



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Scrutiny Programme Committee**

Multi-Location Meeting - Lilian Hopkin Room, Guildhall / MS

Teams

Tuesday, 17 September 2024 at 4.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor T M White (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

A Davis  
P N May

**Councillor(s)**

E W Fitzgerald  
F D O'Brien

**Councillor(s)**

M Jones  
S Pritchard

**Statutory Co-opted Member(s)**

Beth Allender Elizabeth Lee

**Councillor Co-opted Member(s)**

C A Holley S M Jones  
M H Jones L R Jones

**Officer(s)**

Samantha Jenkins	Democratic Services Officer
Adrian Jeremiah	Lead Lawyer
Sarah Jordan	Landlord and Community Housing Services Manager
Brij Madahar	Scrutiny Team Leader
Carol Morgan	Head of Housing & Public Health
Marie Muldoon	Housing Options Manager
Steve Porter	Operations Manager, Community Housing Services
Mark Wade	Director of Place

**Also present**

Councillor A S Lewis – Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): P M Black, V A Holland and W G Lewis

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**17 Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interest.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

**18 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips.**

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

**19 Minutes.**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 16 July 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**20 Public Question Time.**

There were no public questions.

**21 Scrutiny of Cabinet Member Portfolio Responsibilities: Homelessness - Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Service Transformation.**

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation assisted by the Head of Housing and Public Health, Operations Manager – Community Housing Services, Landlord & Community Housing Services Manager and Housing Options Manager discussed the Council's work in relation to tackling Homelessness.

They provided an update on the situation, including key data on levels of homelessness and trends, current pressures on temporary accommodation, what emergency measures have been introduced and how the Council is looking to tackle these challenges going forward.

It was highlighted that the Council would continue to work with and strengthen relationships with its partners to tackle the current homelessness crisis. Working with Health, Criminal Justice, Registered Social Landlords, private rented sector landlords, the Voluntary Sector and other key partners is essential in the prevention of homelessness.

Committee questioning and discussion focussed on the following:

- Breakdown of Homelessness Figures – Noted that main reasons for people presenting as homeless, and that quarterly reports were submitted by the Council to the Welsh Government providing all the details. It was noted that these figures, in terms of breakdown by reason, have not changed significantly.
- Impact of the Early Release Scheme / SDS40 (Standard Determinate Sentences) Scheme – it was anticipated that the Scheme would have a negative impact on the number of people requiring temporary accommodation in 2024/2025.
- Home Swapper Scheme - the process, purpose and benefits in terms of tackling homelessness were detailed.
- Accommodating Asylum Seekers & Refugees – noted some success in moving people on from temporary accommodation. Whilst there were a number of specific schemes available, the Committee heard that the challenge remained more generally in so far as it was difficult to re-house any category of individual at the moment.
- Standard of Council Accommodation – there were minimum standards required prior to letting properties and a process was in place to ensure all properties attained a certain standard prior to letting.

- Use of B&B/Hotel accommodation - efforts were on-going to explore alternatives to B&B. Reducing the numbers in B&B was a key priority and the Council was looking at a number of innovative solutions to tackle this.
- Homelessness Welsh Government White Paper – heard that this placed additional strain on Welsh Local Authorities and the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation, as WLGA Spokesperson, was in on-going discussions with Ministers to attempt to shape the legislation.
- Voids – there were currently 245 'normal' voids. 40 voids were undergoing major refurbishment works. The voids figures were the lowest for many years and the Council had been successful in developing a framework for external contractors and in securing funding.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation expressed her thanks to housing colleagues for their ongoing work.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Officers for their input and also thanked the Officers within Housing for their continued dedication to the service.

**Resolved that:**

- 1) the Vice-Chair write to the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation reflecting the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

**22 Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24.**

The Vice Chair introduced the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2023/24, which subject to Committee endorsement, would be presented by the Chair to Council on 3 October.

It reflected on the work Scrutiny Councillors undertook during the previous municipal year, with examples of good Scrutiny, impact and improvement, including feedback from Scrutiny meeting participants.

