



Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 15 October 2024

Follow Up: Scrutiny Working Group – Public Rights of Way

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| Purpose: | This report provides background and advice to the Committee in following up on the Scrutiny Working Group which looked at issues relating to Public Rights of Way in November 2023. Lead Cabinet Member / officers have been asked to report on progress since then, including issues raised by the Working Group. |
| Content: | <p>The Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure, Councillor Andrew Stevens, has provided a report which is appended for questions and discussion.</p> <p>The Committee is provided with the correspondence between the Working Group and Cabinet Member following its meeting which contain the views / concerns of Scrutiny Councillors. The Committee should follow up on any agreed action in response to Working Group suggestions for improvement.</p> |
| Councillors are being asked to: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider the information provided, ask questions, and make comments and recommendations as necessary. |
| Lead Councillor: | Councillor Andrew Stevens (Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure) |
| Lead Officers: | Mark Wade, Director of Place Phil Holmes, Head of Planning and City Regeneration |
| Report Author: | Brij Madahar, Scrutiny Team Leader Tel: 01792 637257 E-mail: brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk |
| Legal Officer: | Adrian Jeremiah |
| Finance Officer: | Amanda Thomas |

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee has overall responsibility for the Scrutiny Work Programme. Each year, the Work Programme includes several 'one-off' topic-based Scrutiny Working Groups to look at

specific issues of concern. These are usually set up as single meetings to call in relevant Cabinet Member(s), officers, and other relevant persons, to examine the issue and feedback views and recommendations to the Cabinet Member(s). As such the Committee takes responsibility for following up on Working Groups, to check on progress with the topic / issue(s) and response to any specific suggestions / recommendations made and agreed action coming out of the Scrutiny session.

2. Public Rights of Way Scrutiny Working Group

2.1 The Public Rights of Way Scrutiny Working Group originally met on 22 November 2023 for an overview of Public Rights of Way (PROW) across Swansea (mapping / numbers) and discussed a range of issues, including impacts on PROW from developments and the effect on communities. It has now been nearly 12 months since the Scrutiny Working Group, and therefore the Committee should follow up on progress on the issue(s) and action following any suggestions coming out of the Scrutiny session and find out how things have progressed and developments in this area of work.

2.2 Main Working Group Findings

In order to assist the Committee's follow up, a summary is provided:

2.2.1 Overall, Scrutiny Councillors praised the work of the Countryside Access Team and felt that the PROW in Swansea were an asset with huge value for money, however resources were a concern.

2.2.2 The Working Group received a comprehensive report which included reference to a 10-year Countryside Action Plan due to be adopted in Spring 2024. The Working Group had heard that the Countryside Access Team had reduced in size over the last few years leaving 3 Countryside Access Officers and a Team Leader. This left them vulnerable to unforeseen circumstances for instance, staff illness. A wider team restructure was imminent and the Working Group hoped this would provide wider team support. To support the team further, particularly with pathway maintenance, it suggested considering apprenticeships.

2.2.3 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 had 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.

2.2.4 Other areas discussed at the Working Group include partnership working and marketing. Resources were a concern and the Working Group felt, if footfall and usage increases, this may demonstrate the need for increased budgets.

2.2.5 The Cabinet Member responded to the recommendations and conclusions made by the Working Group. In his response letter he had 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 did 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.

2.3 The correspondence between the Working Group and Cabinet Member following this Scrutiny activity is **attached**, showing the range of issues that were discussed, feedback and concerns, and the Cabinet Member's subsequent response.

2.4 Looking back at the Working Group discussion, the Committee will want to ask about the following:

- Information about PROW footfall / usage and whether this has increased
- Progress in developing the 10-year Countryside Action Plan that Councillors were told was due to be adopted in Spring 2024
- Developments regarding resources – the Working Group was told that a team restructure was imminent to improve support for this area of work. Councillors were particularly concerned about resources for pathway maintenance
- Marketing activity regarding PROW
- Progress in lobbying WLGA / Welsh Government on legislation to avoid the duplication of diversion orders which currently takes place
- Any joint / collaborative working between those involved in PROW work and Active Travel work
- The effectiveness of partnership working

2.5 Link to the Scrutiny Working Group meeting:

22 Nov 2023

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=742&MIId=11422&Ver=4&LLL=0>

2.6 Scrutiny Councillors who participated in the Working Group: Mike White (Convener), Peter Black, Chris Evans, Victoria Holland, Paxton Hood-Williams, Dai Jenkins, Lyndon Jones, Michael Locke, Brigitte Rowlands and Will Thomas.

2.7 By carrying out a follow up the Committee can then close off this Scrutiny activity and work, as appropriate.

3. Cabinet Member Report

3.1 The lead Cabinet Member, Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure, has provided a report on progress, in the context of the Scrutiny activity, on Public Rights of Way. See ***attached Appendix B***.

3.2 Lead officer(s) will be present to assist and facilitate the discussion.

3.3 The Committee will hear from the Cabinet Member / officers before questions and discussion. At the conclusion of the session the Committee can write to the Cabinet Member with any observations, views and recommendations arising from the follow up discussion.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications from this report.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications from this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

- Appendix A - Letter correspondence between the Public Rights of Ways Scrutiny Working Group and Cabinet Member: Letters dated 7 December 2023 and 3 January 2024
- Appendix B - Cabinet Member Report on Public Rights of Way