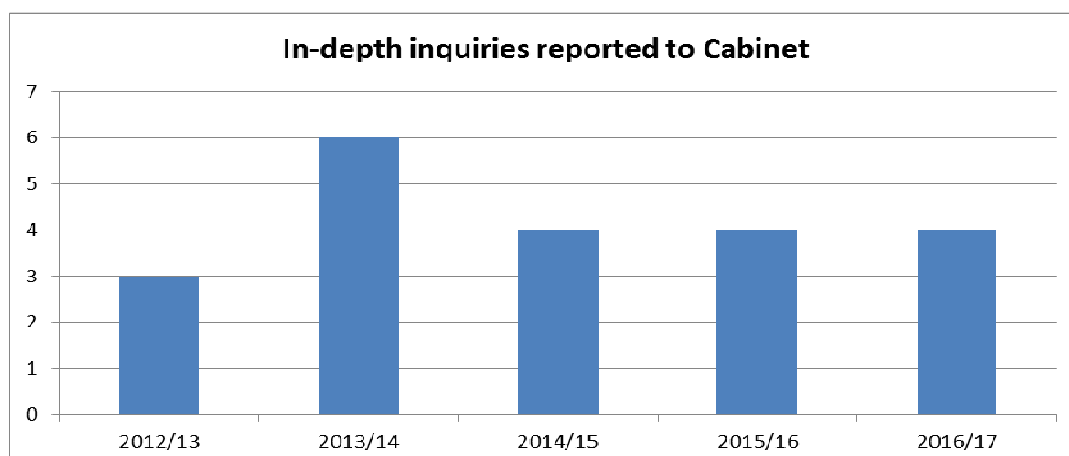
3.14 Action plans agreed = 4

Once recommendations and an action plan have been agreed by cabinet, scrutiny will follow up on progress with implementation and impact. The following action plans were agreed following in-depth inquiries during 2015-16:

- School Governance
- Gypsy Traveller Site Search Process
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Building Sustainable Communities

Comparison with previous years:

Action plans agreed

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	3	4	4	3	4
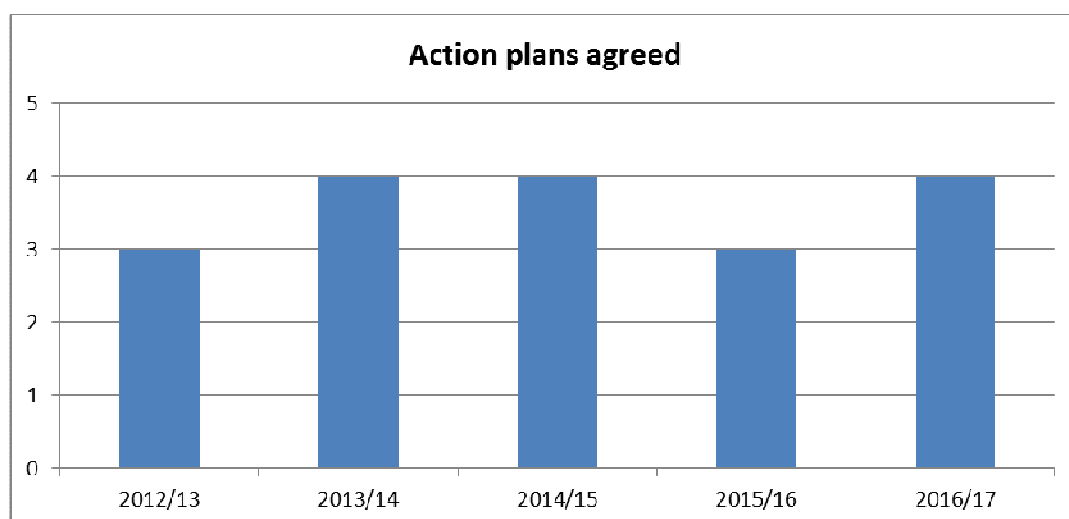
3.15 Follow ups undertaken = 3

