



Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 14 January 2019

Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan

Purpose:	This report presents a draft action plan that will: A. Deal with proposals for improvement identified by Wales Audit Office following their review of scrutiny arrangements in Swansea; and B. Make progress against the five improvement objectives identified by the Committee.
Content:	The report refers to the Wales Audit Office report (Overview & Scrutiny – Fit for the Future?) and the Improvement Objectives agreed by Committee following a process of self-evaluation at the end of 2017-18. An overall Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan is appended.
Councillors are being asked to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree the proposed action plan.
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer:	Tracey Meredith, Chief Legal Officer
Report Author:	Brij Madahar, Scrutiny Team Leader Tel: 01792 637257 E-mail: brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk
Legal Officer:	Tracey Meredith
Finance Officer:	Paul Cridland

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Over the last year the Wales Audit Office (WAO) undertook a review of scrutiny arrangements in all Welsh Local Authorities. The review of scrutiny was dubbed 'Overview & Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?'. Their report on scrutiny arrangements in Swansea was presented to the Scrutiny Programme Committee in September. Overall it was a positive assessment of scrutiny arrangements and practice, which concluded that scrutiny is well-placed to respond to future challenges, regularly challenges decision-makers, and has arrangements to review its own

effectiveness. However, some proposals for improvement were made. These need to be addressed and responded to by the Council.

- 1.2 At the same time, following a process of self-evaluation, the Scrutiny Programme Committee has identified a small number of scrutiny improvement objectives. This was informed by annual councillor, staff, and public scrutiny survey findings as well as Committee members' reflection on scrutiny process and practice, taking into account characteristics of effective scrutiny. It is therefore important to identify practical and meaningful ways in which identified improvement objectives can be met.

2. The Improvement Issues

- 2.1 The WAO report contained three proposals for improvement, on the need to:

- **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.**

This recognises financial pressures to support / deliver training but suggests we develop and deliver an appropriate training & development programme that could include further training on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, as well as other topics that may help members in their role, e.g. scrutiny chairing training.

- **Strengthen the evaluation of impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity**

Whilst recognising that there are arrangements to review our own effectiveness, this relates mainly to measuring the impact and outcomes of activity on citizens / other stakeholders but suggests: a need to identify measurable outcomes, such as an indicator we want to change, that can be looked at pre and post a scrutiny inquiry to see difference made by scrutiny; tracking of scrutiny recommendations to evaluate impact / effectiveness; and improving the Scrutiny Annual Report to reflect more about activity and impact.

- **Further clarify the distinction between scrutiny and Policy Development Committee activity in relation to policy development**

This recognises there are processes in place to avoid potential for confusion / duplication between the roles, but suggests the need to further clarify the distinction vis-à-vis the policy development role because some members remain unclear about the difference and therefore potential for confusion and overlap remains between the role of Policy Development Committees and Scrutiny.

The Terms of Reference of the PDCs clearly define the differences between Scrutiny and PDC's; however it is acknowledged that this message needs to be reinforced and cascaded down to all Councillors.

2.2 The WAO report also highlighted another issue, relating to the improvement of pre-decision scrutiny, specifically about the timeliness of scrutiny. The report suggests that having more time to consider proposed cabinet reports would enable sufficient time for effective planning and broader range of evidence gathering, and more meaningful involvement of scrutiny members in the decision-making process. NOTE – this has already been identified by the Committee as an improvement objective, as shown in paragraph 2.3.

2.2.1 The Chief Legal Officer has advised that a review of report writing procedure is being undertaken in early 2019 and to assist in that review the Scrutiny Team have been asked to undertake research on pre-decision scrutiny approaches in other authorities.

2.3 The five improvement objectives agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee earlier this year were:

- 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.**

2.3.1 Whilst there will be other areas for improvement these objectives reflected the issues that matter most to scrutiny councillors and were therefore priorities.

3. A Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan

3.1 Consideration has been given to an overall scrutiny improvement action plan which will address both the WAO findings and improvement objectives.

3.2 An action plan is **appended** for Committee agreement.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The agreed action plan will be shared with WAO to show the response of the Authority to their review findings, as well as awareness of the Committee's other improvement plans.
- 4.2 A statement of progress with the action plan will be provided to the Committee at regular and appropriate intervals.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications raised by this report.

Background Papers:

Wales Audit Office Report - Overview and Scrutiny: Fit for the Future? – City and County of Swansea Council

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan