

Scrutiny Annual Report 2018/19



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1. Chair's Foreword

Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee



I am proud to present our second annual report of this Council term, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Scrutiny is a vital part of local democracy and good governance. This report reflects on the range of different activities carried out by scrutiny councillors over the past year to make sure the work of the Council is accountable and transparent, effective and efficient, and helps the Council to achieve its objectives and drive improvement, by questioning and providing challenge to decision-makers.

Our report focuses on how scrutiny has made a difference for a better Swansea, and our efforts to support the continuous improvement of scrutiny practice here, building on the positive review of our scrutiny arrangements last year by the Wales Audit Office.

Measuring the performance of scrutiny in a meaningful way is not particularly easy, however we have tried to take a 'results based' approach to tell you about:

- How much scrutiny we did
- How well we did it
- How much scrutiny affected the business of the Council
- What the outcomes of scrutiny were

We hope that this report provides you with assurance and confidence that councillors involved in scrutiny are contributing to better services, policies and decisions, and a better Swansea.

Finally, I must give my thanks to all of the councillors who have led or participated in scrutiny over the past year. I look forward to reporting again on achievements in 12 months!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Jones".

2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2018-19

Scrutiny Practice	A. How much scrutiny did we do?	B. How well did we do?
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of Committee meetings = 14 ↑ (13) 2. Number of Panel & Working Group meetings = 95 ↑ (69) 3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1 ↔ (1) 4. Number of Working Group topics completed = 8 ↑ (7) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 69% ↑ (68%) 6. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 71% ↓ (80%) 7. Meetings with public observers = 49% ↑ (20%) 8. Meetings with public input = 27% ↑ (11%) 9. Meetings attracting media coverage = 32% ↑ (7%)
Scrutiny Outcomes	C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?	D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Number of chairs letters sent to cabinet members = 64 ↑ (63) 11. Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 20 days ↑ (19) 12. Letters responded to within 21 day target = 63% ↓ (71%) 13. Number of scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 2 ↑ (1) 14. Cabinet Action plans agreed = 1 ↓ (2) 15. Follow ups undertaken = 2 ↓ (4) 16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 8 ↓ (12) 17. Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 1 18. Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee = 100% ↔ (100%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 100% ↑ (92%) 20. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 56% ↓ (74%)

(Last year in brackets) ↓↑ = notable change, ↓↑ = small change, ↔ no change

3. About the Indicators

In the past few years, we have reported on key results from our annual councillor and stakeholder survey. We did not carry out this survey during 2018-2019 due to resources. The survey includes asking whether people feel that:

- they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny
- scrutiny arrangements are working well
- the scrutiny work programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance
- scrutiny activities are well-planned
- non-executive members have good opportunities to participate in scrutiny
- scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers
- scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council; and,
- the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good.

Last year's results were very positive and we hope that we will be able to carry out the survey during 2019/20 for the next annual report, to reflect on these important questions. However, we think that the evidence in this annual report reflects well on these aims.

A number of new measures have been included this year, which we feel improves the suite of indicators and provides a better picture of scrutiny work, achievements and impact. This includes showing the response from Cabinet Members to the various scrutiny letters, and the level of press and public engagement.

A. How much scrutiny did we do?

3.1 Number of Committee meetings = 14

The Council has a single overarching Scrutiny Committee, called the Scrutiny Programme Committee, which met 14 times during the 2018-19 municipal year.

The Committee is responsible for developing and managing the overall Scrutiny Work Programme. Overarching priorities were shaped by the annual work planning conference, which took place in June 2018 (open to all non-executive councillors), that heard a

range of perspectives on what should be included. All councillors can suggest particular topics of concern for possible scrutiny. The councillor-led Scrutiny Work Programme 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 scrutiny time and resources.

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 for scrutiny give councillors the opportunity to hold cabinet members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues.