In order to check whether the agreed action plans have been carried out, scrutiny will ask for follow up reports from cabinet members. If councillors are satisfied they can then conclude the work for that inquiry. The following follow ups were considered in 2015-16:

- Corporate Culture

- Social Care at Home
- Education Inclusion

Comparison with previous years:

Follow ups undertaken

A bar chart titled "Follow ups undertaken" showing values: 2012/13 = 7, 2013/14 = 2, 2014/15 = 4, 2015/16 = 5, 2016/17 = 3.
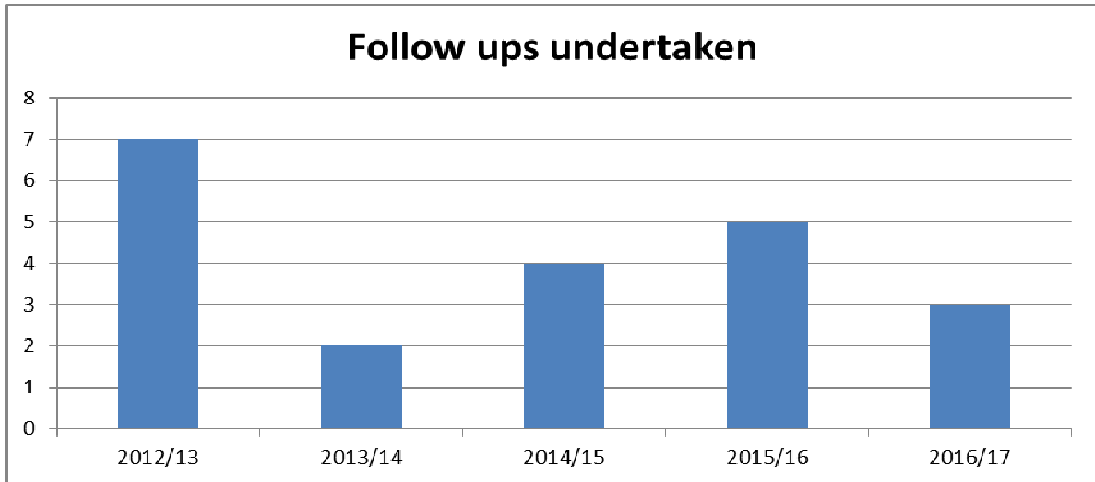
3.16   Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 9

Pre decision scrutiny involves scrutiny councillors considering cabinet reports before cabinet makes a final decision. In 2016/17 9 cabinet reports were subject to pre decision scrutiny, these were:

- Waste Management Commissioning Review
- Castle Square – Development & Public Realm Opportunity
- Corporate Building & Property Services Commissioning Review
- Parks & Cleansing Commissioning Review
- Budget
- Domestic Abuse Commissioning Review
- Family Support (Under 11s and Over 11s Cluster)
- Castle Square Development & Public Realm Opportunities
- Swansea City Centre Regeneration – Funding & Delivery Strategy

Comparison with previous years:

