



# Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23



## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Chair’s Foreword .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2022/23 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>About the Indicators .....</b>	<b>4</b>
3.a	How much Scrutiny did we carry out? .....	4
3.b	How well did we do? .....	9
3.c	How did Scrutiny impact on the business of the Council? .....	13
3.d	What were the outcomes of Scrutiny? .....	20
<b>4.</b>	<b>Impact.....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1	How Scrutiny Councillors have made a difference .....	22
<b>5.</b>	<b>Feedback and Improvement .....</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1	Improving Scrutiny.....	24
5.2	Scrutiny Improvement Objectives .....	27
	For further information .....	29

### **Appendices:**

A – Scrutiny Stories 2022-23

# 1. Chair's Foreword

*Councillor Peter Black, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee*



I am proud to present the Scrutiny Annual Report, reflecting on the first year of the 2022-2027 Council term, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. This report covers the work of Scrutiny between May 2022 and May 2023.

Following the Council elections in May 2022, we welcomed many new Councillors and set about encouraging their involvement in Scrutiny. Scrutiny is a vital part of local democracy and good governance, and training on Scrutiny was a key part of the Council's Councillor Induction Programme, with Induction Sessions held in June 2022 to improve everyone's awareness and knowledge of the Scrutiny function and the Council's specific arrangements.

This year also saw the introduction of hybrid (known as multi-location) meetings. The meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Committee in July 2022 was the first held in the Guildhall since the pandemic. It has been good being able to see Councillors, Cabinet Members and Officers face-to-face once again, although some Councillors take advantage of still being able to attend meetings remotely.

The work of Scrutiny covered by this report ensures the Council remains accountable and transparent. By questioning and providing challenge to decision-makers Scrutiny helps the Council to achieve its objectives and drive improvement. We appreciate the engagement of Cabinet Members in Scrutiny and Officers for their support. Our report focuses on how Scrutiny has made a difference in Swansea, and our efforts to support continuous improvement and good practice.

Measuring the performance of Scrutiny in a meaningful way can be challenging, however we have taken a 'results based' approach to tell you about:

- How much Scrutiny we carried out
- How well we did it
- How Scrutiny impacted on the business of the Council
- What the outcomes of Scrutiny were

We hope that each Annual Report provides you with assurance and confidence that Councillors involved in Scrutiny are contributing to better services, policies and decision making in Swansea.

Finally, I would like to give my thanks to all the Councillors who have contributed over the past year, in particular those who have led on Scrutiny activity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Peter Black

## 2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2022/23

Scrutiny Practice	<b>A. How much Scrutiny did we carry out?</b>	<b>B. How well did we do?</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of Committee meetings = 11 ↑ (10)</li> <li>2. Number of Panel &amp; Working Group meetings = 48 ↓ (56)</li> <li>3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 0 ↓ (1)</li> <li>4. Number of Working Group topics completed = 2 ↔ (2)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Average Councillor attendance at Scrutiny meetings = 73% ↓ (78%)</li> <li>6. Backbench Councillors actively involved in Scrutiny = 72% ↑ (70%)</li> <li>7. Meetings with public observers = 15% ↓ (17%)</li> <li>8. Meetings with public input = 24% ↑ (17%)</li> <li>9. Meetings attracting media coverage = 25% ↓ (29%)</li> </ol>
Scrutiny Outcomes	<b>C. How did Scrutiny impact on the business of the Council?</b>	<b>D. What were the outcomes of Scrutiny?</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Number of Chairs' Letters sent to Cabinet Members = 58 ↓ (66)</li> <li>11. Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 21 days ↑ (18)</li> <li>12. Letters responded to within 21 day target = 65% ↓ (71%)</li> <li>13. Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 1 ↑ (0)</li> <li>14. Cabinet action plans agreed = 1 ↑ (0)</li> <li>15. Follow ups undertaken = 1 ↔ (1)</li> <li>16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 5 ↑ (4)</li> <li>17. Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 0 ↔ (0)</li> <li>18. Cabinet Members who attended at least one Scrutiny meeting = 100% ↔ (100%)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 100% (n/a)</li> <li>20. Recommendations signed off by Scrutiny as completed = n/a (39%)</li> </ol>

(Last year in brackets) ↓↑ = notable change, ↓↑ = small change, ↔ no change

### **3. About the Indicators**

#### **A. How much Scrutiny did we carry out?**

##### **3.1 Number of Committee meetings = 11**

The Council has a single overarching Scrutiny Committee, called the Scrutiny Programme Committee, meeting every 4 weeks with extra meetings added as necessary. During 2022/23 the Committee met 11 times (not including the meeting following Council Annual General Meeting to elect the Committee chair/vice-chair).

The Committee is responsible for developing, agreeing, and managing the overall Scrutiny Work Programme. Overarching priorities were shaped by the Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference which took place in June 2022 (open to all non-executive Councillors), that heard a range of perspectives on what should be included. All Councillors can suggest topics of concern for possible Scrutiny.

The Councillor-led Scrutiny Work Programme, which was agreed by the Committee in July 2022 is guided by the overriding principle that the work of Scrutiny should be strategic and significant, focussed on issues of concern, and represent a good use of time and resources.

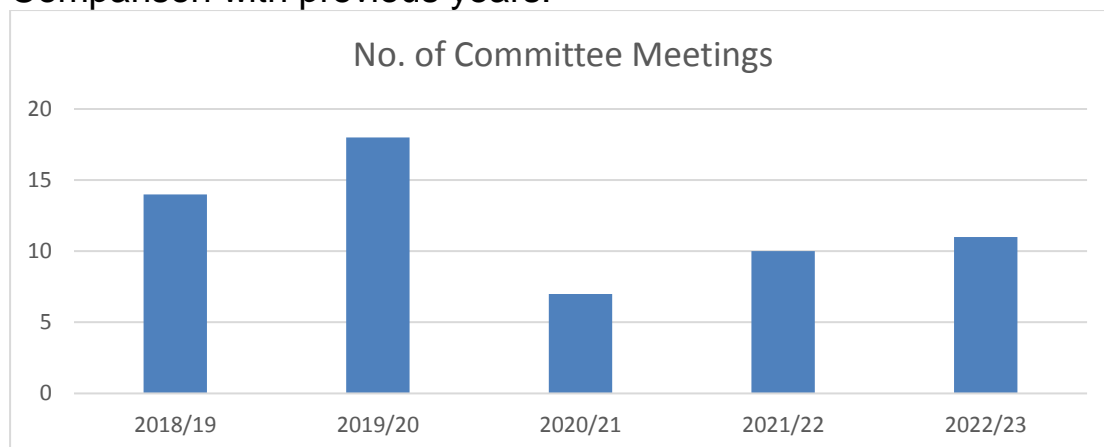
It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. The Committee considers what specific topics should feature in the programme so that it is focussed on the right things. Specific scrutiny activities included in the Work Programme are carried out either by the Committee or by establishing informal Panels and Working Groups. All meetings are held in public.

