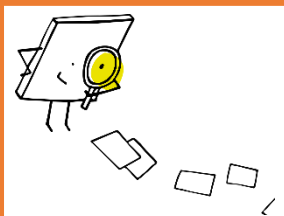


# Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2021/2022 (No.3)

## ‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

### Investigating the Council’s Procurement Practices



Scrutiny Councillors have concluded their inquiry into procurement. The key question of the inquiry is ‘*What is Swansea Council doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices?*’

*(Lead: Councillor Chris Holley)*

The Convenor of the Inquiry Panel, Councillor Chris Holley, said ‘*As part of this inquiry, we wanted to ensure the Council is striving to purchase goods or services using this mantra and when doing so are using the most appropriate methods and engaging with the right people. We were keen to see the example of the work being led by Social Services in relation to co-production, where they are getting partners, service users and the public to co-produce contract specifications for services.*’

Panel Members met with various external organisations such as SCVS and Business Wales, contractors, and several Cabinet Members along with officers from across council departments to gather detailed evidence on how procurement operates in Swansea.

The inquiry concluded that:

- Procurement must be built into the Council’s Recovery & Transformation Plan and clearly aligned to the Council’s key objectives moving forward.
- Adherence to legislation and ensuring local policy and practice is clear, effective, transparent and consistently applied is vital.
- Quality as well as value for money is necessary in order to get the best spend from the public purse.
- We need to consider how leaving the European Union will affect Procurement in Swansea.
- There is positive local procurement practice, which can be built upon and embedded further.
- Not only the Council, but those who enter into contracts with it need to meet the general equality duty.
- There is evidence of good Environmental and Ethical practice, which could be built upon and embedded further.
- There are benefits in collaborating with partners and others in our procurement activities.
- Effective procurement needs a good framework for monitoring performance and measuring success essential for continuous improvement.

The Inquiry Final Report is scheduled for agreement by the Scrutiny Programme Committee on the 15 March 2022. It will then go to Cabinet for consideration and those recommendations agreed, will be implemented.

The Panel will convene again 6-9 months after the Cabinet decision to see the impact of its recommendations.

## Keeping a close eye on the Council's Budget Proposals

Scrutiny Councillors on the Service Improvement & Finance Panel continue to keep a close eye on the Council's budget and corporate arrangements and met in February to scrutinise the Annual Budget Proposals. This enabled the Panel Convener to feed back the views of scrutiny directly to Cabinet ahead of its decision-making.

*(Lead: Councillor Chris Holley)*

Overall, the Panel welcomed the large increase in budget provision, noting this was the largest such increase in recent years.

The Panel also welcomed an increase in spending in Education and Social Services, and additional spending to invest in services in Swansea that have experienced some reductions over recent years in line with constrained budgets. Panel Members expressed hope in that this year's funding will help with repairs to the infrastructure across Swansea.

Panel Members noted however that this will be a one-off large increase in funds and figures are not reflected equally across the three-year plan.

Concerns were raised to Cabinet following advice from the Education Scrutiny Panel regarding the potentially inadequate funding from Welsh Government for:

- The phased roll out of Free School Meal provision to all primary pupils
- The emerging implications of the Additional Learning Needs Act

Concerns were also raised about the potential change to the proxy measure that is based upon Free School Meal allocation which is the indicator used for extra funding in schools for vulnerable pupils. Members are keen to see how this will be addressed in upcoming policy changes from Welsh Government so vulnerable children do not lose out.

## Ensuring the Council is improving how it meets its Equalities Duties

The Equalities Inquiry Panel met recently to look at the impact of and progress made with the recommendations arising from the Equalities Scrutiny Inquiry. Members were pleased with the positive impact of the inquiry and the commitment to it by the Cabinet Member for Better Committees and officers in Swansea.

*(Lead: Councillor Lyndon Jones)*

Panel Members were pleased with the overall work carried out in relation to the Inquiry's 18 recommendations.

The Panel heard that seven of the recommendations are now complete and that good progress has been made with those recommendations that are outstanding.

Panel Members were pleased to hear that a new Strategic Equality Plan for 2020/24 was developed, a new Strategic Equality and Future Generation Board has been established which has a key responsibility for the actions and recommendations within the Strategic Equality Plan and Scrutiny Inquiry.

In response to the recommendation to improve our workforce data, a new Workforce Equalities Group to support the delivery of equality solutions has been established, to support the Council in being an exemplar employer.

The Panel agreed to conclude their follow up involvement with the inquiry after finding that good progress has been made with all the recommendations. However, the Panel will refer to the Scrutiny Programme Committee to suggest the creation of a Working Group to look at the issue of co-production and how it is progressing.

