



# Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

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# 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 work of Scrutiny between May 2023 and May 2024.

There was more Scrutiny activity during 2023/24 than the previous year, reflecting a full year's work. 2022/23 was the first year of a new Council term, which means the Scrutiny Work Programme is effectively re-set and takes a bit longer to get things going. Building on Scrutiny Induction Session and the experience gained by Councillors during 2022/23, I am very pleased that a Scrutiny Training & Development Programme was delivered last year, enabling Swansea Councillors to develop their knowledge and skills, helping us to undertake effective Scrutiny.

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, but we have tried 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

Feedback continues to show that Scrutiny is operating well in Swansea and that our meetings are useful and constructive. 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

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## 2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2023/24

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 ↔ (11)</li> <li>2. Number of Panel &amp; Working Group meetings = 58 ↑ (48)</li> <li>3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1 ↑ (0)</li> <li>4. Number of Working Group topics completed = 3 ↑ (2)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Average Councillor attendance at Scrutiny meetings = 72% ↓ (73%)</li> <li>6. Backbench Councillors actively involved in Scrutiny = 70% ↓ (72%)</li> <li>7. Meetings with public observers = 16% ↑ (15%)</li> <li>8. Meetings with public input = 23% ↓ (24%)</li> <li>9. Meetings attracting media coverage = 28% ↑ (25%)</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 = 68 ↑ (58)</li> <li>11. Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 22 days ↓ (21)</li> <li>12. Letters responded to within 21 day target = 55% ↓ (65%)</li> <li>13. Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 1 ↔ (1)</li> <li>14. Cabinet action plans agreed = 1 ↔ (1)</li> <li>15. Follow ups undertaken = 3 ↑ (1)</li> <li>16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 4 ↓ (5)</li> <li>17. Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 1 ↑ (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 = 92% ↓ (100%)</li> <li>20. Recommendations signed off by Scrutiny as completed = 64% (n/a)</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 2023/24 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 2023 (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 2023, 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.

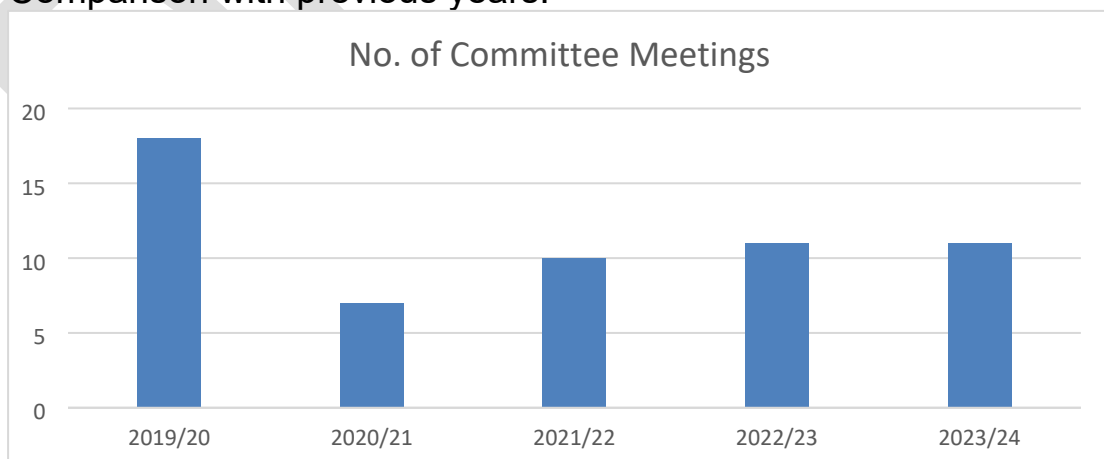
It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. The Committee considers what specific topics should feature in the programme so that it is focussed on the right things. Specific Scrutiny activities included in the Work Programme are 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:

- Active Travel (Sep 2023)
- Children & Young People’s Rights Scheme Progress Report 2021-23 (Nov 2023)
- Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report (Nov 2023)
- Delivery of Corporate Priority – Tackling Poverty & Enabling Communities (Dec 2023)
- Support for Business (Dec 2023)
- Development and Regeneration activity and impact on the City Centre (Jan 2024)
- Delivery against Workforce Development Strategy (Feb 2024)
- Annual Complaints & Compliments Report (Mar 2024)
- Annual Welsh Language Standards Report (Mar / May 2024)
- Follow Up on ‘Bus Services’ (Nov 2023) and ‘Road Safety’ (Jan 2024) Scrutiny Working Group Recommendations
- Cabinet Reports:
  - Pre-decision Scrutiny: FPR7 Redevelopment of 277-278 Oxford Street - Community Hub Project (Jul 2023)
  - Pre-decision Scrutiny: Oracle Fusion Project Closure Process and Transition to New Operating Model (Oct 2023)
  - Call-In: Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework (Feb 2024)
- Co-ordination with the Governance & Audit Committee – Discussion on the Audit / Scrutiny Relationship (May 2024)

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.2 Number of Panel & Working Group meetings = 58

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 taking around six to nine 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	Inquiry commenced Nov 2022. Completed Oct 2023.  - Final Report presented to Cabinet December 2023. - Cabinet Response agreed April 2024 - Panel follow up meeting tba
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Community Assets</b> Key Question: How can the Council ensure that its community assets are working to provide the best outcomes for the people of Swansea?</li> </ul>	Cllr. Stuart Rice	Inquiry commenced Feb 2024  Completion expected Oct / Nov 2024

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

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

Performance Panels 2023/24	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Service Improvement, Regeneration &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>Climate Change &amp; Nature</b> (every two months)</li> </ul>	Cllr. Chris Holley  Cllr. Lyndon Jones Cllr. Sue Jones Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams Cllr. Sara Keeton

(\*In July 2023, the Committee agree to merge the former Service Improvement & Finance Panel and the Development & Regeneration Panel)



Performance Panels engage in regular 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.