Pre-decision scrutiny

A bar chart titled "Pre-decision scrutiny" showing values: 2012/13 = 0, 2013/14 = 0, 2014/15 = 2, 2015/16 = 6, 2016/17 = 9.
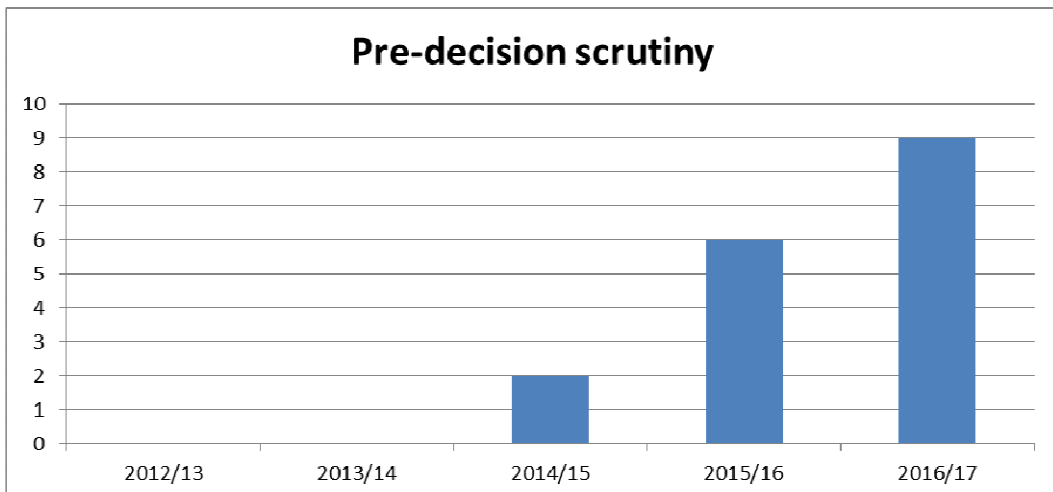
3.17 Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee – 100%

Cabinet members attend scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information. Cabinet attendance at scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the 'holding to account' role of scrutiny is functioning well. In 2016/17 every Cabinet member attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee. This indicator was added in 2013/14.

Comparison with previous years:
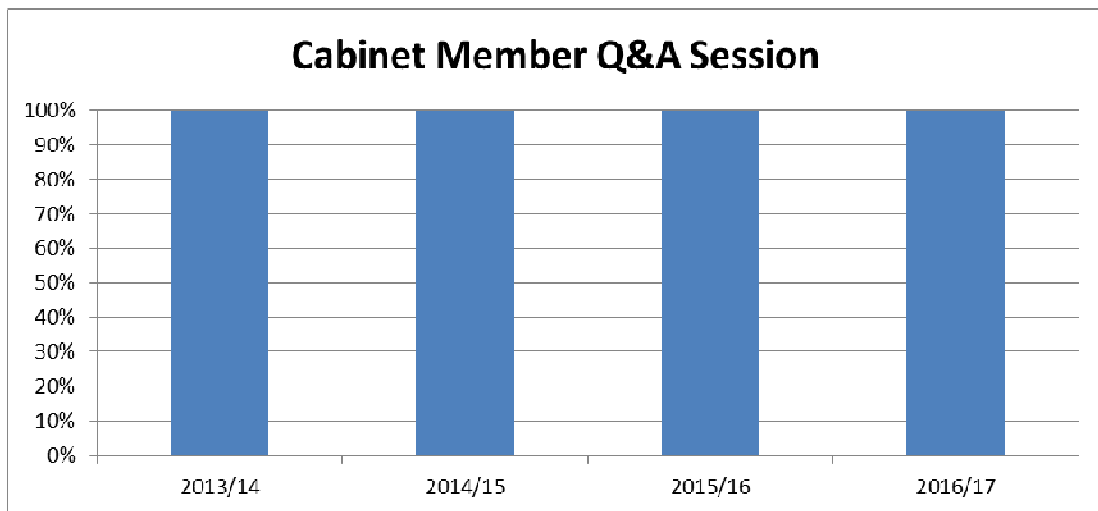
D.   What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

3.18   Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 81%

The rate that cabinet accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. Cabinet responded to 46 scrutiny recommendations in 2016-17 of which 34 were accepted and 3 were partly accepted. 5 were rejected.