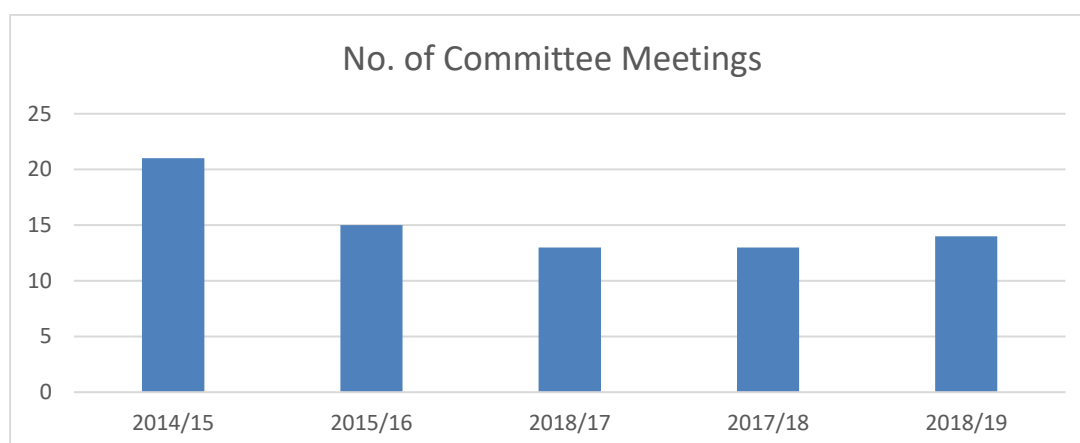
This included holding structured Question & Answer sessions with cabinet members to explore their work, looking at priorities, actions, achievements and impact.

The following topics were also examined by the Committee:

- Scrutiny Improvement & Development Objectives
- Swansea Bay City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee
- Wales Audit Office Report – Overview & Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?
- Consultation on Draft Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022
- Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report
- Children & Young People’s Rights Scheme – Compliance & Progress
- Wales Audit Office Reports to Scrutiny
- Sustainable Swansea Programme - Commissioning Reviews: Service Areas Post Implementation Updates
- Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan (Wales Audit Office Report – Overview & Scrutiny: Fit for the Future? & Improvement Objectives)

The Committee is also the Council’s designated committee for Crime & Disorder Scrutiny and a meeting to discuss the performance of the local Community Safety Partnership, the Safer Swansea Partnership, took place in April 2019.

Comparison with previous years:



3.2 Number of Panel & Working Group meetings = 95

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. The Committee will consider what specific topics should feature in the programme so that it focusses on the right things.

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.

Topics examined during 2018-19:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural Environment Key Question: What should Swansea Council be doing to maintain, enhance and promote its natural environment and biodiversity, and in doing so promote the resilience of eco-systems? 	Cllr. Peter Jones
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equalities Key Question: How effectively is the Council meeting and embedding the requirements under the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Duty for Wales)? 	Cllr Louise Gibbard

Performance Panels - these provide in-depth performance / financial monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas.

Performance Panels 2018-19:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Improvement & Finance (monthly) • Adult Services (monthly) • Schools* (monthly) • Child & Family Services (every two months) • Development & Regeneration (every two months) • Public Services Board (quarterly) 	Cllr. Chris Holley Cllr. Peter Black Cllr. Mo Sykes Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams Cllr. Jeff Jones Cllr. Mary Jones

* since May 2019 the Panel is now known as the Education Performance Panel and Cllr Lyndon Jones is the new convener after Cllr Mo Sykes stood down

Working Groups are one-off meetings established to enable a 'light-touch' approach to specific topics of concern.

Working Groups 2018-19:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness (carried over from 2017/18) • Community Cohesion & Hate Crime (carried over from 2017/18) • Air & Noise Pollution • Welfare Reform • Environmental Enforcement • Local Flood Risk Management (meets annually) • Anti-Social Behaviour • Tourism 	Cllr Peter Black Cllr Louise Gibbard Cllr Joe Hale Cllr Louise Gibbard Cllr Jeff Jones Cllr Peter Jones Cllr Terry Hennegan Cllr Peter Jones

3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1

Work on the following in-depth inquiry was completed during 2018-19:

- Natural Environment: *What should Swansea Council be doing to maintain, enhance and promote its natural environment and biodiversity, and in doing so promote the resilience of eco-systems?*

3.4 Number of Working Group topics completed = 8

Work on the following topics was completed during 2018-19 through meetings of Working Groups:

- Homelessness (carried over from 2017/18)
- Community Cohesion & Hate Crime (carried over from 2017/18)
- Air & Noise Pollution
- Welfare Reform
- Environmental Enforcement
- Local Flood Risk Management (meets annually)
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Tourism

B. How well did we do?

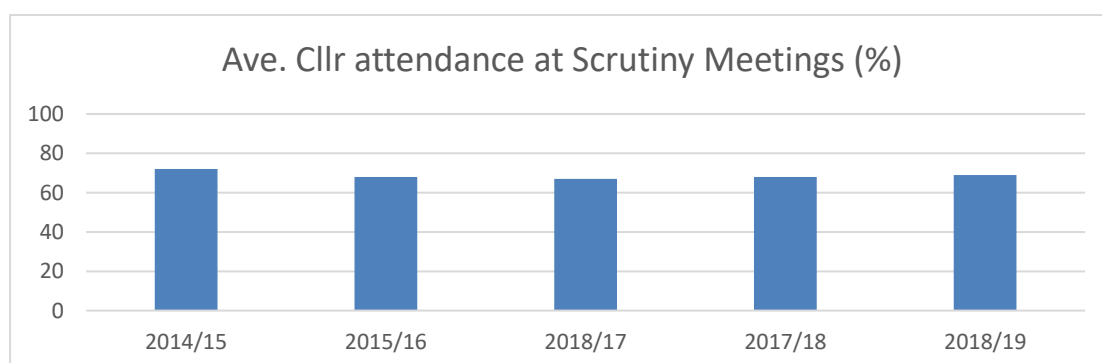
3.5 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 69%

The rate of councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process.

The membership of the Scrutiny Programme Committee is determined by Council. 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 determined by the Committee.

Attendance figures for councillors are collected by the Council's Democratic Services Team and published on the Council's website. 2018/19's figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Panel meetings and the Working Groups.

Comparison with previous years:

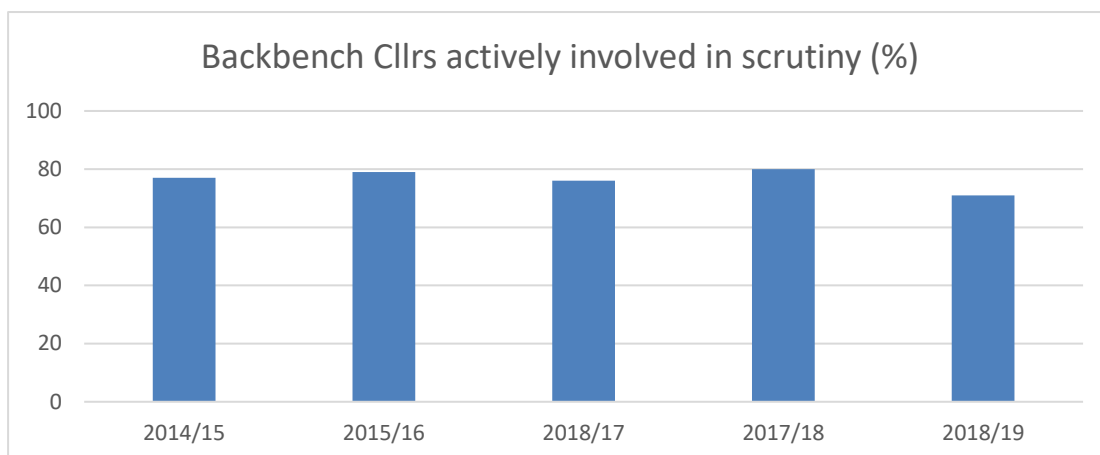


3.6 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 71%

All backbench councillors have the opportunity to 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.

The large majority of backbench councillors were involved in scrutiny either through the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Panels or Working Groups.