## Encouraging the Council to effectively monitor its efforts to tackle poverty in Swansea

The Scrutiny Programme Committee reviewed progress, achievements and implementation of the Tackling Poverty Strategy which is one of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

*(Lead: Councillor Peter Black)*

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted low-income households, pushing more people into poverty, and those experiencing it, further into poverty resulting in an increase in demand for services including crisis support services and increased complexities for those in need.

Committee Members noted that there is an ongoing risk to service delivery caused by the heavy reliance on grant funding with only around 15% of the Tackling Poverty Service Budget being core funded.

The Committee acknowledged that there is a lot of good work being done but felt that the Council should be better placed to monitor, measure, and clearly demonstrate the success from all the clearly considerable efforts being made. Members felt that the suite of current corporate/national performance indicators alone does not adequately tell the story, and each of the objectives the Council has should have clear targets and an effective measure, so that the value from the resources being put in can be seen.

Committee Members discussed with the Cabinet Members the possibility of an improved 'performance and delivery' report in the future with supporting evidence to clearly demonstrate links between investment and activities/actions taken. Committee Members felt that measuring success is essential to check if actions were having the desired impact.

The Committee will re-visit work on Tackling Poverty to closely monitor progress, follow up on issues



### Chair's Round up

This is my third and final roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2021/22, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

### Scrutiny Work Programme

The work of scrutiny is now concluding as we approach the end of the municipal year and Council term.

The in-depth inquiry focusing on Procurement, led by Cllr. Chris Holley, is now complete. The Panel has agreed its conclusions and recommendations and following presentation of the Panel's Final Report to the Scrutiny Programme Committee in March it will be submitted to Cabinet for decision. The Equalities Inquiry Panel has also concluded its monitoring of the implementation of recommendations it made to Cabinet in 2019, following a meeting in January.

Final meetings of the six Performance Panels have been taking place, and in the last few months we have had meetings of the Workforce Working Group and Bus Services Working Group to complete those planned scrutiny activities.

Before wrapping things up Committee members, and Performance Panels, are taking the opportunity to reflect on the past year's work and observations that will help inform future scrutiny and its effectiveness.

## **Committee Work Plan**

As well as monitoring the delivery of the work programme, the Committee has a varied work plan looking at a broad range of service / policy matters, targeting specific issues of concern and focused on addressing any gaps in the overall scrutiny work programme. The Committee will call in Cabinet Members as and when required to account for delivery of objectives, performance, and service improvement.

Since my last update we have asked questions on the performance of the Public Services Board and difference it is making, held a Q & A with the Leader of the Council, and carried out pre-decision scrutiny on a Cabinet reports on the proposed Community Hub development on Oxford Street, and on Covid Recovery & Investment, giving views ahead of Cabinet decision. As the Council's designated Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee, the Scrutiny Programme Committee has also discussed the performance of the Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership. This session included questions on Partnership priorities, governance, the continued impact on activities from the pandemic, response to the Mayhill Riot, action on Child Sexual Exploitation, hate crime, knife crime and anti-social behaviour, and renewal of the Safer Swansea Partnership Strategy.

## **Regional Scrutiny – Corporate Joint Committee**

Following establishment of the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), which involves Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Councils, as well as Brecon Beacons and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities, the CJC has agreed to set up a CJC Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee which will consist of three elected members from each Council which will meet at least quarterly. The joint Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee, to be serviced by Neath Port Talbot Council, will scrutinise the decisions / actions of the CJC as it discharges its functions and performance in relation to policy objectives and targets. The Joint Scrutiny arrangement will not preclude scrutiny within constituent Councils in order to discuss the impact of the CJC on their Council and locality. The CJC will exercise functions relating to strategic land use planning, regional transport planning and the exercise of economic well-being powers.

## **Looking Forward**

Attention will now turn to preparing for the new Council term. A Scrutiny Induction Session will be part of the Council's Councillor Induction Programme after the elections. Consideration will also be given to additional training and development needs for scrutiny councillors to support them in their role.

A Scrutiny Work Planning Conference will also be held to help inform the development of a new Scrutiny Work Programme, which will identify priorities for scrutiny for the coming year. All scrutiny councillors will be invited to participate in this. As well as new topics the work programme will need to consider the continuation of some current activities because of their importance or because work may be incomplete, as well as suggestions that have already been made during the last year about future work. The work programme will try to balance community concerns with issues of importance to the Council. Anyone living or working in Swansea can get in touch with us about matters of concern about services, policies and performance, as scrutiny may be able to help. We will see how best scrutiny could deal with it to make a difference.

## **Making the work of scrutiny transparent and accessible**

Just a reminder that there is easy access to all scrutiny agenda packs, reports and letters as well as responses from Cabinet Members on the [Council website](#). To keep an eye on what is going see also the links below, subscribe to our newsletter, or even follow us on Twitter.

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