Comparison with previous years:
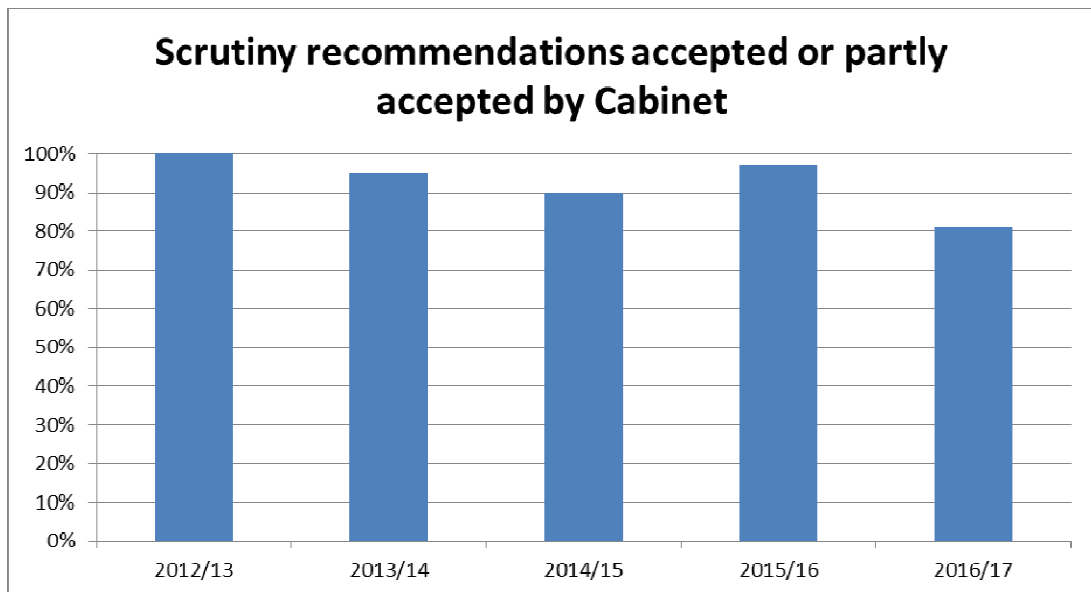
3.19   Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 77%

When follow up reports are presented to scrutiny they detail which of the recommendations from the in depth inquiry have been completed in line with the cabinet member's action plan and which have not. Scrutiny councillors then consider whether they agree with the assessment taking into account the evidence they are presented with. This indictor represents the percentage of recommendations accepted by scrutiny as being completed for the year (60 recommendations were considered of which 56 were signed off as complete).

Comparison with previous years:

Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as complete

A bar chart showing percentages by year:
- 2012/13: approximately 69%
- 2013/14: approximately 50%
- 2014/15: approximately 80%
- 2015/16: approximately 77%
- 2016/17: approximately 93%
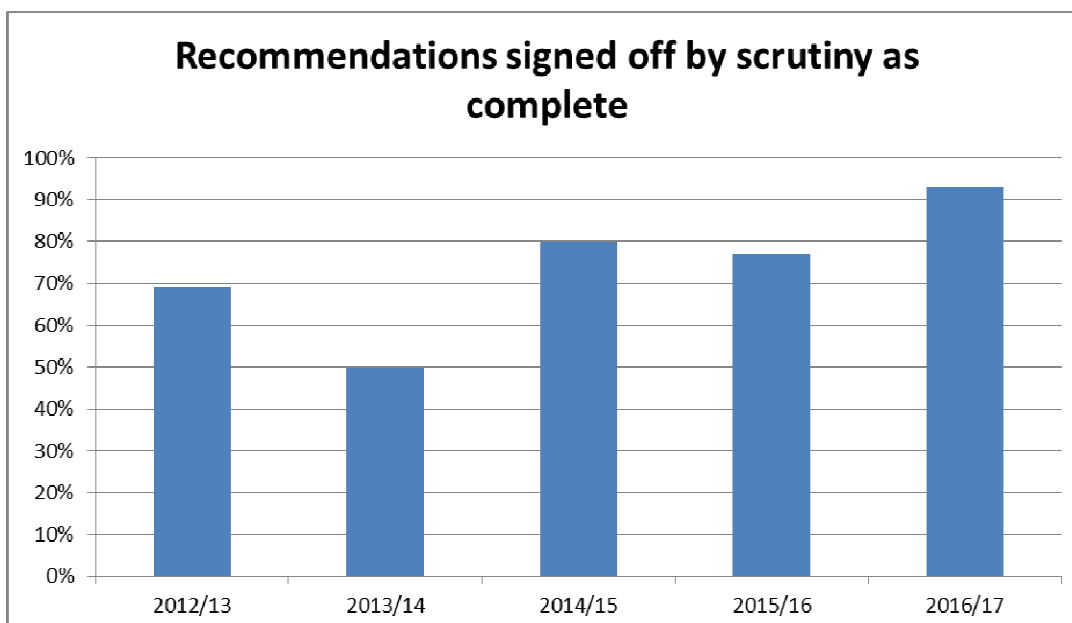
3.20 Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 69%

As part of an annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 35 (49% of all councillors).