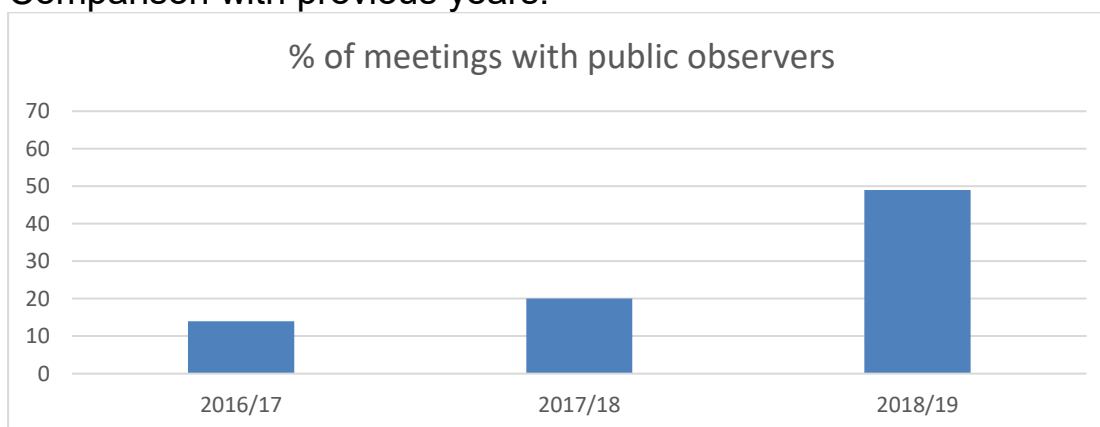
Comparison with previous years:



3.7 Meetings with public observers = 49%

Scrutiny is important as a mechanism for community engagement. All scrutiny meetings, whether the Committee or Panels and Working Group, are conducted in public, subject to specific item of business which contain exempt information. Of the 109 scrutiny meetings held during 2018/9, almost half of these were observed by persons in the public gallery, which indicates there is a significant focus of scrutiny on matters of public interest. Amongst those with the highest percentage of meetings observed were the Equalities Inquiry, Adult Services Performance Panel, Public Services Board Performance Panel, Natural Environment Inquiry, and Development & Regeneration Performance Panel.

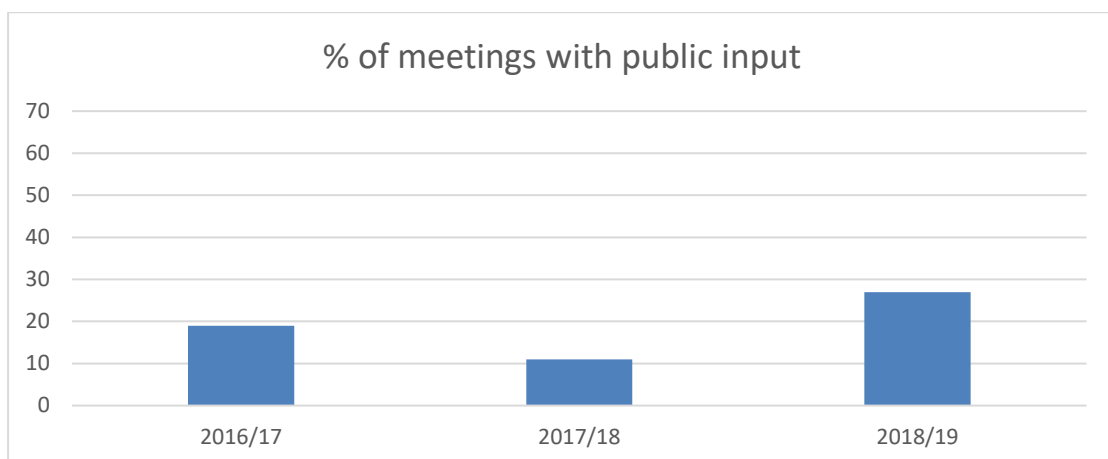
Comparison with previous years:



3.8 Meetings with public input = 27%

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. 27% 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. The Equalities Inquiry benefitted from a high level of engagement with a range of groups / networks who represent people with protected characteristics. Other meetings which saw good levels of public input include the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Schools Performance Panel, and Adult Services Panel.

