Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 15 June 2021

Scrutiny Letters

Purpose:	To ensure the Committee is aware of the scrutiny letters produced following various scrutiny activities, and to track responses to date.
Content:	The report includes a log of scrutiny letters produced this municipal year, and provides a copy of correspondence between scrutiny and cabinet members where discussion is required.
Councillors are being asked to:	• Review the scrutiny letters and responses • Make comments, observations and recommendations as necessary
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Peter Black, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer:	Tracey Meredith, Chief Legal Officer
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1.   Introduction

1.1   The production of scrutiny letters has become an established part of the way scrutiny operates in Swansea. Letters from the chair (or conveners) allow scrutiny to communicate directly and quickly with relevant cabinet members.

1.2   These letters are used to convey views and conclusions about particular issues discussed and provide the opportunity to raise concerns, ask for further information, and make recommendations. This enables scrutiny to engage with Cabinet Members on a regular and structured basis.

2. **Reporting of Letters**

2.1   All scrutiny letters, whether they are written by the Scrutiny Programme Committee or conveners of Panels / Working Groups, are published to ensure visibility, of the outcomes from meetings, across the council and public.

2.2   The Scrutiny Programme Committee agenda also includes a copy of letters to/from Cabinet Members where specific discussion is required, e.g. letters relating to the Committee, Working Groups, and Inquiry Panel follow ups. Letters are included when cabinet member responses that were awaited are received or where a scrutiny letter did not require a response.

2.3   Where requested Cabinet Members are expected to respond in writing to scrutiny letters within 21 calendar days. The response should indicate what action (if any) they intend to take as a result of the views and recommendations made.

2.4   Letters relating to the work of Performance Panels are part of an ongoing dialogue with Cabinet Members and are therefore reported back and monitored by each Panel. However all Performance Panel conveners will provide a progress report to the Committee, including summary of correspondence with Cabinet Members and outcomes.

3. **Letters Log**

3.1   This report contains a log of scrutiny letters produced to enable the Committee to maintain an overview of letters activity over the year – see *Appendix 1*. For completeness, the full log covering the 2020-21 municipal year is also provided – see *Appendix 2*. The letters log shows the average time taken by Cabinet Members to respond to scrutiny letters, and the percentage of letters responded to within timescale.

3.2   The following letter(s), not already reported to the Committee, are *attached* for discussion:

	Activity	Meeting Date	Correspondence
a	Scrutiny Working Group - Workforce	29 Mar	Letter to / from Cabinet Members
b	Digital Inclusion – Working Group	11 May	Letter to Cabinet Member for Business Improvement & Performance

3.3   Scrutiny Working Group – Workforce (convener: Cllr Cyril Anderson)

3.3.1   A summary of the main outcome from the meeting and agreed action follows:

The Workforce Scrutiny Working Group met to look at the impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of staff; how the Council is supporting this; issues around home working; staff sickness; staff turnover; use of agency staff and pressures.

Overall, the Working Group was reassured that the Authority is doing what it can to support its workforce during and post pandemic. It heard about results from the staff survey that was undertaken towards the start of the pandemic and were told that a follow up survey will be undertaken. The Working Group was also pleased about the extensive engagement with the Trade Unions and that this continues on a fortnightly basis.

The Working Group gave its support to the approach of having an agile working policy and accommodation strategy that is more flexible and provides work / life balance, whilst still meeting the needs of the residents of Swansea. It recommended that any new home working policy must include clear provision to support the health and well-being of staff working from home.

The Working Group recommends to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that a follow up meeting of the Working Group is held within six months, when the results of the follow up survey have been analysed and we understand better what the future holds for the Authority and its workforce.

3.4   Scrutiny Working Group – Digital Inclusion (convener: Cllr Lesley Walton)

3.4.1   A summary of the main outcome from the meeting and agreed action follows:

The Digital Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group considered an overview report showing the work done to increase digital inclusion before and during the pandemic, the work already planned for 2021/22 and a look towards the future, post-COVID-19.

Overall, the Working Group agreed that the Council is on the right track with its Digital Inclusion Strategy and recognised that the Council is keen to make the right improvements moving forward.

Individual members of the Working Group have asked to be contacted in due course so they can input into the development of the Digital Inclusion Strategy and the new Council Website.

The Working Group also feels that further oversight of work on Digital Inclusion is necessary as things develop, perhaps annually, whether through Working Group or other method of scrutiny.

4.   Legal Implications

4.1   There are no legal implications.

5.   Financial Implications

5.1   There are no financial implications.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:
Appendix 1: Scrutiny Letters Log – 2021-22
Appendix 2: Scrutiny Letters Log – 2020-21
Appendix 3: Correspondence between Scrutiny and Cabinet Members