Comparison with previous years:

Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council

A bar chart showing percentages by year:
- 2012/13: approximately 79%
- 2013/14: approximately 70%
- 2014/15: approximately 84%
- 2015/16: approximately 75%
- 2016/17: approximately 69%
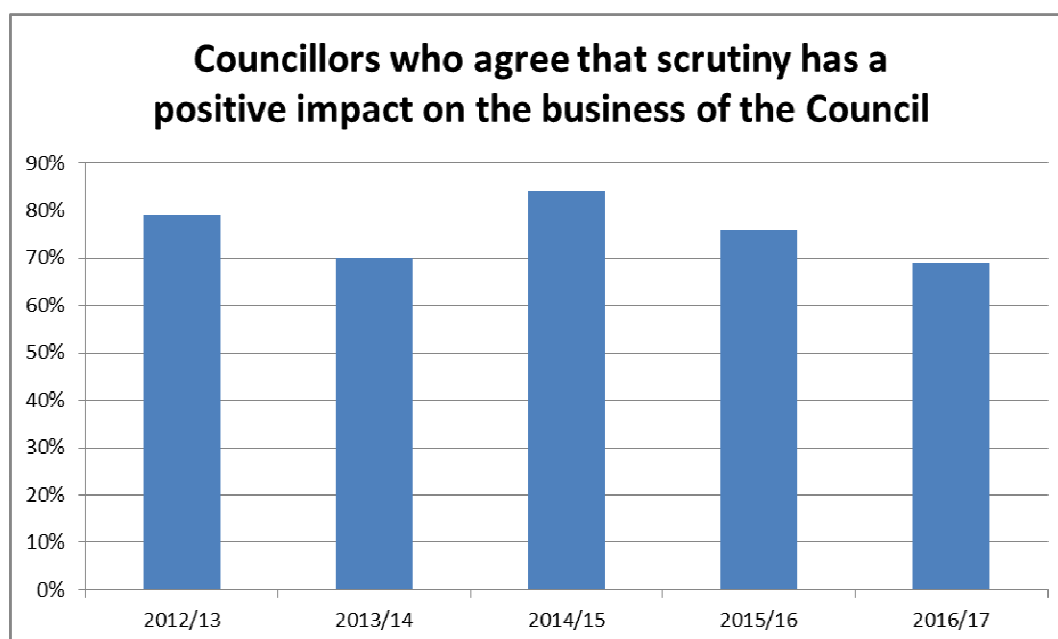
3.21 Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 41%

