



Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 16 January 2024

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 for discussion as required.
Councillors are being asked to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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
Report Author:	Brij Madahar, Scrutiny Team Leader Tel: 01792 637257 E-mail: brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Finance Officer:	Amanda Thomas

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 for its attention and discussion as required, e.g., letters relating to the work of 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, or have taken, 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 current municipal year – see **Appendix 1**. The Letters Log will show the average time taken by Cabinet Members to respond to Scrutiny letters, and the percentage of letters responded to within timescale. For comparison, during the previous year (2022/23) 58 letters were sent to Cabinet Members, of which 20 required a written response. The average time taken to respond was 21 days, with 65% responded to within the 21 days target.
- 3.2 The following letter(s), not already reported back to the Committee, are **attached** for discussion, as necessary:

	Activity	Meeting Date	Correspondence
a	Scrutiny Working Group – Public Rights of Way	22 Nov	Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure

3.3 Public Rights of Way Working Group

- 3.3.1 In order to assist future Committee follow up, which will be planned for around 9-12 months' time, a summary is provided below:
- 3.3.2 The Public Rights of Way Working Group met to look at an overview of Public Rights of Way (PROW) across Swansea (mapping / numbers) and issues, impacts on PROW from developments and the effect on communities. Relevant officers attended alongside the Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure, Cllr Andrew Stevens.
- 3.3.3 The Working Group received a comprehensive report and praised the work of the Countryside Access Team, which includes a 10-year Countryside Action Plan due to be adopted in Spring 2024. The team has reduced in size over the last few years leaving 3 Countryside Access Officers and a Team Leader. This has left them vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances for instance, staff illness. A wider team restructure is imminent and the Working Group hope this will provide wider team support. To support the team further, particularly with pathway maintenance, it suggested considering apprenticeships.
- 3.3.4 The Working Group requested the Cabinet Member lobby the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to introduce legislation in Wales to avoid the duplication of diversion orders which currently takes place. These changes have already been made in England. It also recommended integrating the PROW and Active Travel routes as maintaining an overview of both would provide a clearer picture and a collaborative approach. Additionally, the Working Group has requested a breakdown of expenditure.
- 3.3.5 Other areas discussed at the Working Group include partnership working and marketing. Overall it felt that the PROW in Swansea are an asset with huge value for money. Resources are a concern and the Working Group felt, if footfall and usage increases this may demonstrate the need for increased budgets.
- 3.3.6 The Cabinet Member responded to the recommendations and conclusions made by the Working Group. He has agreed to write to WLGA and Welsh Government to request that the legislation in Wales is introduced. He recognised the developing crossover of PROW and Active Travel routes however felt the purposes of both are different. The Cabinet Member suggested a map for Active Travel routes that is compatible with PROW maps and stated that the two teams do work together when there is common interest. The additional breakdown of expenditure was provided along with additional information regarding successful PROW marketing and evidence of partnership working.

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 – 2023-24

Appendix 2: Scrutiny Letters / Responses