Comparison with previous years:

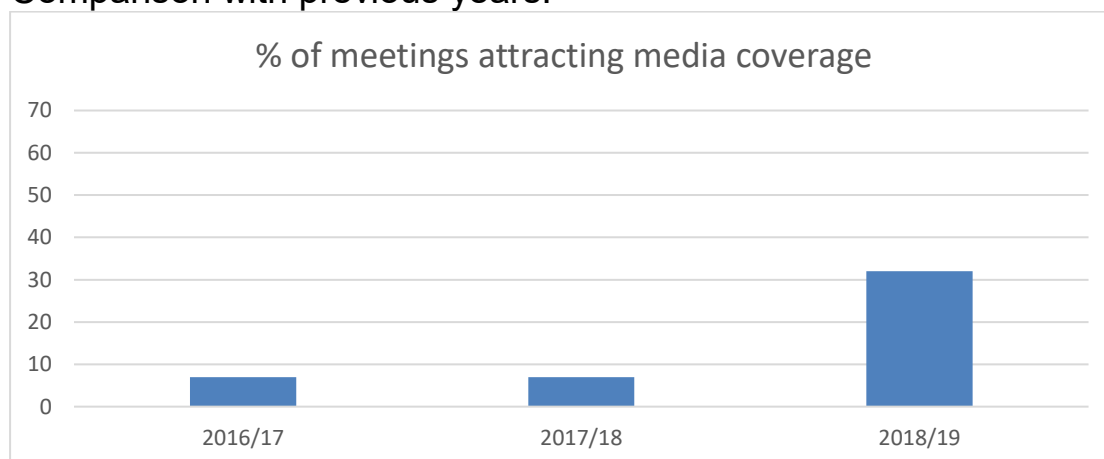


3.9 Meetings attracting media coverage = 31%

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 32% of scrutiny meetings made the news. The work of the Adult Services Performance Panel, Scrutiny Programme Committee, Natural Environment Inquiry Panel, and Development & Regeneration Performance attracted the most media interest. Across all activities there were at least 35 scrutiny discussions reported in the local press (print and on-line). Issues, which generated coverage, included: the Natural Environment, Council Housing & Housebuilding, Future of Leisure Services, Charges for Council

Services, Homelessness, Green Energy & Transport, Costs of Adult Social Care, Waste Disposal & Recycling, Care Homes, School Funding, City Centre Regeneration, Adoption, School Closures, HMOs / Student Accommodation, Fly Tipping, Community Safety, and Care Homes for Looked After Children.

Comparison with previous years:

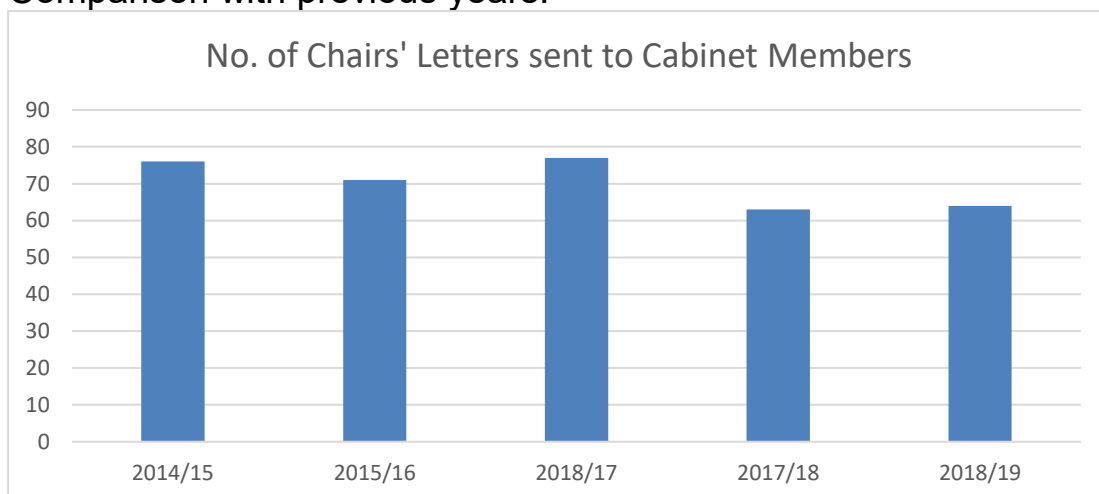


C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?

3.10 Number of chairs letters sent to cabinet members = 64

Chairs 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 Committee / Panel / Working Group meetings. Letters are effectively 'mini-reports' with conclusions and proposals from scrutiny – and where necessary require a response. 64 letters were sent to Cabinet Members during 2018-19.