As part of an annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The number of people answering this question was 67.
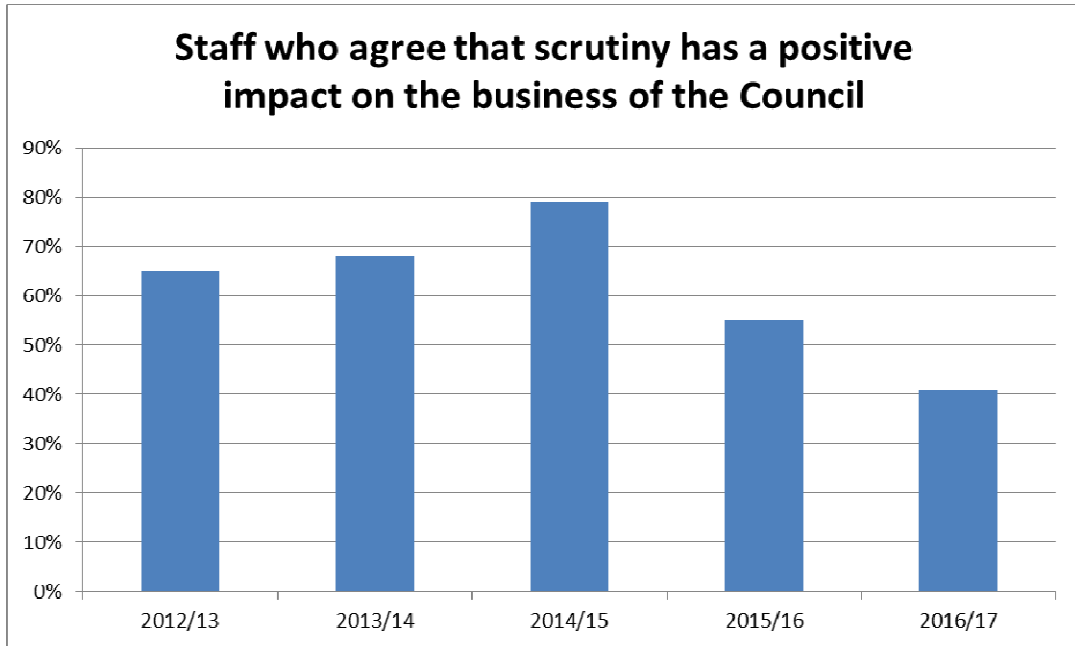
Comparison with previous years:

Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council

A bar chart titled "Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council" with the y-axis ranging from 0% to 90%. The bars show:
- 2012/13: approximately 65%
- 2013/14: approximately 68%
- 2014/15: approximately 79%
- 2015/16: approximately 55%
- 2016/17: approximately 41%

3.22 **Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 77%**

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.

Comparison with last year:

A bar chart titled "Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance" with the y-axis ranging from 0% to 100%. The bars show:
- 2015/16: approximately 74%
- 2016/17: approximately 77%