Formal Committee meetings gave Councillors the opportunity to hold Cabinet Members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues of concern, relevant to their portfolio responsibilities, and its work addressed any gaps in the overall Scrutiny Work Programme to ensure good coverage of Scrutiny across all Cabinet portfolios. The Committee is also the Council's designated Committee for statutory Scrutiny of Swansea Public Services Board, and Crime & Disorder Scrutiny of the Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership.

The following topics were also examined in Committee meetings:

- Archives / Community Hub
- Fly Tipping
- Homelessness
- Development and Regeneration activity, including the Swansea Bay City Deal
- Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report
- Delivery of Corporate Priority – Tackling Poverty
- Follow Up on Workforce Scrutiny Working Group Recommendations
- Cabinet Reports on:
  - Oracle Project Investment Update
  - National 20 Mph Default Speed Limit
  - Economic Recovery Fund – Capital and Revenue Budget allocations
- Co-ordination with the Governance & Audit Committee – Discussion between Chairs / Committees on the Audit / Scrutiny Relationship

Comparison with previous years:



### **3.2 Number of Panel & Working Group meetings = 48**

Most of the work of Scrutiny is delegated to informal topic-based Panels and Working Groups. Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups are established by the Scrutiny Programme Committee, with an appointed Convener (Chair), to carry out specific Scrutiny activities.

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, usually around six months, and will produce a final report at the end of the inquiry with conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet (and other decision-makers), informed by the evidence gathered.

Topics examined	Convener	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Anti-Social Behaviour</b> Key Question: How can the Council ensure that it is working with its partners to appropriately and effectively tackle Anti-Social Behaviour in Swansea?</li> </ul>	Cllr. Terry Hennegan	Evidence Gathering / Consultation Complete  At Final Report Stage – expected completion October 2023

(See para. 3.15 for previous / completed inquiries followed up)

**Performance Panels** - these provide in-depth performance / financial monitoring and challenge for specific service areas.

Performance Panels 2022/23	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Service Improvement &amp; Finance</b> (monthly)</li> <li><b>Education</b> (monthly)</li> <li><b>Adult Services</b> (6-weekly)</li> <li><b>Child &amp; Family Services</b> (6-weekly)</li> <li><b>Development &amp; Regeneration</b> (every two months)</li> <li><b>Climate Change &amp; Nature</b> (every two months) In July 2022 the Committee agreed to rename the 'Natural Environment' Panel to 'Climate Change &amp; Nature', reflecting recent change in corporate priorities</li> </ul>	Cllr. Chris Holley Cllr. Lyndon Jones Cllr. Sue Jones Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams Cllr. Chris Holley  Cllr. Hannah Lawson

Performance Panels engage in on-going correspondence with relevant Cabinet Members to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, about services. Performance Panels will hold relevant Cabinet Members to account with clear opportunities for questioning, to explore their work, looking at priorities, actions, achievements, and impact. Performance Panel Conveners provide a regular update to the Committee to enable discussion on key activities and impact.



**Working Groups** are one-off meetings established to enable a ‘light-touch’ approach to specific topics of concern, to consider a specific report or information, resulting in a letter to the relevant Cabinet Member(s) or report to Cabinet with views and recommendations.

Four one-off Working Groups were included in the Work Programme, to be completed as time and resources allow. The following Working Group meetings were held during 2022/23:

<b>Working Groups</b>	<b>Convener</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Road Safety</b></li> <li>• <b>Co-production</b></li> </ul>	Cllr Chris Holley Cllr Lyndon Jones

### **3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 0**

The Anti-Social Behaviour Inquiry is not yet complete and is expected to conclude in October 2023.

### **3.4 Number of Working Group topics completed = 2**

Work on the following topic(s) was completed through meetings of Working Groups:

- **Road Safety** - Completed in December 2022. This Working Group enabled information, focussed questioning & discussion to understand the Council’s role and responsibilities on road safety, e.g., asking about hot spots; work to improve safety; preventative measures; speed controls – use of signs / humps / cameras; proposed new 20mph limits; condition of roads; safety of cyclists & pedestrians; partnership working, etc. A letter with the Working Group’s conclusions and recommendations was sent to the Cabinet Member and response received. This was reported to the Committee on 14 February and the Committee will be responsible for follow up in the next 12 months.
- **Co-production** - Completed in March 2023. It enabled information, focussed questioning & discussion on the development of Co-production in the Council and progress in helping to improve involvement and engagement with service users, partners, and the public in the design & delivery of

services & decision-making, etc. A letter with the Working Group's conclusions and recommendations was sent to the Cabinet Member and response received. This was reported to the Committee on 16 May and the Committee will be responsible for follow up in the next 12 months.

NOTE: There are also regional Scrutiny arrangements that Swansea is involved in, which have enabled Scrutiny councillors to look at the work of:

- **Partneriaeth** – the new regional Education / School improvement partnership, through a Joint Scrutiny Councillor Group. It comprises of Education Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, or equivalent, across Swansea Council, Carmarthenshire Council and Pembrokeshire Councils. Initial meetings took place 24 October 2022 and 13 February 2023, but otherwise the Group will meet termly, mirroring the Partneriaeth Joint Committee. The Joint Scrutiny Councillor Group is supported by the Swansea Scrutiny Team.
- **Delivery of the Swansea Bay City Deal programme, through the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee** - this arrangement involves three councillor representatives from each of the four Councils involved in the City Region, meeting to scrutinise the work of the Joint Committee responsible for delivering the City Deal programme. Meetings took place in July, September and December 2022, and February and May 2023. As per Joint Agreement, this Joint Scrutiny Committee is serviced by Neath Port Talbot Council.
- **The new South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)** -The CJC involves Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Councils, as well as Brecon Beacons and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authorities, and will exercise functions relating to strategic land use planning, regional transport planning and the exercise of economic well-being powers. The Committee has set up a CJC Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee which consists of three elected members from each Council and will meet at least quarterly. The Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee will scrutinise the decisions / actions of the CJC as it discharges its functions and performance in relation to policy objectives and targets. Meetings took place in November 2022, and January, February and April 2023. The Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee is being serviced by Neath Port Talbot Council.

A regular update on regional Scrutiny activity was provided to Committee members to ensure awareness.

## **B. How well did we do?**

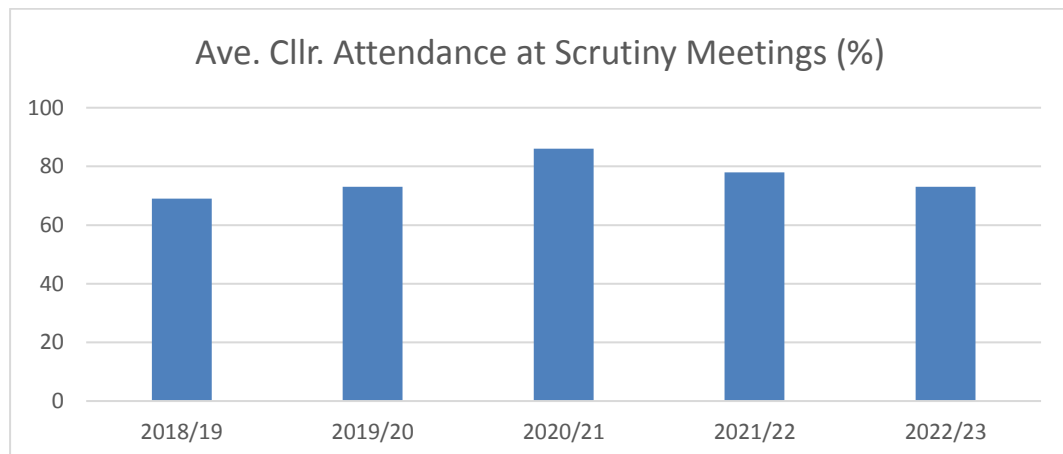
### **3.5 Average Councillor attendance at Scrutiny meetings = 73%**

The rate of Councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of Councillors in the Scrutiny process.

