



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Programme Committee**

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

Teams

Tuesday, 18 March 2025 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor P M Black (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

A Davis
W G Lewis
T M White

Councillor(s)

V A Holland
F D O'Brien

Councillor(s)

M Jones
S Pritchard

Statutory Co-opted Member(s)

Elizabeth Lee

Councillor Co-opted Member(s)

C A Holley

Officer(s)

Samantha Jenkins	Democratic Services Officer
Adrian Jeremiah	Lead Lawyer
Sarah Lackenby	Head of Digital and Customer Services
Brij Madahar	Scrutiny Team Leader

Also present

Councillor A S Lewis – Cabinet Member for Service Transformation.

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): P N May

Statutory Co-opted Member(s): Beth Allender

Councillor Co-opted Members: P R Hood-Williams, M H Jones, S M Jones and L R Jones

85 Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interest.

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

86 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.

87 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 18 February 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

88 Public Question Time.

There were no public questions.

89 Follow Up: Scrutiny Working Group - Customer Contact.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation assisted by the Head of Digital & Customer Services presented a report detailing the progress on improving customer contact since the Customer Contact Scrutiny Working Group meeting on 23rd February 2024.

Members noted there had been significant improvement in performance due to the filling of vacancies in the corporate call centre and a continued shift to online channels.

Calls had reduced by just under 35%, while online forms and emails had increased by just over 90% since 2022-23.

The performance of other call centres had also improved by just over 27% when comparing January performance across years.

The phone access review project, which started in autumn 2024 and was set to complete by the end of March 2025, aimed to assess and improve the usability, accessibility, and effectiveness of current phone access channels. The review covered infrastructure, customer experience, performance metrics, and staff training, with expected benefits including improved customer access and satisfaction, and consistent service standards.

The unified communications project would provide a more reliable and adaptable system for residents to communicate with the council and would complete by the end of March 2026.

The Swansea account project aimed to incorporate more services into the Swansea account by the end of May, with further services to be added by March 2026.

A Customer Contact Target Operating Model (TOM) has been developed. The TOM aimed to improve customer contact channels to make services more accessible, effective, and inclusive. The Y Storfa face-to-face community hub in the city centre was due to open in October. The plan of work would largely be delivered through the phone access review, unified communications and Swansea account project.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation thanked the Head of Digital & Customer Services for her hard work in transforming the Service.

Committee questioning and discussion focussed on:

- Contact Details – it was reported that a significant amount of work had been undertaken with the phone access review strategy to ensure the accuracy of officer contact details. Service representatives had reviewed and checked lists for accuracy and any numbers not reached during mystery shopping would be investigated further.
- Out of Office Messages – Members noted that staff had received comprehensive advice (via a dedicated Staffnet Page) about good practice / consistency regarding the use of 'out of office' messages.
- Telephone Call Handling – the unified communications project developments included the introduction of the callback option and average wait time which was a welcome addition. As reported previously, the decline in phone calls and the full compliment of staff had a positive impact on the call handling function. Piloting of the new system was underway and was anticipated to be fully implemented by March 2026. Call times could be longer due to the complexity of the calls (assisting with completion of on-line applications etc). Members noted the range of services available to the public within libraries and with the greet and meet provision available when Y Storfa opens in October 2025.
- Website – the Officer outlined the improvements to the Council's website over the past year. The customer Swansea Account had gone live and included bookings and case management. Registrars and commercial waste services would follow. A form review was progressing with the aim of creating auto fill forms. Service users could view their query status and case history. New mapping currently included parks, open spaces and food banks and the number of people using those facilities was steadily increasing. Members noted the analytical developments in relation to use of search engines directing users to the exact information they require on the Council's website.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Head of Digital & Customer Services their informative report.

Resolved that:

- 1) The Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee write to the Cabinet Member reflecting on the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

90 Review of Digital Strategy and Transformation.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation assisted by the Head of Digital & Customer Services presented a report detailing progress with the Digital Strategy and Digital Transformation Programme and the six strategic goals.

Members noted that the Digital Strategy and Digital Transformation Programme had made significant progress since its approval by Cabinet in April 2023.