3.23 Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 34%

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. Only 67 staff and partners answered this question. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.
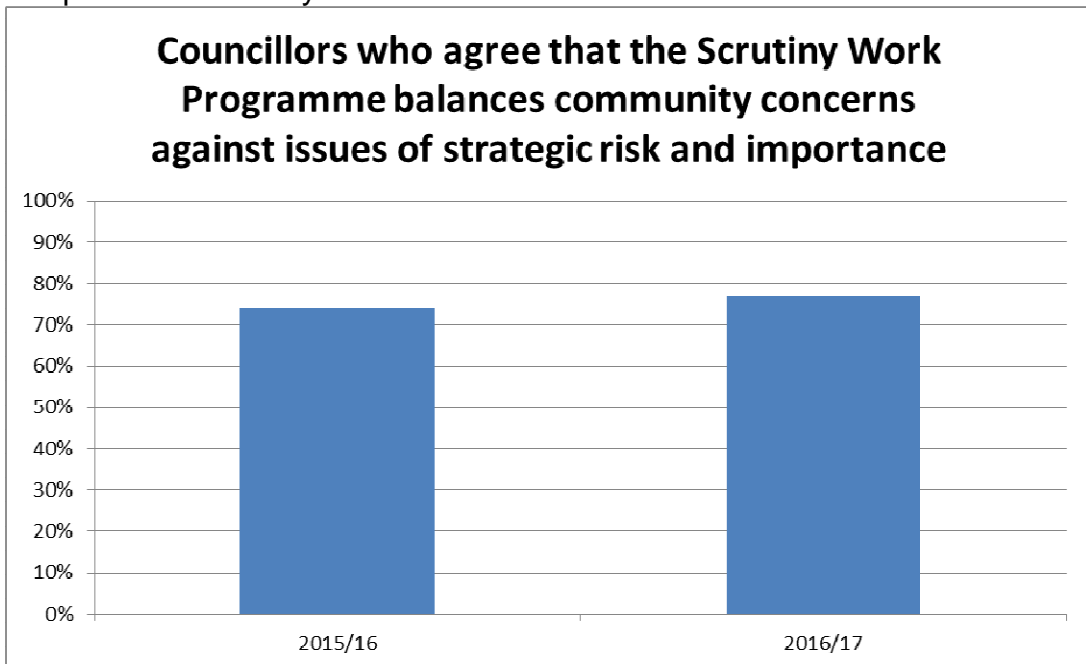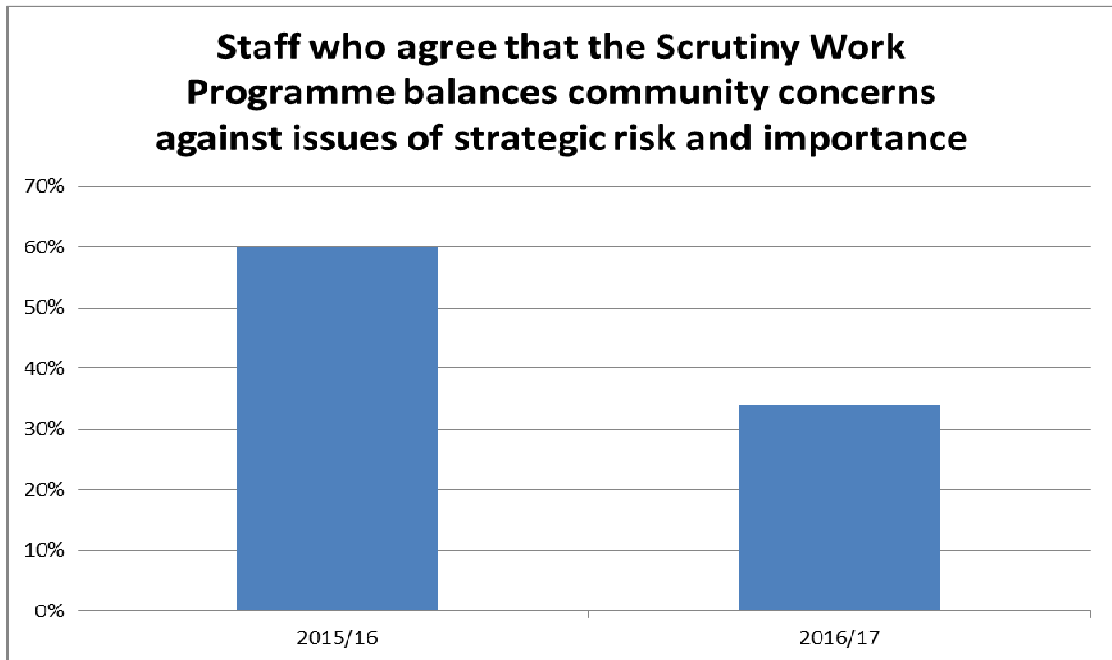
Comparison with last year:

Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance

4.   Feedback and Improvement

4.1   Improving Scrutiny

This annual report marks the end of a five year Council. While it is important that areas for improvement are discussed and agreed by scrutiny councillors in the new Council, we believe it is helpful to set out what we think has worked well and what has not worked so well. We hope that scrutiny going forward will be able to continue and expand what has been effective and to try new things in those areas where things could be better.

The suggestions about what has worked well and not so well come from the following sources:

- Scrutiny Annual Survey
- User research with scrutiny councillors conducted in December 2016
- Feedback received throughout the year

4.2   Things that have worked well

Overall both councillors and staff report that scrutiny is working well with 69% of councillors agreeing that scrutiny has had a positive impact on the business of the Council. Survey respondents also highlighted the clarity of the well organised scrutiny process that was challenging and constructive with items that were relevant and justified and interested members asking good questions.

Specific things worth noting include:

1.   Pre-decision scrutiny
The number of times that pre-decision scrutiny was used continued to increase with eight taking place in 2016/17. At the same time those involved feel that the process works well and has had a positive impact for commissioning reviews in particular.

