

Progress Report – Current Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups

1. Inquiry Panels:

These will undertake in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis, and will be expected to take around six months to complete to enable wide-ranging evidence gathering, and production of a final report with conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet (and other decision-makers).

a) **Procurement** (convener: Cllr Chris Holley)

Key Question: What is the Council doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically, and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices?

Progress Bar:

Planning				Evidence Gathering				Draft Final Report			

The Procurement Pre-Inquiry Working Group met on the 24 October 2019 and involved an overview / briefing on the subject matter. This helped Councillors to be informed about how scrutiny can contribute to improvement and the focus, scale and direction of any inquiry. The Panel agreed to undertake an inquiry and the Terms of Reference were discussed. The inquiry work is on hold pending recruitment of Scrutiny Officer but will start evidence gathering as soon as possible and this could explore, for example

- effectiveness of process & strategy
- value for money / social value
- benefits to local economy
- impact of local procurement on regeneration / jobs
- financial savings to the Council
- collaboration

The inquiry may take up to six months to complete, as it will call for wide ranging evidence, and will lead to a report with conclusions and recommendations that will be presented to Cabinet.

2. Follow Up on Completed Inquiries:

Follow-ups of inquiries will consider both the implementation of scrutiny recommendations and wider impact / difference made. Inquiry Panels are reconvened between 6-12 months after cabinet decision on Inquiry reports.

Inquiry	Cabinet Decision	Recommendations			Follow Up Panel Meeting
		Agreed	Partly	Rejected	
Regional Working	16 Aug 2018	11	0	0	15 Oct 2019 COMPLETE
Natural Environment*	18 Jul 2019	18	0	2	1 Sep 2020 COMPLETE
Equalities	21 Nov 2019	18	0	0	tba July 2020

*this inquiry will be followed up within the work of the new Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel

3. Performance Panels:

NOTE: following the resumption of scrutiny activity in June, and in view of resources, the Committee directed that efforts be made to convene one meeting of each Performance Panel before the end of the municipal year (i.e. before October).

Performance Panels enable regular and structured in-depth monitoring of performance and challenge within these key areas:

a) **Service Improvement & Finance** (convener: Cllr Chris Holley)

The Panel usually meets every month. The Panel last met on 2 March 2020 discussing the Corporate Complaints Annual Report, Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring and the Wales Audit Office Report on Local Government Use of Data.

The Panel is meeting on 21 September 2020 for discussion of latest corporate performance and financial monitoring reports (Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring – 1st Quarter 2020/21; Annual Performance Monitoring Report – 2019/20) and relevant COVID-19 impacts and issues.

b) **Education** (convener: Cllr Lyndon Jones)

This Panel usually meets every month. The Panel met on 15 July 2020 for the first time since March 2020 for a service-specific update on the impact of COVID-19.

c) **Adult Services** (convener: Cllr Peter Black)

This Panel usually meets every month. The Panel met on 13 July 2020 for the first time since March 2020 for a service-specific update on the impact of COVID-19.

d) **Child & Family Services** (convener: Cllr Paxton Hood-Williams)

This Panel usually meets every two months. The Panel last met on 24 February 2020 to discuss progress on Child and Family Improvement Programme and Safeguarding.

The Panel is meeting on 16 September 2020 for a service-specific update on the impact of COVID-19 on this area of work.

e) **Development & Regeneration** (convener: Cllr Jeff Jones)

This Panel usually meets every two months. The Panel last met on 18 February 2020 to discuss the draft budget proposals.

The Panel is meeting on 14 September 2020 for a service-specific update on the impact of COVID-19 on this area of work.

f) **Natural Environment** (convener: Cllr Peter Jones)

This Panel usually meets quarterly. The Panel met on 1 September 2020 for the first time since December 2019. The Panel was able to discuss relevant impacts of COVID-19 and emerging environmental lessons and opportunities. The Panel also completed the follow up on the implementation of recommendations from the Natural Environment Inquiry that were agreed by Cabinet in July 2019. The Panel also received a verbal update on Local Flood Risk Management.

g) **Public Services Board** (convener: Cllr Peter Black)

This Panel usually meets twice yearly. The Panel last met on 5 February 2020 and had been focussing on action plans associated with Public Services Board objectives, progress and outcomes. A meeting planned for 22 April 2020 was cancelled – it would have focussed on the Stronger Communities and Working with Nature objectives, hearing from Public Services Board leads – Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service and Natural Resources Wales. Date for future meeting(s) are to be confirmed.

4. **Regional Scrutiny:**

This is collaborative scrutiny with other Local Authorities for topics / issues of shared interest or concern, and models of regional working.

a) **Education Through Regional Working**

The Scrutiny Councillor Group last met on 27 January 2020, hosted by Powys Council. They

- met with the Chair of the ERW Joint Committee and the Lead Director to discuss progress with reform programme and meeting the national mission for education
- discussed the costed ERW business plan
- spoke to the ERW Lead for Secondary Curriculum and Examinations
- spoke to the ERW Lead for Research and Higher Education Partnerships.

Arrangements for the next meeting are to be confirmed.

b) **Swansea Bay City Region**

The Joint Scrutiny Committee last met on 15 January 2020 in Pembroke to continue its City Deal Programme monitoring. As well as programme monitoring, there was specific discussion on local projects for Carmarthenshire and the Regional Digital Infrastructure Project, and a discussion on Terms and Conditions from UK and Welsh Governments on the release of monies.

Arrangements for the next meeting are to be confirmed.

5. **Working Groups:**

A number of new topics have been identified which will be dealt with through one-off Working Groups. These enable a 'light-touch' approach to specific topics of concern and will be planned as a one-off meeting (in the order shown below) primarily involving discussion with relevant cabinet member(s) / officer(s), and any other persons called, to gather information, ask questions, and give views / raise any concerns.

a) **Brexit** (convener: Cllr Peter Jones)

This Working Group met on 23 September 2019 to enable information, questions and discussion about Council preparedness and resilience; how this is being discussed; what plans / contingencies are being put in place given possible impact, relationship with Wales / UK Government, etc. A letter was sent to the Cabinet Member for Economy & Strategy with the thoughts of the Working Group and a response received – reported to the Committee in November. This issue is being kept in the work programme with a further meeting of the Working Group anticipated post Brexit, when the impact(s) should be clearer.

The following planned Working Groups are currently on hold due to resources:

b) **Staff Health & Well-being** (convener: Cllr Cyril Anderson)

This will enable information, questions and discussion on how the Council supports members of staff; issues around staff sickness; pressures, etc.

c) **Road Safety** (convener: Steve Gallagher)

This will enable information, questions and discussion on hot spots; work to improve safety; preventative measures; speed controls; safety of cycling routes; partnership working, etc.

d) **Digital Inclusion** (convener: Cllr Lesley Walton)

This will enable councillors to follow up on the Working Group meeting originally held in March 2017. At that meeting the Working Group detailed a number of issues to be considered as part of a review of the Council's digital inclusion strategy. Councillors will be able to have a discussion around digital transformation, the Council's digital inclusion strategy, and how well prepared both the Council and the public is to use and communicate / engage via digital technology to avoid exclusion / poor access)