Three 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 2023/24:

<b>Working Groups</b>	<b>Convener</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public Rights of Way</b> (Nov 2023)</li> <li>• <b>Customer Contact</b> (Feb 2024)</li> <li>• <b>Community Growing</b> (May 2024)</li> </ul>	Cllr Mike White Cllr Peter Black Cllr Michael Locke

There were more Panel / Working Group meetings during 2023/24 than the previous year as 2022/23 was the first year of a new Council term and with the work programme effectively re-set, Scrutiny activity did not commence until September. The figure for 2023/24 would be the number of meetings we would expect in a typical full year. This explains why, similarly, there were significantly more Scrutiny Chair's Letters sent to Cabinet Members (see para. 3.10).

### **3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1**

The Anti-Social Behaviour Inquiry was completed in October 2023. The Inquiry Panel gathered detailed evidence on the resources and arrangements in place to deal with ASB, performance and challenges. The Panel met with several Cabinet Members and Council Officers, officers from South Wales Police, Registered Social Landlords/Housing Associations, representatives of Equality Groups and Forums, representatives from the Business Community, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service, as well as inviting public submissions. The Panel also met with a group of young people who told Councillors what it was like from their

perspective and how it affected them. The Panel concluded its inquiry with a report to Cabinet that drew a number of conclusions and made 24 recommendations for Cabinet and the wider Safer Swansea Partnership that should help tackle and prevent ASB in Swansea.

### **3.4 Number of Working Group topics completed = 3**

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

- **Public Rights of Way** - Completed in November 2023. This Working Group enabled information, focussed questioning & discussion of the topic. Councillors had an overview of Public Rights of Way (PROW) across Swansea (mapping / numbers) and discussed issues, including impacts on PROW from developments and the effect on communities. 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 January and the Committee will be responsible for follow up in the next 12 months.
- **Customer Contact** - Completed in February 2024. It enabled information, focussed questioning & discussion on user experience when contacting the Council / accessing services whether by telephone or on-line / through digital means; response rates; provision for offline and on-line contact; effectiveness of Council Contact Centre; on-going actions to improve digital inclusion / access; quality of website, 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 May and the Committee will be responsible for follow up in the next 12 months.
- **Community Growing** - Completed in May 2024. It enabled information, focussed questioning & discussion around Council activity / support to Community Growing, with examples (e.g., allotments) and experience; benefits / success; including focus on children & young people; and its contribution to health & well-being, etc. The Working Group communicated its findings via letter to the relevant Cabinet Member(s). The Scrutiny Letter and Cabinet Member

response were reported to the Committee on 16 July. The Committee will follow this work 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 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. The Group meets termly, mirroring the Partneriaeth Joint Committee. Meetings took place 19 June 2023, 23 October 2023 and 26 February 2024. 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 and October 2023 and February and April 2024. 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 exercises 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 is there to 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 2023 and January 2024. 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?**

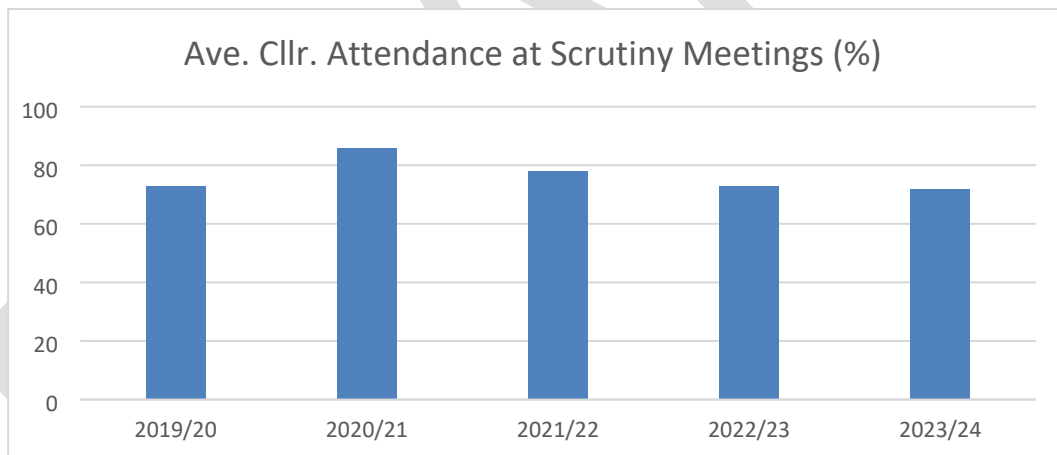
### 3.5 Average Councillor attendance at Scrutiny meetings = 72%

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 72%. Attendance at Committee meetings alone was 81%. Both healthy figures of engagement.

Comparison with previous years:

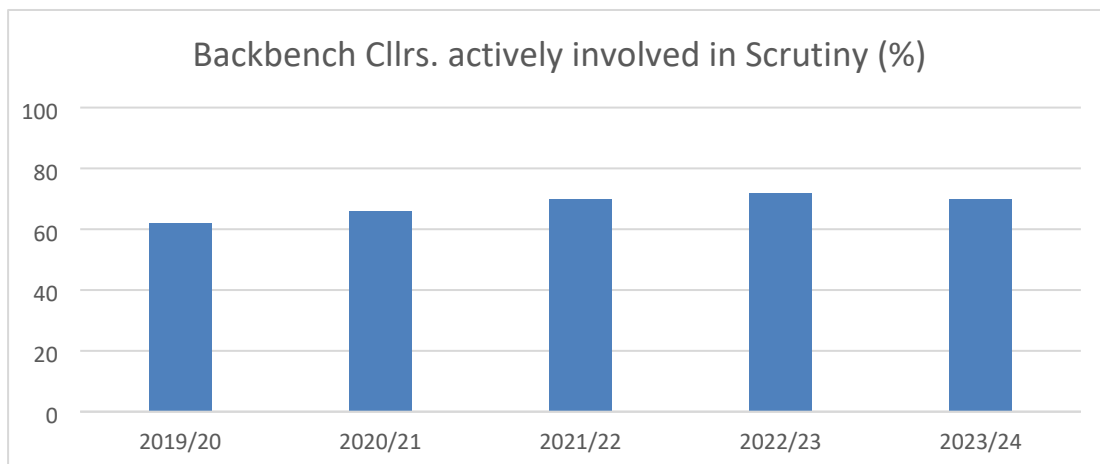


### 3.6 Backbench councillors actively involved in Scrutiny = 70%

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 = 16%

Scrutiny is important as a mechanism for community engagement. The extent to which the public (including the press) observes 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.