2.   Councillor commitment
Scrutiny maintained a high level of activity even in an election year with 104 meetings being held. Councillor attendance also remained high. A core group of councillors have been able to offer a high level of commitment and the system has been able to benefit from this.

3.   Cabinet Member Q&A Sessions
Cabinet Member Q&As continue to be an important aspect of the Council's scrutiny work and are well regarded by scrutiny councillors. Cabinet Members also feel that Q&As provide a robust test for and that the committee acts respectfully and fairly. Once again every Cabinet member attended a Q&A at least once during the course of the year.

4. Flexible working

The opportunity to do detailed work in some areas, such as child and family services, and quick, light touch work in other areas, is seen as a strength of the system by those involved.

5. In-depth inquiries

From councillors we know that they value the opportunity to explore and question topics in detail and to develop a real sense of team working with fellow councillors. We also had a positive mention for a previous inquiry into corporate culture on the Good Practice Exchange blog [here](#).

6. Media coverage and communications

There has been a good level of media coverage for scrutiny work over the last 12 months. From our survey we also know that councillors feel that there has been good communication to them throughout the scrutiny process and that the scrutiny webpages are seen as 'first class'. The scrutiny bulletin board also had a positive mention on a popular national blog [here](#).

7. Support for scrutiny

We know that councillors value the support that they receive from the scrutiny team and this year 88% rated that support as either excellent or very good. At their last meeting the Scrutiny programme Committee commended the Scrutiny Team for their work, advice and support

8. Regional scrutiny – work with ERW

Regional work will become an increasingly important feature of scrutiny over the next few years so it is good that Swansea's provision of support for scrutiny of ERW (regional education service) has worked well and been well received. The Managing Director said that: "Many thanks for this work. It is coordinated well and the feedback is good"

4.3 Things that could be improved

While overall feedback was positive there were nevertheless a number of general improvement issues raised such as the need to better at focussing on the good as well as the bad, monitoring outcomes, providing opportunities for all councillors to express their views and avoiding 'over scrutiny' of some topics. Respect for the right to speak welsh was also raised as an issue through the survey.

Some of the issues that stood out included:

1. Greater recognition for scrutiny work

Some scrutiny councillors felt that their work was not getting sufficient recognition from Cabinet and Council.

2. Greater staff awareness of scrutiny

Levels of staff awareness of scrutiny continue to be low. Only 45% of those surveyed said they had a good understanding of scrutiny.

3. Better timings for meetings

Some councillors have been unable to attend meetings due to the time they have been arranged or because they have been arranged at short notice. Lower levels of attendance can have an impact on the quality of meetings.

4. Better use of data

The use of data was raised in the survey suggesting that councillors could use data more effectively and use more than one source where possible.

5. Less duplication with Cabinet Advisory Committees

This issue was raised several times in our survey by staff and councillors. While the Cabinet Advisory Committees have now been replaced by Policy Development and Delivery Committees, the issue still needs consideration.

6. Excluding party politics

Our survey suggests that, while scrutiny is generally non-partisan, there is a perception that party politics can occasionally be a factor.

7. More engaged Cabinet responses

The Scrutiny Programme Committee highlighted that, there had been occasions when the recommendations from in depth reports were not fully understood and given due consideration from the perspective of the scrutiny councillors involved.

8. Expand the group of the most active councillors

The Scrutiny Programme Committee were keen to see more councillors getting more active in the work so that the bulk of the work did not just fall to a small group. The need to see a wider range of councillors more actively involved was also highlighted in the survey.

9. Greater strategic focus

The need to ensure that future scrutiny work focuses on strategic topics to have maximum impact, and spend less time on very specific and smaller, nonetheless interesting, topics, was highlighted by the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

10. More time to scrutinise commissioning review reports

The Scrutiny Programme Committee highlighted that, while the scrutiny of Commissioning Reviews had been a positive step forward, this would be further improved by having more time to scrutinise such important cabinet reports.