Council determines the membership of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. However, membership of the various informal Panels and Working Groups is based on interest shown by Councillors in the topics under Scrutiny. Based on expressions of interest the membership of Panels and Working Groups is agreed by the Committee.

Attendance figures for Councillors are collected by the Council's Democratic Services Team and published on the Council's website. Our figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Panel meetings and Working Groups and was 73%. Attendance at Committee meetings was 89%. Both healthy figures of engagement.

Comparison with previous years:

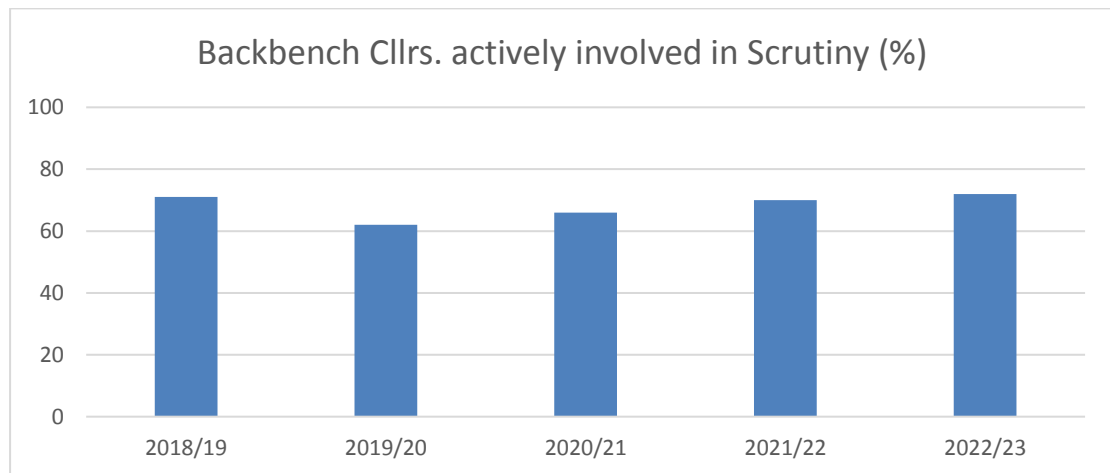


### 3.6 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 72%

All backbench Councillors can participate in Scrutiny work regardless of Committee membership. New Scrutiny topics, once agreed, were advertised to all non-executive Councillors and expressions of interest sought to lead and/or participate in these activities. It enables Councillors to participate based on interest and enables them to build up specialist expertise.

Most backbench Councillors were involved in Scrutiny, through either the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Panels or Working Groups.

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.7 Meetings with public observers = 15%

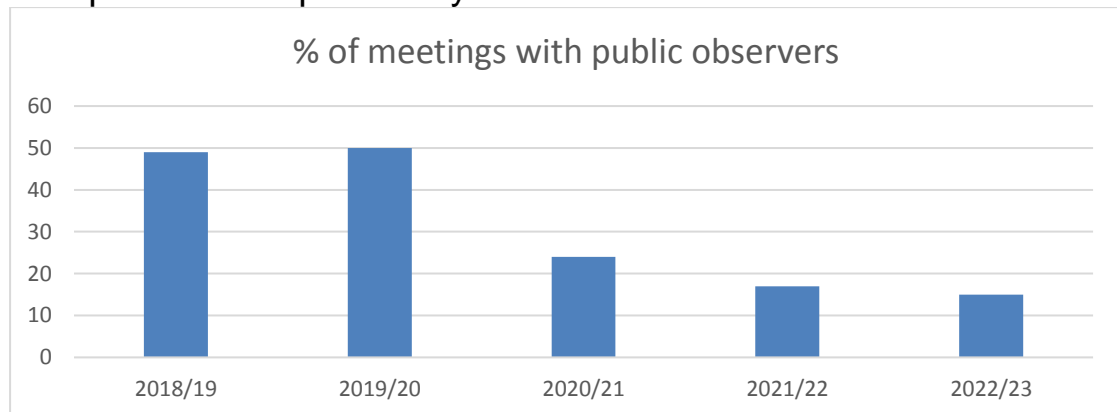
Scrutiny is important as a mechanism for community engagement. The extent to which the public observes (including the press) meetings may indicate whether there is a significant focus of Scrutiny on matters of public interest. All Scrutiny meetings, whether the Committee or Panels and Working Group, are conducted in public, subject to specific items of business that on rare occasions may contain exempt information.

With the move to remote meetings over the past few years, people were able to watch video recordings of meetings. Since June 2022 Scrutiny meetings are all now hybrid (or multi-location) meetings, meaning people can either attend in the Guildhall or join meetings online via MS Teams.

Except for the Committee, Panel / Working Group meetings are not currently live streamed, but recordings of all meetings are published on the Council website / YouTube usually within 24 hours, for public viewing. Given access to video of meeting, this has inevitably impacted on the number of observers physically attending meeting. 9 of the 59 Scrutiny meetings held were observed by members of the public who either attended in person or joined remotely on request or to ask a question.

A scan of YouTube views shows Committee meetings seem to attract on average 40 viewers, significantly more people than who would have watched meetings pre-COVID from the public gallery. There are similarly good figures across other Scrutiny meetings, with Development & Regeneration and Climate Change & Nature Performance Panel meetings appearing to attract the biggest interest.

Comparison with previous years:

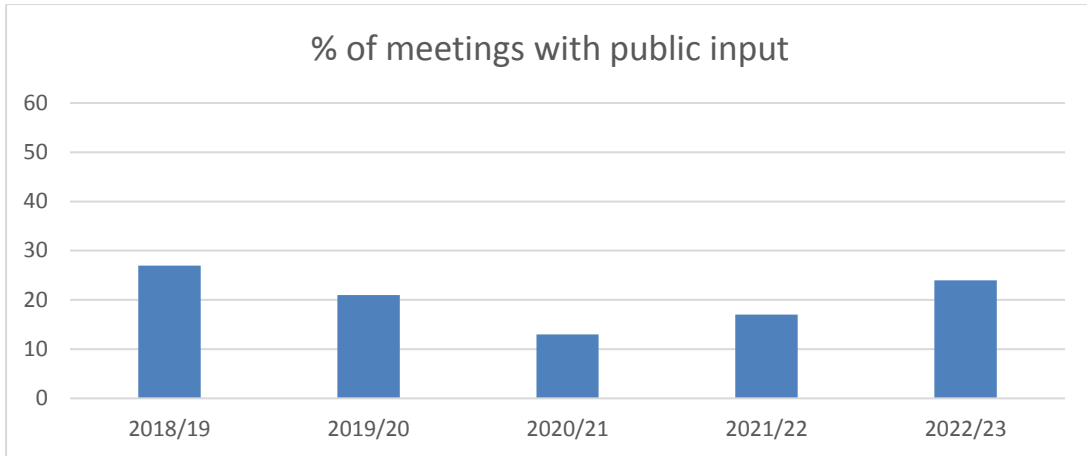


### **3.8 Meetings with public input = 24%**

As well as attracting interest and observers to listen to what is being discussed, Councillors are keen to increase active public involvement in the work of scrutiny. 24% of all Scrutiny meetings had some form of such engagement and public input.