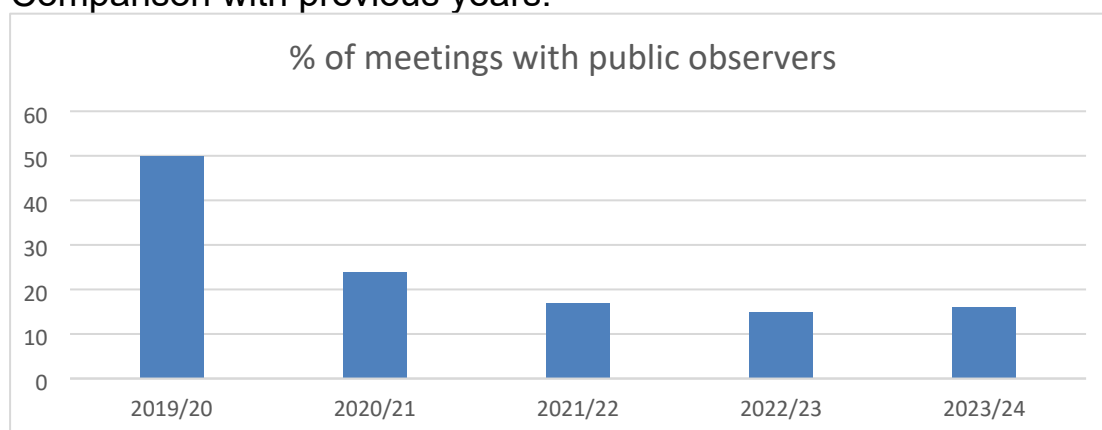
With the move to remote meetings over the past few years, people are able to watch video recordings of meetings. Since June 2022 Scrutiny meetings have been hybrid (or multi-location) meetings, meaning people can either attend in the Guildhall or join meetings online via MS Teams.

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 meetings, this has inevitably impacted on the number of observers physically attending meeting. 11 of the 69 Scrutiny meetings had members of the public who either attended in person or joined remotely on request.

A scan of YouTube views shows Committee meetings seem to attract on average 57 viewers, significantly more people than who would have watched meetings previously from the public gallery. There are similarly good figures across other Scrutiny meetings,

with the Community Assets Inquiry and Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance and Education Performance Panel meetings appearing to attract the biggest interest. The most viewed meeting was the Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance meeting on 14 November 2023, with 149 views, which included discussion on the proposed Skyline development.

Comparison with previous years:



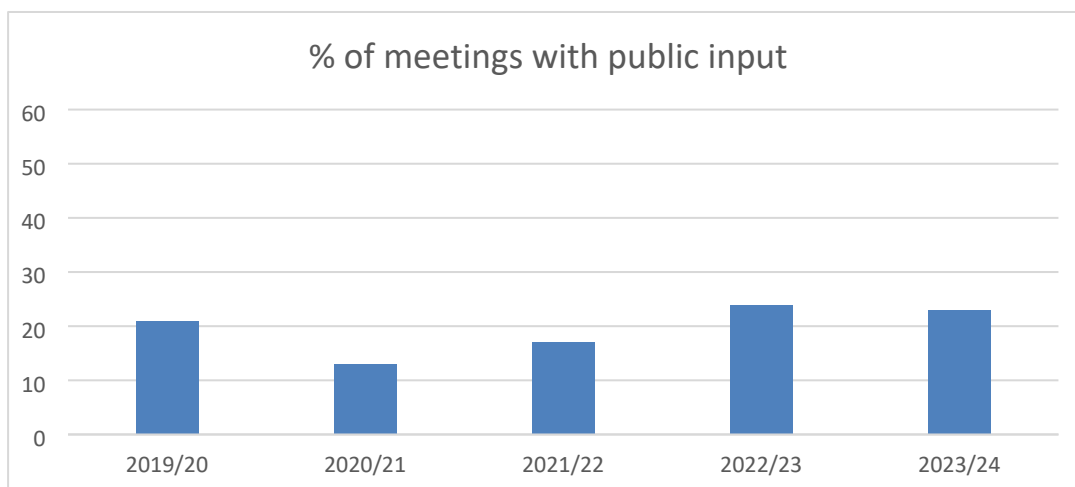
### 3.8 Meetings with public input = 23%

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. 23% 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.

Some matters may be referred directly to Cabinet Members for them to respond to the member of the public. Individual issues of concern will be referred elsewhere, e.g. the Council's Corporate Complaints process. In addition to public requests for Scrutiny formally reported to the Committee, members of the public are able to contact Scrutiny with questions for Cabinet Members. If these relate to planned Scrutiny activity they are fed into specific meetings. Where they do not, questions are forwarded to relevant Cabinet Members for direct response. The Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee monitors the process to ensure Cabinet Members are responsive to public questions.

Comparison with previous years:

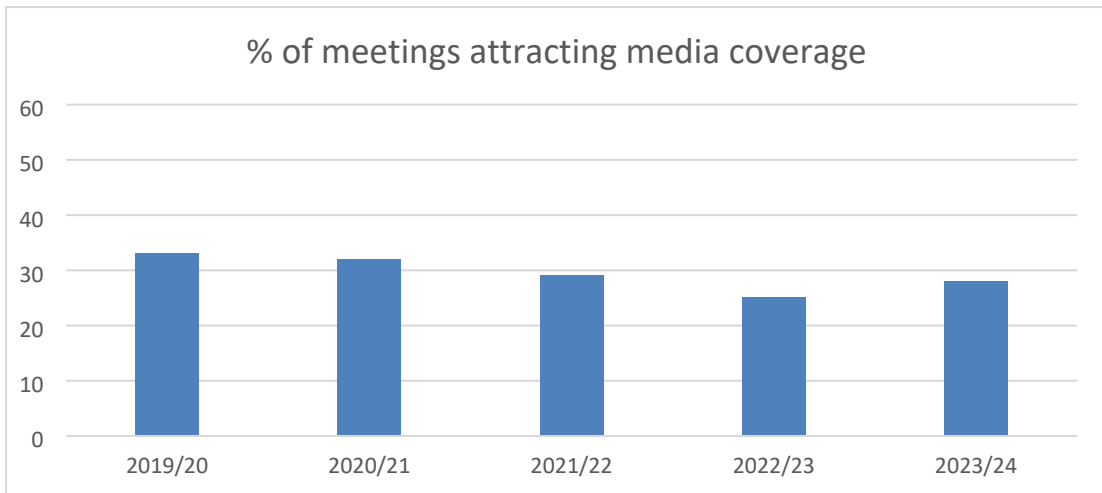


### 3.9 Meetings attracting media coverage = 28%

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 over 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 24 Scrutiny discussions reported in the local press (print and on-line).

