

Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2019/2020 (No. 1)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’



Ensuring Swansea Council is meeting its Equalities duties

Scrutiny Councillors have carried out an in-depth inquiry to examine how well the Council is meeting its duties under the Equality Act 2010

(Lead: Councillor Louise Gibbard)

The Convener of the Equalities Scrutiny Inquiry Panel, Councillor Louise Gibbard, said *‘We chose to look at this issue because it features highly in the list of issues that Councillors and the general public are concerned about. It has provided scrutiny councillors with the opportunity, ten years on from the passing of the Equality Act, to reflect on how far we have come as a city and a local authority to embed the principles of equality and diversity in all we do.’*

Councillors sitting on this Inquiry Panel heard from people from different groups and organisations across Swansea, including: young people, older people, people from the LGBT Forum, Carers, and people from the Black & Minority Ethnic Forum.

Councillors also spoke to Council Directors in order to understand the equalities aspects within their remit including how they are progressing with their equalities objectives, the embedding of the council’s equalities duties and staff training/knowledge.

The Panel found that ‘Swansea Council does treat people fairly but this could be improved’. The Panel concluded that there are seven ways in which Swansea Council can improve how it meets its equalities duties, by:

1. Keeping a close eye on the national picture and how that impacts us locally
2. Continuing to build upon the commitment to equality and diversity already evident within the Council
3. Ensuring effective policy, practice and processes are in place that meet and help embed the Equalities Duty
4. Improving the accessibility of Council services
5. Improving how we work with and learn from others
6. Continuing to improve how we consult and engage
7. Protecting future generations

Following this inquiry the council has already decided to establish an Equalities & Future Generations Policy Development Committee that will help the Council to identify and take forward actions to implement the inquiry recommendations.

The [final inquiry report](#) was presented to Cabinet on 19 September and it was very well received. Councillor Clive Lloyd, who is the Cabinet Member responsible for Equalities, thanked all who took part in the inquiry, welcomed the inquiry report as he thought it was ‘timely’ and added *‘it is really pleasing the amount of engagement that took place through this Panel with outside bodies in terms of demonstrating how the council interacts in a proper equalities manner in line with our strategic equality plan. I think this was a good example of excellent co-production, listening and delivering an inquiry which really focussed on what people and groups think of the Council rather than it being member led’*

A decision on the inquiry recommendations is expected at the Cabinet meeting on 21 November.

Holding Cabinet Members to Account

The Scrutiny Programme Committee continues to hold cabinet members to account through monthly Q&A sessions. Acting as a 'critical friend' Scrutiny Councillors challenge Cabinet Members on their priorities, actions, achievements and impact.

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

The Committee recently met with Cllr Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy, and questioned her on various aspects of her portfolio including progress made with the Council's adoption of the 'Housing First' model and approach to tackling homelessness. Cllr Lewis reported that accommodation and intensive support for the most entrenched rough sleepers in Swansea can be achieved through this model. She added that there is a capacity to work with up to 20 individuals with an Intervention Team on hand and through multi-agency working to help these individuals access housing and the support they need to help sustain it. The Committee wrote to Cllr Lewis following the session asking for the planned start date for 'Housing First' and for more details on support expected from the local health board.

Members of the public are invited to contribute ideas to the Scrutiny Programme Committee's Q&A sessions. We have now introduced an [online submission form](#) to further simplify and promote engagement with the general public.

Upcoming Q&A Sessions

13 Jan 2020:

Cllr. Rob Stewart
(Leader): Economy & Strategy

10 Feb 2020:

Cllr. Mark Thomas:
Environment & Infrastructure Management

9 March 2020:

Cllr. Robert Francis-Davies: Investment, Regeneration & Tourism

Continuing to listen to the people of Swansea

Councillor-led scrutiny enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard. The Adult Services Scrutiny Performance Panel has held focus groups to listen to the views of parents of adults with Mental Health Issues and Learning Disabilities who require supported living arrangements.

(Lead: Councillor Peter Black)

The Adult Services Scrutiny Panel has been keen to engage more widely and gather external perspectives to support its monitoring of performance and challenge to services. Before considering a report from the Cabinet Member for Health, Care & Ageing Well, Councillor Mark Child, on 'Supported Living Developments for Mental Health and Learning Disability Services' the Scrutiny Panel heard what parents of adults with Mental Health Issues & Learning Disabilities who are either in supported living or are on the waiting list for supported living, thought of the service.

Scrutiny councillors were able to discuss and question Cllr Child and senior officers about their assessment of services in light of the concerns raised by the parents including:

- Lack of communication between parents & care providers
- Care plans and contracts not deemed transparent and many parents expressed concerns about not having access to their adult children's care plans
- High level of carer staff turnover
- Lack of training of carer staff
- Instability brought forth by change of management and/or care provider affecting the service users' well-being

Cllr Peter Black, convenor of this Panel wrote to Cllr Child to reflect on the Panel's findings.

Following on from these meetings two further focus groups have been arranged as requested by the parents for both the Adult Services and the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Panels to listen to views of carers focussing on 'Carers Assessments'.



Preparing for Brexit

A one off Scrutiny Working Group took place to look at the Authority's plans in preparation for Brexit.