This input can take various forms, including submission of questions for scrutiny sessions with Cabinet Members, making suggestions for the Scrutiny Work Programme, contributing evidence to specific items under scrutiny - whether in person or reflected in the meeting agenda.

Comparison with previous years:

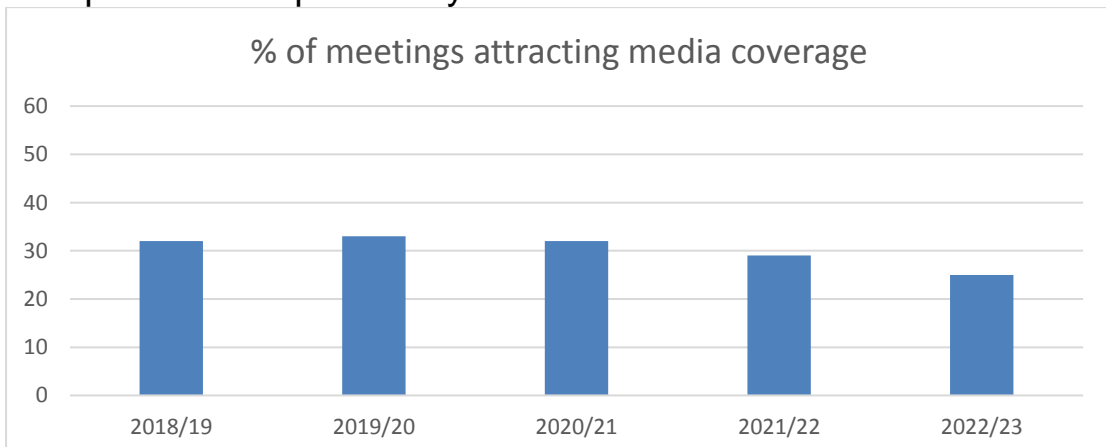


### 3.9 Meetings attracting media coverage = 25%

As well as attracting interest from individuals and getting members of the public to engage directly, a measure of whether Scrutiny is focussed on the right things and is making an impact is the amount of media coverage that Scrutiny is attracting. We found that a quarter of scrutiny meetings made the news, e.g., in print in the South Wales Evening Post or Western Mail, and/or on websites including WalesOnline, BBC etc. Across all activities there were at least 18 scrutiny discussions reported in the local press (print and on-line).

Issues which generated coverage included Scrutiny discussion on: Archives / Community Hub development; Oracle Project Investment Update; Fly Tipping, Homelessness; 20mph National Default Speed Limit; Civic Centre re-development; Development and Flood Risk; Children's Residential Care Homes; Welsh Housing Quality Standard; Tidal Lagoon development, Castle Square re-development, Air Pollution; Green Vehicle adoption; Domiciliary Care; and the proposed Skyline development.

Comparison with previous years:



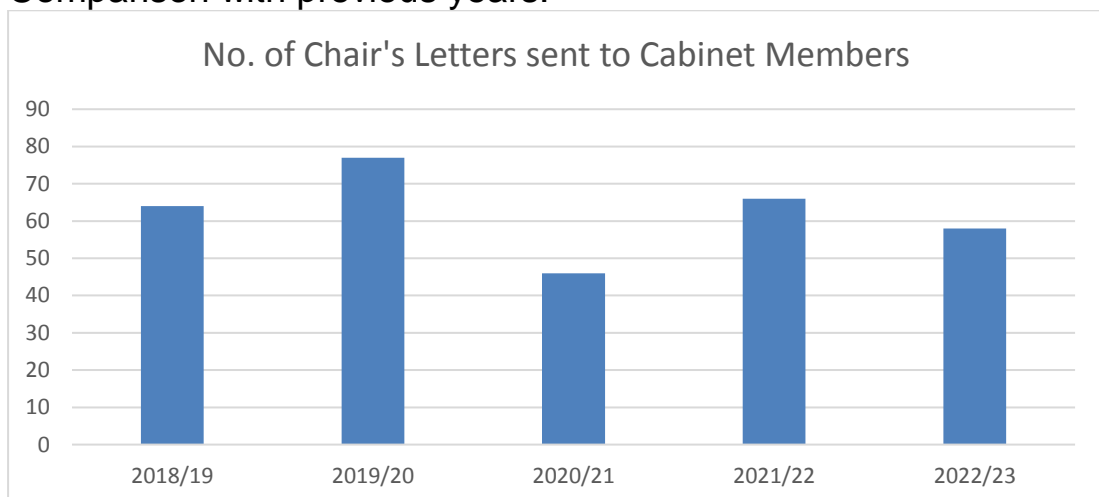
## C. How did Scrutiny impact on the business of the Council?

### 3.10 Number of Chair's Letters sent to Cabinet Members = 58

Chair's / Convener's letters are an established part of the Scrutiny process in Swansea. They allow the Committee and Panel meetings / Working Groups to communicate quickly and efficiently directly with relevant Cabinet Members. They will send letters to raise concerns, recognise good practice, ask for further information and make recommendations for improvement, reflecting the discussion at Committee / Panel / Working Group meetings. Letters are effectively 'mini-reports' with conclusions and proposals from Scrutiny – and where necessary require a response.

58 letters were sent to Cabinet Members following Scrutiny activity.

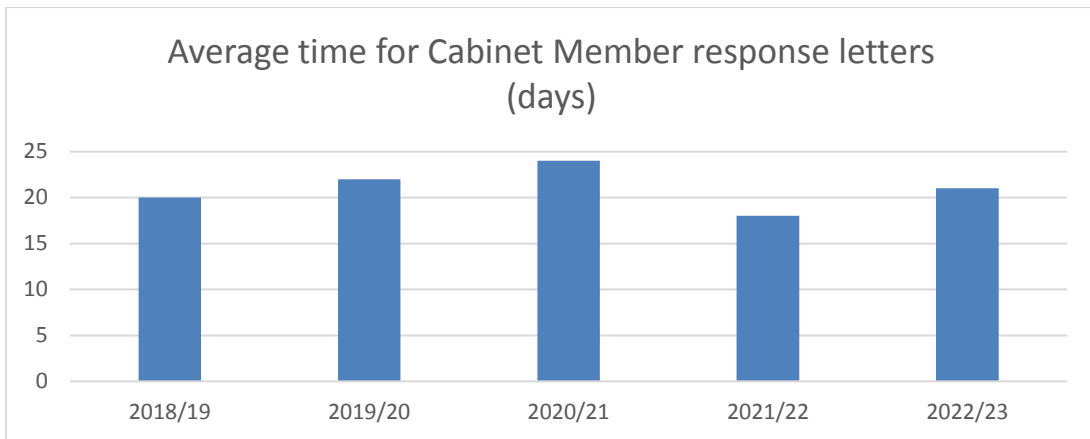
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.11 Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 21 days

When Scrutiny Letters are sent to Cabinet Members and require a response, Cabinet Members are required to respond within 21 calendar days. The average response time for letters sent was 21 days and confirms that Scrutiny is getting a timely response to views, concerns, and any suggested action for Cabinet Members.