Issues which generated coverage included Scrutiny discussions on: Highways Maintenance; Domiciliary Care; Swansea Arena; City Centre Community Hub development; Children's Residential Care; Active Travel; Anti-Social Behaviour; Oracle IT Project; Skyline development; Recycling; Council budget; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; City Centre investment; Air Quality Management; Drainage; and Crime & Disorder.

Comparison with previous years:



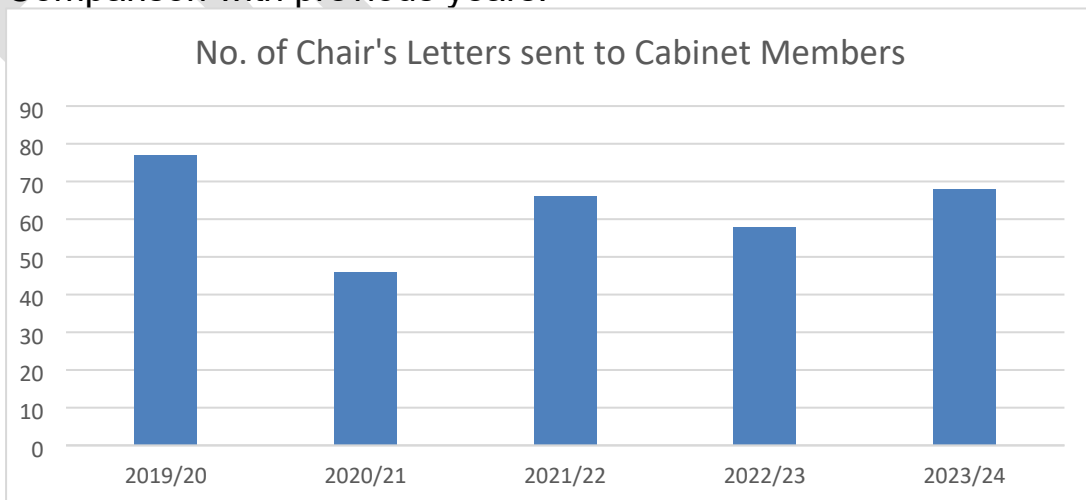
**C. How did Scrutiny impact on the business of the Council?**

**3.10 Number of Chair’s Letters sent to Cabinet Members = 68**

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 Scrutiny meetings. Letters are effectively ‘mini-reports’ with conclusions and proposals from Scrutiny – and where necessary will require a response.

68 letters were sent to Cabinet Members following Scrutiny activity.

Comparison with previous years:

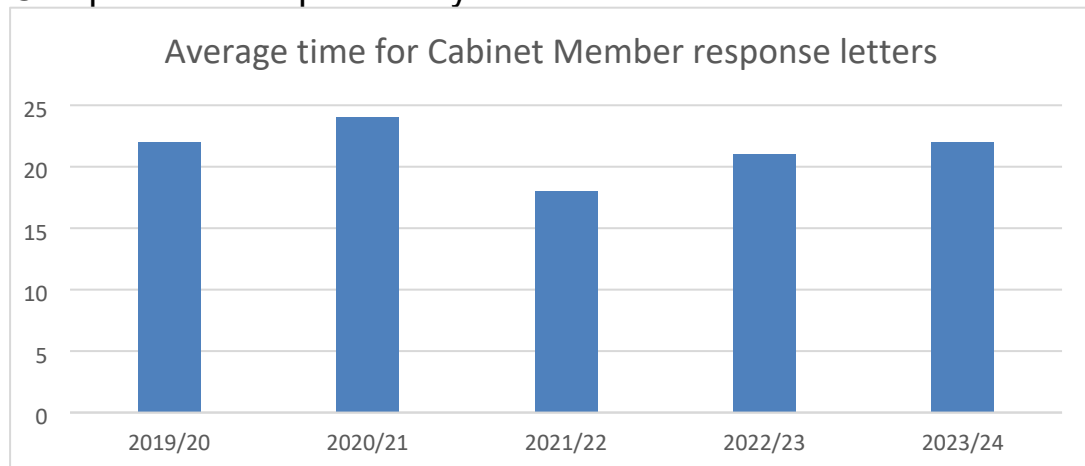




### 3.11 Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 22 days

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 just outside of that, at 22 days, so Scrutiny is getting a timely response to views, concerns and any suggested action for Cabinet Members.

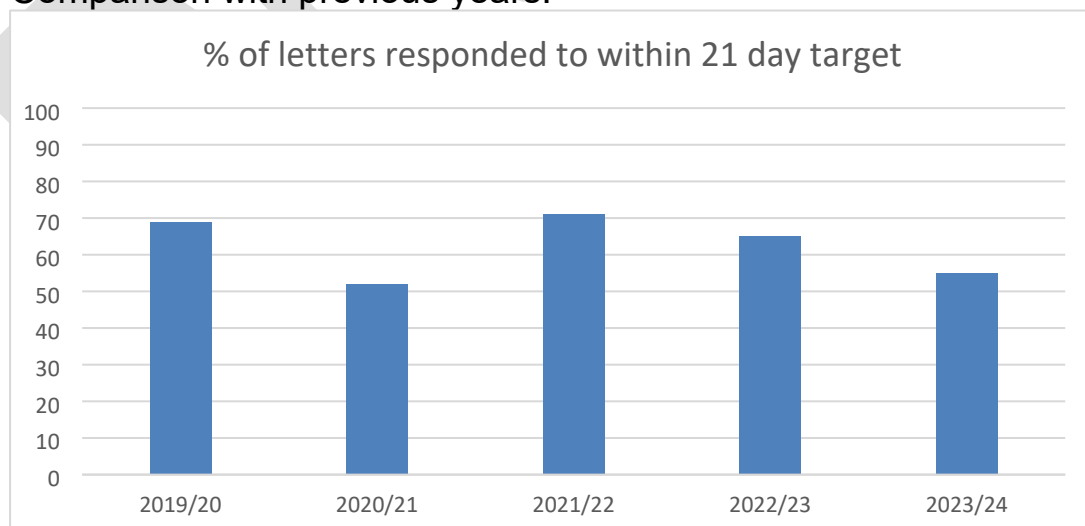
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.12 Letters responded to within 21 day target = 55%

