



Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 16 July 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
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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 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 2024-25 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 (2023/24) 68 letters were sent to Cabinet Members, of which 20 required a written response. The average time taken to respond was 22 days, with 55% responded to within the 21 days target.
- 3.2 The following letter(s) from previous Scrutiny meetings, not already reported back to the Committee, are **attached** for discussion, as necessary:

	Activity	Meeting Date	Correspondence
a	Committee – Crime & Disorder Scrutiny (Safer Swansea Partnership)	16 April	Letter to Joint Chairs of the Safer Swansea Partnership
b	Scrutiny Working Group – Community Growing	13 May	Letter to / from Cabinet Members for Community (Services) and Well-being

c	Committee – Swansea Public Services Board	14 May	Letter to Chair of Swansea Public Services Board
d	Committee – Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023-24 / Review of Welsh Language Strategy 2017-22	14 May	Letter to Cabinet Members for Education & Learning and Culture, Human Rights & Equalities

3.3 Community Growing 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 Community Growing Scrutiny Working Group, convened by Councillor Michael Locke, met on the 13 May 2024 for a focussed discussion and questioning around Council activity / support to Community Growing, with examples (e.g. allotments) and experience; benefits / success; including focus on schools / children & young people; and its contribution to health & well-being, etc. Anthony Richards, Tackling Poverty Development Manager, Lee Cambule, Tackling Poverty Service Manager, Ronan Ruddy, Assistant Manager – Local Area Coordination, Gemma Bevan, Community Initiative Coordinator, Kathryn Thomas, Community Greenspace Officer, Deborah Hill, Nature Conservation Team Leader, Mike Scott, AONB Officer and Rachel Lewis, Directorate Project Manager attended to assist the Working Group.

3.3.3 The Working Group heard a summary of work happening across 5 Council departments, the Tackling Poverty Development Team, Local Area Coordination, Cultural Services, Nature Conservation, AONB team and Property Services. It received three questions from the public, these were around the Councils role and responsibilities regarding Community Growing. Officers stated the Councils main role was promoting and distributing several community grants and that there was no established framework.

3.3.4 The Working Group asked several questions on community orchards as well as allotments, growing on large estates, the sustainable farming scheme, garden sharing and schools. It made some specific recommendations including giving oversight of community growing to one department, communicating more with Councillors regarding growing sites and the 'Wild about our Ward' maps, running a garden share scheme, annual reporting of allotments and having a designated nature and biodiversity governor in local schools.

3.3.5 The Cabinet Member responded to the recommendations and conclusions made by the Working Group. As allotments are all under community asset transfers there are no plans for Council monitoring. The Council has no plans to create a garden sharing scheme or give one department oversight over community growing as additional resources would be required. 'Wild about our Ward' maps should be available from Autumn 2024 and Councillors agreed to contact governing bodies encouraging them to identify a link governor to champion green space and growing projects. The Committee will need to follow up these two actions.

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 – 2024-25

Appendix 2: Scrutiny Letters / Responses