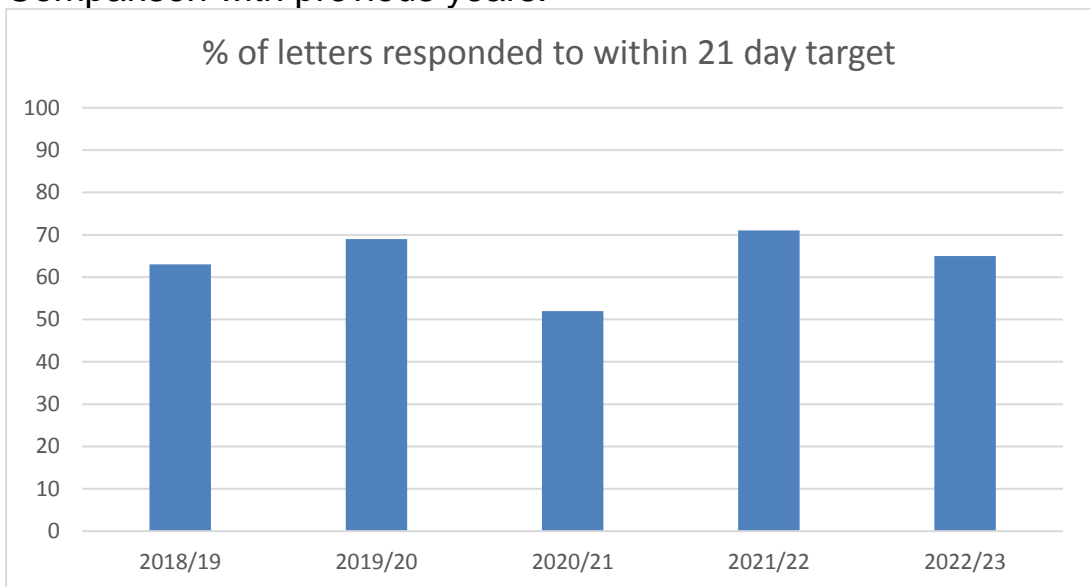
Comparison with previous years:



### **3.12 Letters responded to within 21 day target = 65%**

Whilst the response to Scrutiny Letters was on average 21 days, some did take longer. The number of letters responded to within the 21 day target was 65% (13 out of 20 letters).

Comparison with previous years:



### **3.13 Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 1**

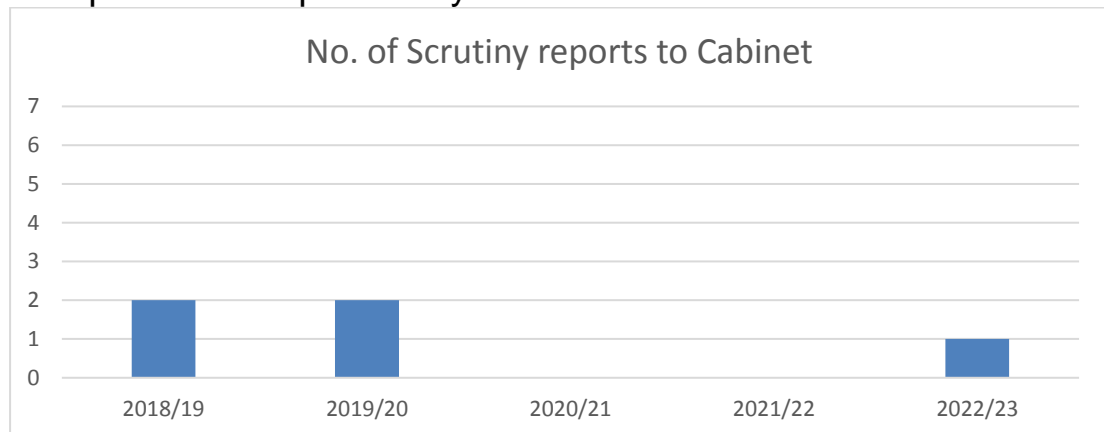
In-depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet, for it to respond to the recommendations agreed by Scrutiny and its action plan on how recommendations will be implemented. Scrutiny Working Groups also have the option of either writing a letter to relevant Cabinet Member(s) or report to Cabinet, depending on outcomes from discussion.



In June 2022, Cabinet was presented with the final report from the Procurement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel, by the Panel Convener, Councillor Chris Holley. Here, the work of the Scrutiny Panel explored what the Council is doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically, and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices?

(See also para. 3.16 for Pre-decision Scrutiny feedback reports to Cabinet)

Comparison with previous years:

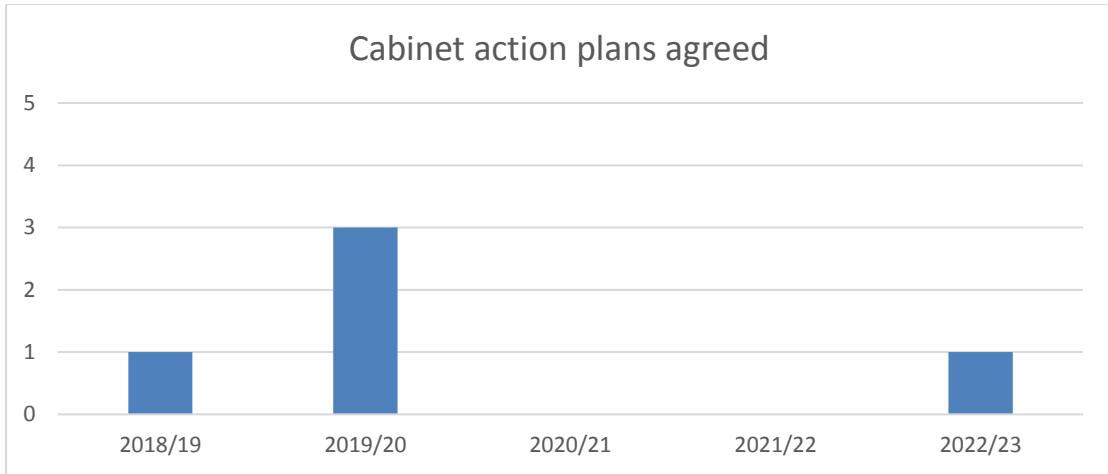


### 3.14 Cabinet action plans agreed = 1

Once recommendations and an action plan have been agreed by Cabinet, Scrutiny will follow up on progress with implementation and impact.

Cabinet formally responded to the Procurement Scrutiny Inquiry final report in October 2022. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Service & Performance reported to Cabinet with a proposed response to each of the Scrutiny recommendations and action plan, which was agreed by Cabinet.