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 55% (11 out of 20 letters).

Comparison with previous years:



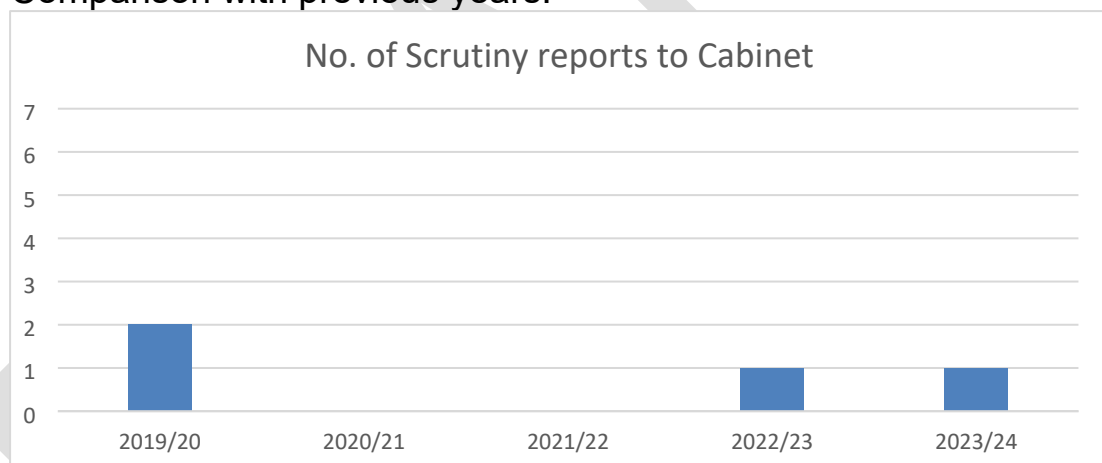
### 3.13 Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 1

In-depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet, for it to respond to the recommendations agreed by Scrutiny and publish 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 December 2023, Cabinet was presented with the final report from the Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Inquiry Panel, by the Panel Convener, Councillor Terry Hennegan. Here, the work of the Scrutiny Panel explored how the Council can ensure that it is working with its partners to appropriately and effectively tackle Anti-Social Behaviour in Swansea.

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

Comparison with previous years:

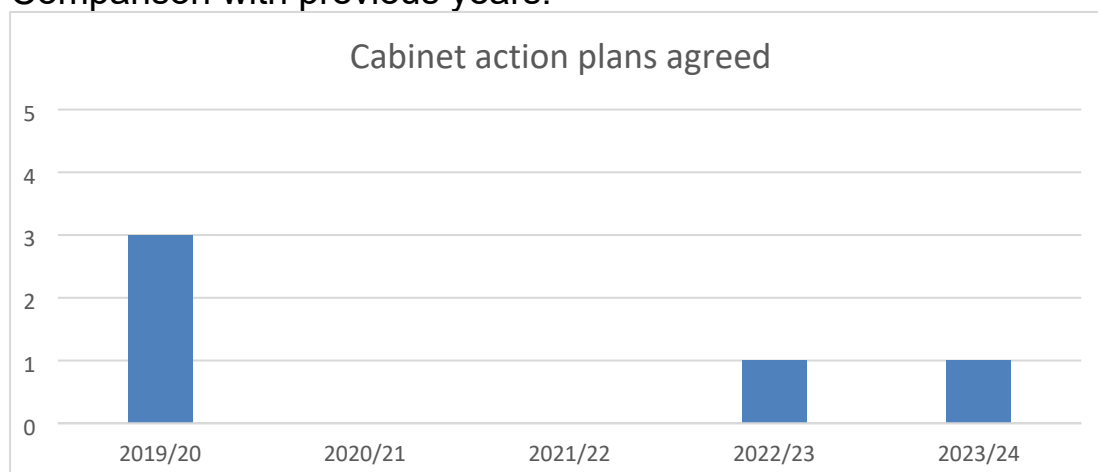


### 3.14 Cabinet action plans agreed = 1

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 Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Inquiry final report in April 2023. The Cabinet Member for Well-being 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 = 3

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.

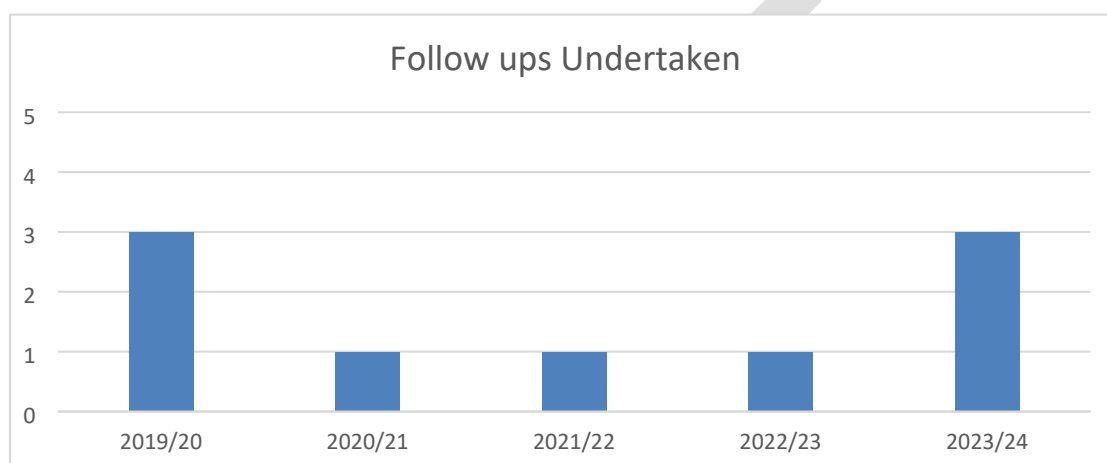
To check whether the agreed action plans have been carried out, Scrutiny will ask for follow up reports from Cabinet Members. If Councillors are satisfied, they can then conclude the work and monitoring for that inquiry.