The report described the range of activities carried out by Councillors, whether as members of the Committee, Inquiry Panels, Performance Panels and Scrutiny Working Groups.

The report highlighted how Scrutiny had made a difference, by

- Ensuring that Cabinet Members (and other decision-makers) were 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 key Cabinet 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; and
- Making the work of the Council open and transparent to the public

The report also supported continuous improvement for the Scrutiny function – efforts to change processes and practice, and tweak things to be even more effective and make the most of limited time and resources.

The Vice-Chair invited Councillors to provide comments and ideas for improvement.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 be approved and submitted to Council on 3 October, 2024.

## **23 Membership of Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.**

The Vice Chair introduced the report and sought approval in respect of the membership of the 'Grants' Inquiry Panel and the Working Groups on 'Empty Properties', 'Public Engagement', 'Agile Working', and 'Trees', having sought expressions of interest from all non-executive councillors. This included needing to appoint a Convener for each. He reported that Councillor Joe Hale had volunteered to chair the Grants Inquiry Panel, and Councillor F D O'Brien had volunteered for the Empty Properties Working Group and Councillor P N May had volunteered for the Trees Working Group. the Working Groups on Public Engagement and Agile Working were still to be sought.

As there was room for more Councillors on the Working Groups on Public Participation Working and Agile Working, further interest would be sought before confirming the membership / conveners. This would be reported back to the Committee for approval.

The Committee noted that the Adult Services Performance Panel had renewed its co-option of Mr Tony Beddow for the 2024/25 municipal year.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) the report be approved.

## **24 Scrutiny Work Programme.**

The Vice-Chair introduced the agreed Work Programme to facilitate the Committee's monitoring of all Scrutiny activity. Various information was provided to ensure progress could be reviewed with the agreed Programme.

He referred to the headlines in the covering report, and in the appendices, members noted:

- the Committee's own work plan
- the Cabinet Forward Plan was also included for review for anything significant within, should the Committee feel Pre-decision Scrutiny was merited for any particular report, not already identified
- timetable of all Scrutiny activities (projected or actual where dates are known).

On this occasion included in the papers were each of the agreed work plans for the 5 Scrutiny Performance Panels for Committee's awareness. Also, in the interests of avoiding duplication and ensuring co-ordination with work going on elsewhere, Members noted the work plans in respect of the Council's Service Transformation Committees.

The Vice-Chair highlighted the main items for the next Committee meeting scheduled for 15 October, 2024:

- Scrutiny of Cabinet Member Portfolio Responsibilities – Streetscene Improvements – Street Cleansing Operations' (this was originally scheduled for the September meeting but had to be moved back)
- Follow Up: Scrutiny Working Group – Public Rights of Way

The Committee noted that since the last Committee meeting in July, 7 members of the public had contacted Scrutiny via the website. The majority of these were essentially complaints or services requests and referred accordingly to the Council's Complaints Team or the relevant department. However, 3 were referred directly to Cabinet Members for them to directly provide a response to the members of the public. These related to: the Council's Planning Applications Online Portal / visibility of public comments; Equalities & Diversity training & development to external bodies using Council facilities, e.g. Sports Clubs; and Fly Tipping.

## **25 Scrutiny Letters.**

The Vice-Chair referred to the following letters, reflecting on recent Scrutiny activity:

- Committee – Recycling & Waste Collection Service – 16 July 2024 - Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure.
- Follow-up – Scrutiny Working Group – Co-production – 16 July 2024 – Letter to / from the Cabinet Member for Community (Support).

The Cabinet Member response regarding the Recycling & Waste Collection Service was included. The Committee was keen to have a further update on the staffing situation. To allow time for the service area to implement, review and revise actions the Cabinet Member suggested the Committee is provided a full update in late 2024, so this will be scheduled.

**26 Date and Time of Upcoming Panel / Working Group Meetings.**

The Vice-Chair referred upcoming Panel/Working Group/Regional Scrutiny meetings, for awareness.

The meeting ended at 4.59 pm

**Chair**