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.15 Follow ups undertaken = 1

Inquiry Panels reconvene to follow up on the implementation of agreed recommendations and Cabinet action plans and assess the impact of their work. A meeting will usually be held 6-12 months following Cabinet decision, with a further follow up arranged if required.

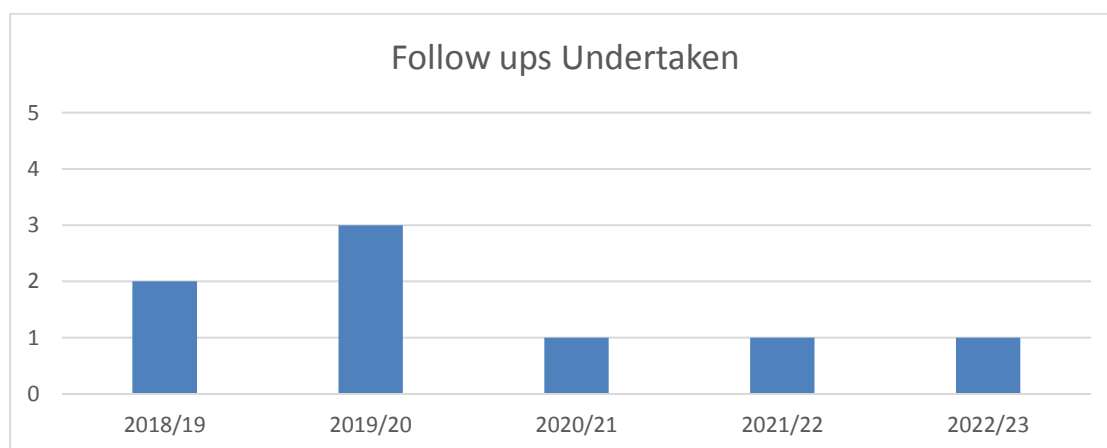
To check whether the agreed action plans have been carried out, Scrutiny will ask for follow up reports from Cabinet Members. If Councillors are satisfied, they can then conclude the work and monitoring for that inquiry.

Previous Scrutiny inquiries that required a follow up:

<b>Inquiry</b>	<b>Convener</b>	<b>Cabinet Action Plan agreed</b>	<b>Monitoring Status</b>
<b>Procurement</b> Key Question: What is the Council doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically, and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices?	Cllr. Chris Holley	October 2022	Follow Up meeting planned for Oct 2023

Arrangements for the follow up of one-off Working Groups has been strengthened with the Scrutiny Programme Committee formally carrying out a follow up. As such, the indicator is now including both Inquiry follow ups and Working Group follow ups. During 2022/23 it followed up on the Workforce Scrutiny Working Group which concluded in February 2022.

Comparison with previous years:



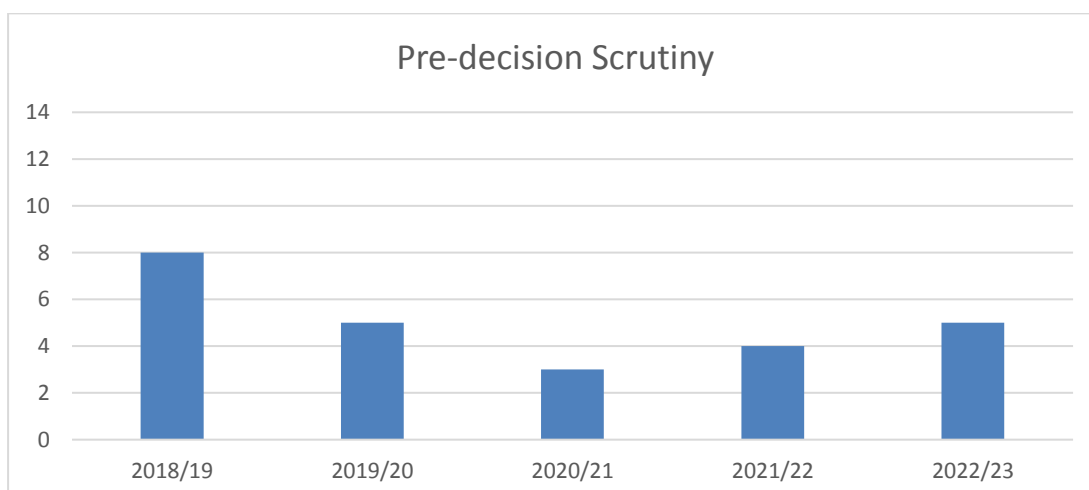
### 3.16 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre-decision scrutiny = 5

Pre-decision Scrutiny involves Scrutiny Councillors considering Cabinet reports before Cabinet makes a final decision. Considering strategic impact, public interest, and financial implications, the following five Cabinet reports were subject to Pre-decision Scrutiny (carried out by the Committee or relevant Performance Panels), with views reported to Cabinet before decisions were taken:

Report	Cabinet Member	Cabinet Meeting	Undertaken by
Oracle Project Investment Update	Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader) & Service Transformation (Deputy Leader)	20 Oct 2022	Committee
Annual Budget	Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)	14 Feb 2023	Service Improvement & Finance Panel (with contribution from other Panels)

National 20 Mph Default Speed Limit	Environment & Infrastructure	23 Mar 2023	Committee
Financial Procedure Rule 7 - Additional to the Capital Budget & Programme 2022/23 - 2027/28 - Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) Approved Schemes (exceeding one million pounds)	Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)	18 May 2023	Committee
Additional Revenue Provision for Residual Economic Recovery Fund 2023/24.	Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)	18 May 2023	Committee

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.17 Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 0

During 2018-19, the Council agreed new Call-in arrangements with Scrutiny at the centre of the process. Any valid Call-in of Cabinet decisions leads to the calling of a special meeting of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. A Call-in can be made by the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee or by any four Councillors by giving notice in writing to the Head of Democratic Services within a specific Call-in period. With the increase in pre-decision scrutiny seen over the last few years many Call-ins are not anticipated. There were no Cabinet decisions 'called in' over the past year.

### **3.18 Cabinet Members who attended at least one Scrutiny meeting – 100%**

Cabinet Members attend Scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information to assist Scrutiny and account for their work. Cabinet attendance at Scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the 'holding to account' role of Scrutiny is functioning well. It ensures that Scrutiny can provide regular challenge to decision-makers, and explore the work of Cabinet Members, looking at priorities, actions, achievements, and impact.

Aside from a regular Q & A session with the Leader of the Council, there is targeted approach within the Committee, calling in Cabinet Members as and when required to report on specific portfolio responsibilities and issues, with emphasis on Performance Panels holding relevant Cabinet Members to account with clear opportunities for questioning in their meetings.

All Cabinet Members were engaged with Scrutiny, whether with the Committee, Panel or Working Group, over the last year. The range of issues discussed within the Committee alone involved 9 of the 11\* Cabinet Members.

Our target is always 100%.