Previous Scrutiny inquiries that required a follow up:

Inquiry	Convener	Cabinet Action Plan agreed	Monitoring Status
<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	Monitoring Complete (follow up meeting held 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 includes both Inquiry follow ups and Working Group follow ups. During 2023/24 it followed up on the Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group which concluded in February 2022 and the Road Safety Scrutiny Working Group, which concluded in December 2022.

Comparison with previous years:



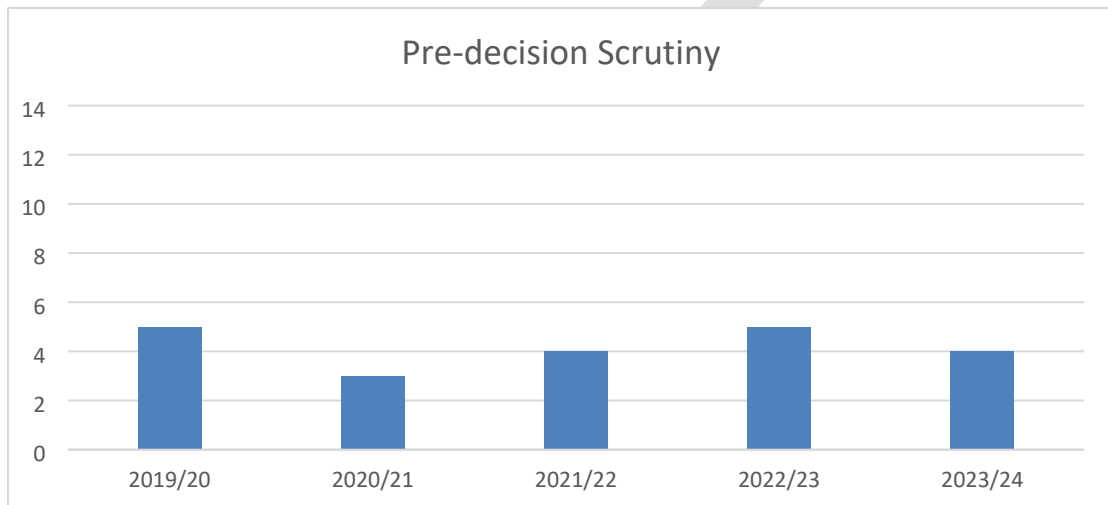
### 3.16 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre-decision scrutiny = 4

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 four 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
<b>FPR7 Redevelopment of 277-278 Oxford Street - Community Hub Project</b>	Corporate Services & Performance and Culture, Human Rights & Equalities	20 Jul 2023	Committee
<b>Oracle Fusion Project Closure Process and Transition to New Operating Model</b>	Service Transformation (Deputy Leader)	19 Oct 2023	Committee

<b>Annual Budget</b>	Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)	15 Feb 2024	Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Panel (with contribution from other Panels)
<b>Updated FPR7 for Palace Theatre Refurbishment.</b>	Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism	16 May 2024	Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Panel

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.17 Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 1

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 lead 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 was one Cabinet decision 'called in' over the past year.

Following discussion in February 2024, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet decision that had been made regarding approval of a 'Customer Charter & Service Standards Framework' be reconsidered, in light of concerns raised and in line with the Chief Executive's proposed way forward which had been

reported to the Committee. This was agreed by the lead Cabinet Member, who had delegated authority to make the necessary changes.

### **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 of whether Scrutiny activity has covered all Cabinet portfolios and 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%.

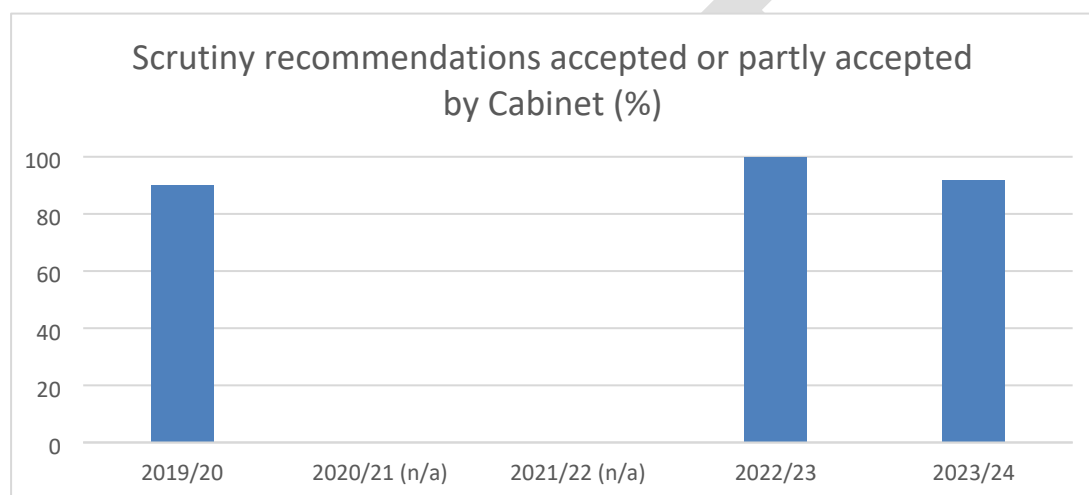
\*Although there are 10 Cabinet Portfolios, during 2023/24 there were 11 Councillors in Cabinet positions. The Community portfolio operating under a job share system between two councillors sharing the responsibilities.