(Lead: Cllr Peter Jones)

Scrutiny Councillors were reassured by the information provided at the meeting and felt the Authority is as prepared as it can be for Brexit. They would like to see the Authority publicise the good work it is doing to communicate this message.

The Working Group was pleased to hear that some monies are in place to help fund preparations for Brexit. However, this will not cover all the costs of managing and monitoring this work and Scrutiny Councillors suggested that the Authority will need to look at ways of getting this money back.

Scrutiny Councillors also felt concerned about any potential fuel crisis, as this could have a huge impact on communities should it go on for months. Their main concern was how the public would be able to continue accessing transport to work as well as emergency services. The Working Group acknowledged that there should not be a fuel shortage but if there is panic buying it could cause one and they wanted to know what the Authority could do to help.

In his response to the Working Group, the Leader of the Council has reassured that *'the likelihood of any disruption to fuel supplies is very low and this is agreed by all partners who have business continuity plans in-place; many of the emergency services have significant fuel reserves like ourselves in addition to our electric vehicle fleet. Public transportation has also been planning for some time and have contingency plans in-place to ensure service delivery. There has also been a significant amount of workaround communications, a part of which will be reassurance messaging to help prevent any false emergency being caused through panic buying'*.



Chair's Round up

This is my first roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2019/20, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Priorities for 2019/20

The Scrutiny Work Programme was agreed by the Committee in July, following our annual Work Planning Conference in June. All scrutiny councillors were invited to participate in an informal discussion on priorities for scrutiny, reflecting on last year's programme, hearing about council priorities and challenges, and views gathered from surveys, including issues raised by the public.

The Work Programme contains a varied selection of topics that shows the focus for scrutiny over the coming year. It represents strategic issues balanced with community concerns to ensure that scrutiny is always looking at the right things, and making good use of limited time and resources. A significant feature of the Work Programme is regular in-depth monitoring and challenge of performance in key areas, including Education and Social Services, through a number of Performance Panels. A new Performance Panel has been set up to focus on Natural Environment, aligned with the new Council Priority on maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity, to monitor delivery of Council commitments, and ensure there is an ongoing conversation between scrutiny and the executive on performance.

However, we also identify topics either for in-depth Inquiry or light-touch Working Groups. Our inquiry will look at Procurement, which will focus on what the Council is doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically, and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices.

In terms of one-off Working Groups, we have already looked at the Council's preparedness for Brexit. Other topics will include a look at: Staff Health & Well-being, Road Safety, and Digital Inclusion.

Lead Scrutiny Councillors

I want to thank all of the councillors who lead or participate in scrutiny, and we are keen to explore and address any barriers to participation that may exist. Councillors leading different parts of this year's Scrutiny Work Programme are:

Procurement Inquiry Panel	- Cllr. Chris Holley
Adult Services Performance Panel	- Cllr. Peter Black
Child & Family Services Performance Panel	- Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams
Development & Regeneration Performance Panel	- Cllr. Jeff Jones
Education Performance Panel	- Cllr. Lyndon Jones
Natural Environment Performance Panel	- Cllr. Peter Jones
Public Services Board Performance Panel	- Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee
Service Improvement & Finance Performance Panel	- Cllr. Chris Holley
Brexit Working Group	- Cllr. Peter Jones
Staff Health & Well-being Working Group	- Cllr. Cyril Anderson
Road Safety Working Group	- Cllr. Steve Gallagher
Digital Inclusion Working Group	- Cllr. Lesley Walton

Annual Report published

Looking back at 2018/19, I was proud to present our second Scrutiny Annual Report of this Council term to Council (Oct). The report reflected on the range of different activities carried out by scrutiny councillors over the past year to make sure the work of the Council is accountable and transparent, effective and efficient, and helps the Council to achieve its objectives and drive improvement, by questioning and providing challenge to decision-makers. It focuses on how scrutiny has made a difference for a better Swansea, and our efforts to support the continuous improvement of scrutiny practice here, building on the positive review of our scrutiny arrangements last year by the Wales Audit Office.

Picking Up Public Concerns

Following a public request for scrutiny we agreed to convene a meeting to look at concerns about urban gulls and nuisance. A meeting of the Natural Environment Performance Panel was held on 22 October to listen to these concerns, and consider different perspectives on the issue including the Council's position, and views from the RSPB. The Panel will be writing to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management, Cllr. Mark Thomas, with its views and recommendations that could help to address the problem, including actions to discourage public feeding and improve food waste storage and disposal. Even with a work programme agreed requests for scrutiny from any scrutiny councillor or member of the public can be made throughout the year. I will consider any issue raised and, with the committee's agreement, determine how best scrutiny can deal with it to make a difference.

Making the work of scrutiny transparent and accessible

Scrutiny agenda packs are available on the Council's 'agenda and minutes' webpage. There you can also find scrutiny letters sent to cabinet members following meetings and responses. Our meetings are open to the public and anyone living or working in Swansea can suggest a topic for scrutiny. There are also opportunities for anyone to suggest questions, and submit views. To keep an eye on what's going see the links below, subscribe to our newsletter, or even follow us on Twitter.

Councillor Mary Jones

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