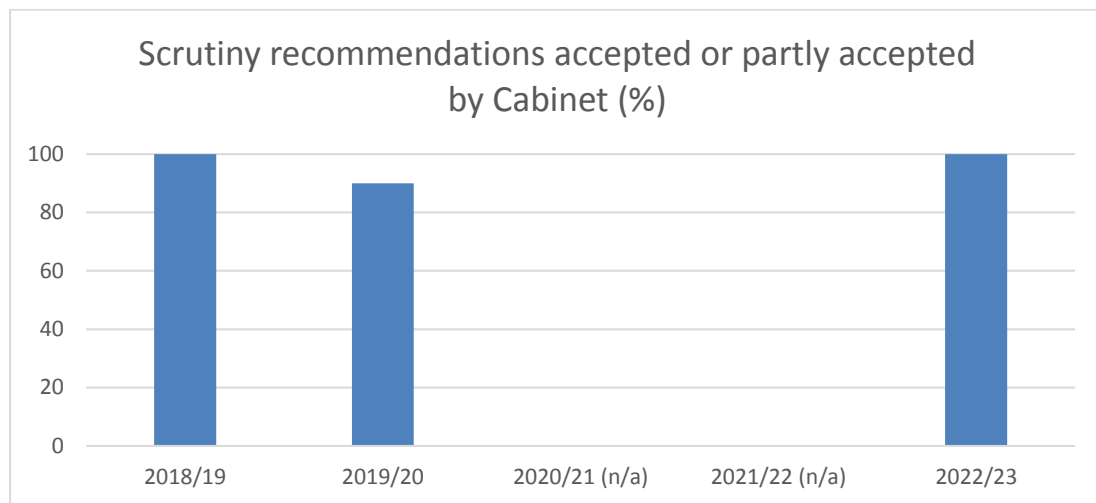
\*Although there are 10 Cabinet Portfolios, during 2022/23 there were 11 Councillors in Cabinet positions. The Community portfolio operating under a job share system between two councillors sharing the responsibilities.

## D. What were the outcomes of Scrutiny?

### 3.19 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 100%

The rate that Cabinet accept Scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether Scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. Cabinet agreed all 14 of the Procurement Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations in October 2022.

Comparison with previous years:



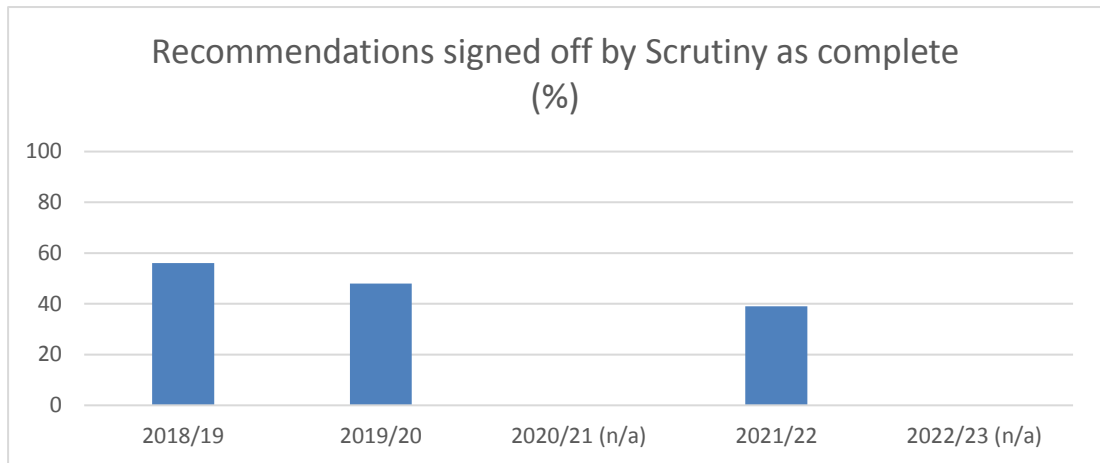
### 3.20 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = n/a

When follow up reports are presented to Scrutiny (usually within 12 months following original Cabinet decision) they detail which of the recommendations from the in-depth inquiry (or other scrutiny report) have been completed in line with the agreed Cabinet Member's action plan and which have not. In the case of in-depth inquiries Scrutiny Councillors consider whether they agree with the assessment about implementation of recommendations, looking at the evidence they are presented with about the changes that have happened following Scrutiny and its impact. This indicator would represent the percentage of recommendations accepted by Scrutiny as being complete.

The Procurement Inquiry will be followed up by the Panel in October 2023.

It should be noted that in many cases implementation of Scrutiny recommendations continues beyond the process of formal monitoring.

### Comparison with previous years:



## 4. Impact

### 4.1 How Scrutiny Councillors have made a difference

#### 4.1.1 Scrutiny Councillors make a difference by:

- Ensuring that Cabinet Members (and other decision-makers) are held to account through public question and answer sessions
- Making evidence-based proposals on topics of concern through task and finish Scrutiny Inquiry Panels, and other Scrutiny activities, that report to Cabinet
- Monitoring and challenging service performance and improvement through standing Scrutiny Performance Panels
- Addressing issues of concern through one off Working Groups
- Acting as a 'check' on the key decisions through Pre-decision Scrutiny and Call-in
- Communicating concerns and proposals for improvement through regular publication of Scrutiny Letters and Reports
- Following up on recommendations made, to check on implementation and assess the impact of Scrutiny
- Making the work of the Council open and transparent to the public

4.1.2 It is important to know that the work and the efforts of Scrutiny Councillors are having a positive impact and are delivering effective Scrutiny. A selection of 'Scrutiny Stories' from the past year is provided in **Appendix A** highlighting specific Scrutiny activities showing the impact of Scrutiny and how Scrutiny is making a difference. Stories from the last year include:

- **Creating a Safer Swansea**
- **Partnership Working**
- **Tackling Poverty**
- **Developing the Workforce**
- **Making our Roads Safer**
- **Working with Service Users**
- **Influencing Cabinet decisions**



- **Monitoring Climate Change & the Natural Environment**
- **Monitoring Education & Learning**
- **Monitoring Development & Regeneration**
- **Monitoring Council Budgets**
- **Monitoring Children's Social Services**
- **Monitoring Adult Services**

4.1.3 The difference made and impact of the overall work of Scrutiny is also communicated via:

- press releases to the local media;
- regular posts to our Swansea Scrutiny blog; and
- use of social media, including Twitter.

## **5. Feedback and Improvement**

### **5.1 Improving Scrutiny**

5.1.1 It is good practice for those involved in the Scrutiny function to undertake regular self-evaluation of this work. Considering the characteristics of effective Scrutiny and our experiences it is important for the continuous improvement of the function that any issues identified about current Scrutiny practice are discussed and addressed. Annual review discussions are usually held within the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panels towards the end of each municipal year, to reflect on the year's work and Scrutiny experience, specifically considering, for example, how well they have worked, whether they have focussed on the right things, and what lessons had been learnt.

5.1.2 The Scrutiny Programme Committee carried out an End of Year Review in May 2023, reflecting on the past year, the work of the Committee and work programme, to identify any improvement and development issues. As well as reviewing previously agreed improvement objectives, Councillors were encouraged to identify areas of improvement in relation to the work programme and Scrutiny practice, so that it is even more effective.