## D. What were the outcomes of Scrutiny?

### 3.19 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 92%

The rate that Cabinet accept Scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether Scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. Cabinet agreed 21 of 24 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations in April 2023. 1 was partly agreed.

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.20 Recommendations signed off by Scrutiny as completed = 64%

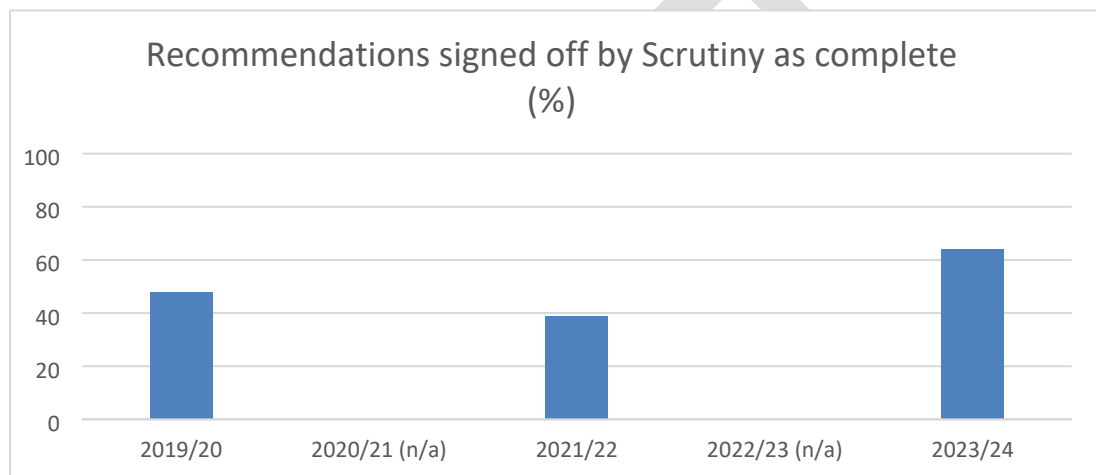
When follow up reports are presented to Scrutiny (usually within 12 months following original Cabinet decision) they detail which of the recommendations from the in-depth inquiry (or other scrutiny report) have been completed in line with the agreed Cabinet Member's action plan and which have not. In 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 was followed up by the Panel in October 2023. All 14 recommendations had been agreed by Cabinet. Having received a report on Cabinet's agreed action plan, to support the follow up and following discussion with the lead Cabinet Member / officers, the Panel agreed to conclude formal follow up of the Inquiry after satisfying themselves that good progress has been made with

all the recommendations. They heard that 9 of the recommendations are now complete and that good progress has been made with those recommendations that are outstanding. They were reassured to hear that all the necessary pieces are in place to ensure ongoing improvement in those areas where the recommendations are incomplete.

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, to Cabinet / Cabinet Members
- 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:

- **Investigating Anti-Social Behaviour**
- **Looking in detail at Procurement Practice**
- **Creating a Safer Swansea**
- **Partnership Working**
- **Tackling Poverty & Enabling Communities**
- **Keeping an eye on Bus Services**
- **Making our roads safer**

- **Maintaining Public Rights of Way**
- **Improving Customer Contact**
- **Influencing Cabinet decisions**
- **Calling In Cabinet Decisions**
- **Monitoring Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance**
- **Monitoring Climate Change & the Natural Environment**
- **Monitoring Education & Learning**
- **Monitoring Children's Social Services**
- **Monitoring Adult Services**

DRAFT

## **5. Feedback and Improvement**

### **5.1 Self-Evaluation**

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 2024, 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. Overall, the Committee were satisfied with the way the year had gone and looked forward to the next Work Planning Conference, which took place in June 2024.

Some issues raised previously that we still need to keep an eye on:

- The timing of Scrutiny activity 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.
- Making sure Councillors are 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.
- Providing Councillors with as much time as possible to review agendas / information to help them to prepare for meetings.

### 5.1.3 Feedback from Scrutiny Performance Panels

All Scrutiny Performance Panels were invited to reflect on their work and observations that may inform future Scrutiny and its effectiveness. 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. There was some discussion about specific activities they were involved in, but also some observations that could be applied generally to Scrutiny practice.

The following general observations were noted, to act upon for 2024/25:

- Increasing the use of pre-meetings to help prepare for meetings
- Welcoming more opportunities for face-to-face engagement with people to see work being done on the ground
- Ensuring that where PowerPoint presentations are planned for any item, copy is provided in advance for inclusion within agenda papers
- Where possible, getting an external perspective on things, in addition to hearing Cabinet Members and Council Officers
- Revisiting issues of concern raised at meetings, to follow up on progress

5.1.4 In order to strengthen end of year review / evaluation efforts, a Councillor Survey had been issued to all Councillors in April 2023 inviting views about the way Scrutiny has worked, so that we can monitor the effectiveness of Scrutiny, get a better indication of satisfaction and address any areas for improvement. The survey was not repeated this April as it was considered prudent to do so twice in each Council Term (at the end of Year 1 and Year 3), rather than annually, so will next be carried out in April 2025.

However, survey results (from April 2023) showed that:

- ✓ Councillors had a good understanding of the role of Scrutiny. (89%)
- ✓ Respondents felt that overall, Scrutiny is operating well in Swansea. (79%)
- ✓ Swansea Scrutiny was Councillor-led. (100%)
- ✓ Non-executive members had good opportunities to participate in Scrutiny (90%)

- ✓ Our Scrutiny Work Programme balanced issues of strategic importance and community concerns. (79%)
- ✓ Scrutiny activities were well-planned. (82%)
- ✓ Scrutiny provided regular challenge to decision-makers. (86%)
- ✓ Scrutiny was an important Council mechanism for public engagement. (75%)
- ✓ Scrutiny had a positive impact on the business of the Council. (75%); and
- ✓ Councillors were happy with the level of support and guidance provided by the Scrutiny Team. (100%)
- ✓ However, only 54% agreed that Scrutiny has the resources and organisational support it needs to be effective.

What Councillors liked 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 raised that we have been giving 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.