The Programme's six strategic goals had seen substantial progress enhancing the Council's digital presence and operational efficiency.

Key achievements included improvements in customer service, the creation of the Swansea Account, the migration of the ERP system to the cloud and the implementation of various automation processes.

Benefits can take many years to be fully realised and were being identified and monitored on an ongoing basis.

There had been some challenges around market testing and procurement which had caused delays. Capacity in very busy services continued to be a risk which was being managed and mitigated through the Digital Transformation Programme.

Key priorities for the upcoming year included completing procurement activities by March 2026, monitoring the benefits tracker and providing monthly progress reports to the Digital Transformation Board. Additionally, an annual review would be conducted and a new project pipeline would be developed to achieve strategic goals by 2028.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation thanked the Head of Digital & Customer Services for her work in developing the Programme.

Committee questioning and discussion focussed on:

- Microsoft CoPilot – the Officer stated that the pilot had commenced in various different teams across the Authority. She detailed the capabilities in providing automation of routine tasks (research, drafting emails, minutes etc) that would assist Councillors and staff in carrying out their work. There were some issues around ensuring security and training was ongoing within the teams who were engaged in the pilot. Training would be rolled out across the Council in due course.
- Digital Apprenticeships – it was reported that the Council had been working with Gower College since 2017. Four apprentices were recruited and employed permanently, two of which have remained within digital services. In 2022 a further five apprentices were recruited, working across server, desktop support and network services and application development. All five apprenticeships had secured roles within the IT Department. The collaboration between the Council and Gower College had delivered exceptional benefits, not only in enhancing the digital services team, but also providing the apprentices with valuable skills and professional development opportunities. The Council had supported apprentices to complete degrees, in addition to their original qualifications. In February, the recent cohort had the opportunity to meet and discuss the benefits of apprenticeships with the First Minister, and it is anticipated that a further cohort would be recruited in the coming year.
- A Digitally Connected City & County – it was reported that the partnership working and funding as part of the City Deal Partnership had been intrinsic in developing the programme. Attention was focussed on attracting more telecom

providers to improve the digital infrastructure (broadband coverage, broadband speed and congestion across the whole County). A further development included the introduction of sensors which would assist many areas of the Council to improve operation efficiency and the attractiveness and well-being of the City (e.g. sensors in litter bins to determine when it required to be emptied). Officers were examining development of funding to implement and purchase further sensors. It was further noted that free Wi-Fi exists within the City Centre.

- Customer Service Data – the Officer stated that common / repeat customer issues could be seasonal/event related (e.g. a bin lorry breaking down, storms, flooding, pests in the summer months). Data analysis was provided to Cabinet Members and Directors in order to ensure efficient and more targeted services.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Head of Digital & Customer Services their informative report.

Resolved that:

- 1) The Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee write to the Cabinet Member reflecting on the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

91 Scrutiny Performance Panel Progress Report - Education (Councillor Lyndon Jones, Convener).

The Panel Convener had given apologies for the meeting. The item was deferred to the next Committee meeting.

92 Membership of Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.

No changes to report.

93 Scrutiny Work Programme.

The 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.

The main item(s) for the next Committee meeting on 8 April were:

- Crime & Disorder Scrutiny - Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership (Annual Item - Partnership Joint-Chairs / Representatives will attend to report on the performance of the Safer Swansea Partnership).

94 Scrutiny Letters.

Scrutiny Letters were reported reflecting on recent Scrutiny activity:

- Working Group – Agile Working – 20 January 2025 – Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance.

- Committee – Leader Q & A Session – 21 January 2025 – Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance & Strategy.
- Committee – Draft Tackling Poverty Strategy – 18 February 2025 – Letter to Cabinet Member for Wellbeing.
- Committee – Delivery of Workforce Strategy – 18 February 2025 – Letter to Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance.

The Chair highlighted the findings of the Agile Working Scrutiny Working Group which the Committee will be responsible for following up in the next 12 months.

95 Date and Time of Upcoming Panel / Working Group Meetings.

The date and time of upcoming Panel/Working Group/Regional Scrutiny Meetings was provided “For information”.

The meeting ended at 4.41 pm

Chair