The following were raised:

- The Annual Work Planning Conference is a good way to get all Councillors involved in identifying Scrutiny priorities for the year ahead.
- Recent Inquiry Panels have worked very well.
- The timing of Scrutiny activity should be considered to ensure topics are being discussed at the right time when it will enable meaningful discussion and maximum impact and value. This will help encourage Councillor engagement in Scrutiny.
- The timeliness of financial monitoring information to support effective Scrutiny and better co-ordination with Cabinet reporting, needs to be considered.
- Overall, the work of Scrutiny should be mindful of pressure not only on officers providing information but on Councillors participating in Scrutiny. It would help if Councillors were clear about the demands of any Scrutiny activity to help them consider

their involvement and ensure they can give their time to it, balancing other demands whether within Scrutiny or elsewhere.

- Whether there is scope to provide Councillors with more time to review agendas / information to help them to prepare for meetings.
- The Committee will need to consider the impact of any reduction in resources on the Work Programme and capacity. The Committee will need to consider quality vs quantity, ensuring effective Scrutiny but also good coverage of Scrutiny across all important areas of the Council.

### 5.1.3 Feedback from Scrutiny Performance Panels

As well as specific discussion about future work, the following general observations can be noted:

- Overall, Panels were pleased with how the year had gone and felt they have made a positive difference to the working of Council departments and services, and citizens, through ongoing monitoring and challenge.
- Panels feel they have focussed on the most important issues.
- There are positive relationships with Cabinet Members and officers, who have attended meetings and provided reports / information when requested. Panels have felt well supported.

5.1.4 In order to strengthen end of year review / evaluation efforts, a Councillor Survey was issued to all Councillors in April inviting views about the way Scrutiny has worked over the last year, so that we can monitor the effectiveness of Scrutiny, get a better indication of satisfaction, and address any areas for improvement. The survey also provided an opportunity to input ideas for future Scrutiny topics, which were fed into the Scrutiny Work Planning Conference. 28 Councillors responded to the survey (24 non-executive Councillors and 4 Cabinet Members)

Survey results show that:

- ✓ Councillors have a good understanding of the role of Scrutiny. (89%)
- ✓ Respondents feel that overall, Scrutiny is operating well in Swansea. (79%)
- ✓ Swansea Scrutiny is Councillor-led. (100%)

- ✓ Non-executive members have good opportunities to participate in Scrutiny (90%)
- ✓ Our Scrutiny Work Programme balances issues of strategic importance and community concerns. (79%)
- ✓ Scrutiny activities are well-planned. (82%)
- ✓ Scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers. (86%)
- ✓ Scrutiny is an important Council mechanism for public engagement. (75%)
- ✓ Scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council. (75%); and
- ✓ Councillors are happy with the level of support and guidance provided by the Scrutiny Team. (100%)

However, only 54% agree that Scrutiny has the resources and organisational support it needs to be effective.

What Councillors like about getting involved in Scrutiny:

- ✓ ability to maintain good oversight on range of topics of concern.
- ✓ a way to find out what's going on / opportunity to gain insight into reasons behind decisions and way to get more information on issues affecting the area.
- ✓ opportunity to develop an understanding of a subject.
- ✓ being able to get an issue looked at within scrutiny.
- ✓ best opportunity to ask questions and get into the detail.
- ✓ ability to challenge decision-makers / decision-making.
- ✓ way to help the Council, and its services and policies, to improve.

Some things Councillors have raised that we could give attention to:

- workload / timing of meetings, to assist attendance.
- more Councillors actively participating.
- ensuring things are followed up effectively.
- quality of reports / information to scrutiny.
- ensuring all are clear about the process.
- engaging all in meeting preparation.
- ensuring focussed meetings.
- making sure scrutiny is well-timed.
- being careful not to cover the same ground repeatedly.
- co-ordination with other Committees.
- resources.

## 5.2 Scrutiny Improvement Objectives

5.2.1 A number of Scrutiny Improvement Objectives and action plan were agreed by the Committee in January 2019. This included actions to address the three proposals for improvement made by the Wales Audit Office (now Audit Wales) following its review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements in 2018. This was a co-ordinated and comprehensive single improvement plan for Scrutiny, for the issues that matter most.

### **WAO Proposals for Improvement**

- 1) The Council should consider the skills and training that scrutiny members may need to better prepare them for current and future challenges, and develop and deliver an appropriate training and development programme, including providing additional training on the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- 2) The Council should strengthen its evaluation of the impact and outcomes of its scrutiny activity.
- 3) The Council should further clarify the distinction between scrutiny and Policy Development Committee activity in relation to policy development.

### **Councillor Improvement Issues**

- 1) We need more of our work to be reported to Cabinet so that there is more formal consideration of scrutiny conclusions and recommendations.
- 2) We need to be involved at an earlier stage in proposed Cabinet decisions so that our input can be more meaningful.
- 3) We need to increase opportunities for participation so that more councillors can get involved in the work of scrutiny.
- 4) We need to strengthen follow up of all scrutiny recommendations so that the response and difference made can be assessed.
- 5) We need more coverage in the media so that people are more aware of our work.

5.2.2 The Committee has regularly reviewed and considered progress against the action plan and did so last in May 2023. The review of the improvement plan showed only one outstanding action:

- Development and delivery of a Scrutiny training and development programme (as suggested by Audit Wales)  
MAY 2023 UPDATE: this is currently being explored, with a view to delivery early in the 2023/24 municipal year. Councillors have been surveyed on training development topics that will help inform the programme.

5.2.3 Further to WAO Proposal for Improvement 2, we are also now inviting post-meeting feedback from Cabinet Members and officers who have participated in Scrutiny meetings, about their experience and satisfaction. They are invited to complete a short anonymous survey shortly after each Scrutiny meeting, to help us to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of Scrutiny practice and inform the improvement and development of Scrutiny in Swansea. During 2022/23, this has generated 42 responses.

Drawing some headlines from the responses, the feedback indicates:

- The purpose of Scrutiny meetings has been clear, with topics of discussion being significant and important.
- Those attending meetings have felt well supported in the process of Scrutiny and treated well, with the experience being overwhelmingly positive.
- Scrutiny meetings have been chaired effectively.
- Those carrying out Scrutiny have been focused on the topic(s) and asked pertinent questions, with discussion / debate being fair and balanced.
- Scrutiny meetings have been useful and constructive.

Some improvement suggestions:

- With hybrid meetings it is useful when the Chair says who is in the physical room, as it is unclear from the cameras to those participating online.
- Being careful not to stray into personal / ward specific issues during Scrutiny.

5.2.4 Thought will be given to new Scrutiny Improvement Objectives for the new Council term.

## For further information:

### **Making the work of Scrutiny more transparent and accessible**

All Scrutiny agenda packs are now available on the Council's '[agenda and minutes](#)' [webpage](#). There you can also find all Scrutiny Letters sent to Cabinet Members following meetings and responses. All Scrutiny meetings are open to the public and anyone living or working in Swansea can [suggest a topic for Scrutiny](#). There are also opportunities to [suggest questions, and submit views](#). If you would just like to keep an eye on what's going on we have webpages, and a [blog](#). You could even [follow us](#) on Twitter.

### **Connect with Scrutiny:**

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