## 5.2 Post-Meeting Participant Feedback

5.2.1 We also seek 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 2023/24, this generated 27 responses.

5.2.2 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 positive quotes from the feedback received:

*“The Scrutiny Panel was well researched and interested in the presented information. They asked relevant questions for clarity and welcomed additional information to present as broad as possible a picture of the subject material. The Chair ensured the meeting ran professionally and in a timely fashion whilst ensuring all who wanted, had the opportunity to contribute”*

*“Councillors were courteous and the Chair moderated discussion well”*

*“Very well Chaired, treated with courtesy and respect and good, relevant questions”*

*“Very well chaired with fair, balanced and relevant questions”*

*“The Scrutiny Panel provided an excellent opportunity to promote and showcase the work which is being undertaken within this*

*section of the Council. Furthermore, the process of preparing the report, provided an opportunity for reflection on the projects being undertaken and consider how these can be developed going forward”*

*“I thought the meeting was well organised and constructive It was very useful to have a fair amount of notice of the questions being asked in order to prepare responses and make best use of the time available”*

*“Members of the Scrutiny Panel were knowledgeable and well versed on the issues faced”*

*“Good, sensible conversation and suggestions to move forward”*

*“Scrutiny meetings in Swansea are always run well”*

5.2.3 However, there were some improvement suggestions to act upon during 2024/25:

- Giving more notice of questions in advance as much as possible to help Cabinet Members and Officers prepare and ensure the issues Councillors wish to raise can be properly addressed within meetings avoiding responses needing to be followed up after meetings.
- Ensuring officers are also given the opportunity to address Scrutiny meetings to present key points, in addition to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder's introduction, before moving to the wider discussion.

5.2.4 We have acted upon the improvement suggestions that came out of participant feedback in the previous year:

- With hybrid meetings, to help online participants, the Chair at the start of the meeting states who is in the physical room, as it is unclear from the cameras to those participating remotely.
- Councillors have been careful not to stray into personal / ward specific issues during Scrutiny.

## 5.3 Scrutiny Improvement Objectives

5.3.1 A number of Scrutiny Improvement Objectives and action plan had been 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 mattered 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.

5.3.2 The Committee has regularly reviewed and considered progress against the action plan and did so last in May 2024. The review of the improvement plan had previously showed only one outstanding action, which was the development and delivery of a Scrutiny training and development programme. This was completed during 2023-24. Details below.



## 5.4 Scrutiny Training & Development Programme

5.4.1 A training programme was developed and delivered during 2023-24 which was facilitated by Cerith Thomas from the Improvement Team at the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) for all Swansea Scrutiny Councillors. The Programme consisted of five different Sessions between October 2023 and January 2024:

- Introduction to Scrutiny
- Scrutiny Chairing Skills
- Questioning Skills for Scrutiny
- Scrutiny of Performance
- Self-Assessment of Scrutiny (two parts)

5.4.2 In total 22 Councillors and 1 of the Statutory Education Co-optees participated in the Programme, attending at least one session. Of these, 7 Councillors and the Statutory Education Co-optee attended all sessions. Video recording of each session and relevant materials were subsequently shared with all Scrutiny Councillors, enabling those who were not able to attend to benefit.

5.4.3 As well as benefitting individual Councillors, the Programme would help to inform Scrutiny Improvement Objectives and actions going forward. With the Programme concluding with a self-assessment exercise a number of ideas emerged from this process.

5.4.4 Possible / suggested action to take forward, included:

- Ensuring all Committee / Panel members have the opportunity to engage in the development of their individual work plans, ideally through face-to-face meetings / workshops, as well as in preparing for meetings.
- Increasing, wherever possible, external input / perspectives at Scrutiny meetings, in addition to hearing from Cabinet Members and Officers.
- Ensuring timely consideration of reports that are otherwise being reported to Cabinet, e.g. Performance / Financial monitoring reports.
- Taking advantage of any opportunities to undertake visits, enabling Scrutiny Councillors to see as well as hear about things.

- To make greater use of informal pre-meetings to prepare for meetings and post-meetings to evaluate how meetings have gone.
- Ensuring all suggested actions and recommendations made by Scrutiny, whether in reports or letters, are SMART (Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; and Timely).
- Reviewing / refreshing all internal / external information about Scrutiny (e.g. on the Council intranet and Council website) to ensure good visibility and its effectiveness in increasing awareness of Scrutiny and ways that the public can get involved.
- Giving consideration to an End of Year Conference, whether in place of or in addition to individual Committee / Performance Panel discussions.
- Reviewing the Scrutiny Annual Report and the measures of success to report on Scrutiny performance.

5.3.5 We will be using these as the basis for Scrutiny Improvement Objectives for the next few years.

## 6. Looking Ahead

### 6.1 Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/25

6.1.1 Taking into account feedback from the Scrutiny Work Planning Conference the Committee has agreed a Work Programme for 2024/25, which includes new Scrutiny Inquiry Panel and Working Groups and shows arrangements for Performance Panels.

#### 6.1.2 New Inquiry Panel

Once the current Community Assets Inquiry is concluded, the next Inquiry will be on 'Grants' – whilst exact Terms of Reference and Key Question will be agreed by the Inquiry Panel, there are concerns about the visibility of Grants as part of overall Council budget and a desire to shine a light on the significance of Grants, what they are, processes and how well they are being used, etc.

#### 6.1.3 New Working Groups

One-off Working Group topics have been identified, focussing in turn on 'Empty Properties', 'Public Engagement', 'Agile Working' and 'Tree Services'.

#### 6.1.4 Performance Panels

Performance Panel arrangements are unchanged from last year. Each Performance Panel will have its own work plan, developed by the Convener / Members and agreed by the Panel. but the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2024/25 identified some specific topics for Performance Panels to cover within their work plans, where possible.

6.1.5 The agreed Work Programme can be seen at **Appendix B**.

## For further information:

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

All Scrutiny agenda packs are available on the Council's '[agenda and minutes' webpage](#), including video recording of each meeting. There you can also find all Scrutiny Letters sent to Cabinet Members following meetings and responses.

All Council meetings which have been recorded can be viewed here: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/meetingsonline>

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 check our webpages. You could even [follow us](#) on X (formerly Twitter).

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