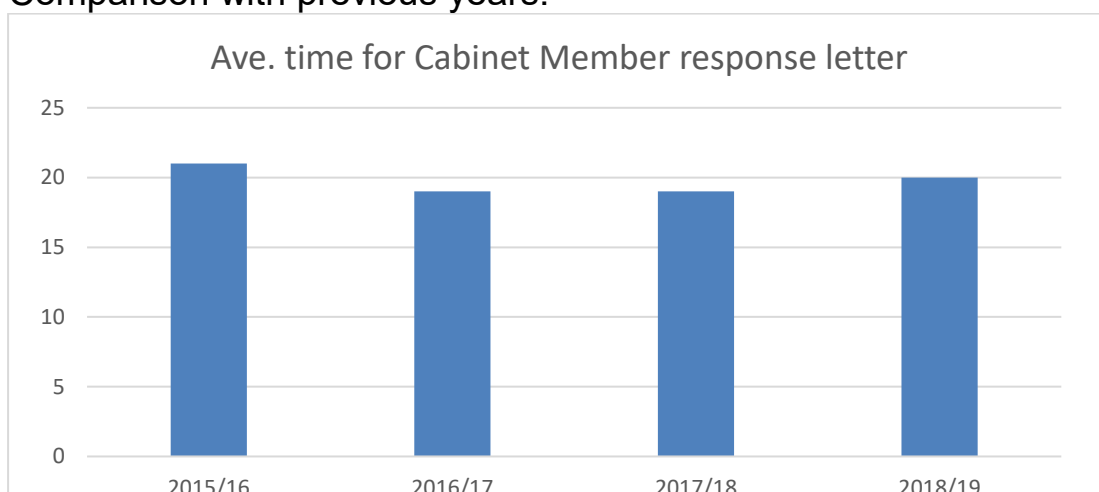
Comparison with previous years:



3.11 Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 20 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 during 2018-19 was 20 days, which indicates that scrutiny is generally 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 = 63%

Whilst the response to scrutiny letters was on average 20 days, some letters did take longer. The number of letters responded to within the 21 day target was 63% (22 out of 35 letters).

Comparison with previous years:

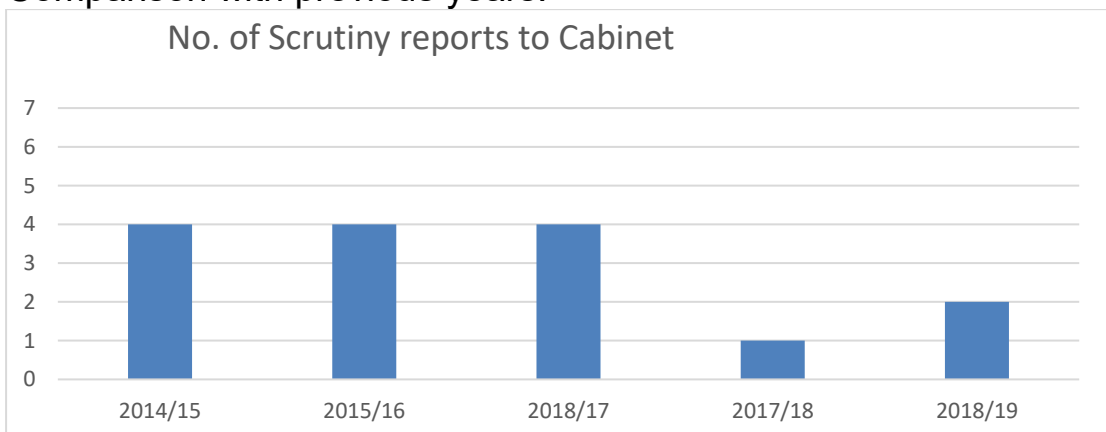


3.13 Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 2

In-depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations agreed by scrutiny and action plan on how the recommendations will be implemented. The following in-depth reviews were reported to Cabinet from scrutiny with the number of recommendations from each shown:

Inquiry	Convener	Report to Cabinet	No. of Recommendations
Regional Working	Cllr Lyndon Jones	June 2018	11
Natural Environment	Cllr Peter Jones	March 2019	20

Comparison with previous years:

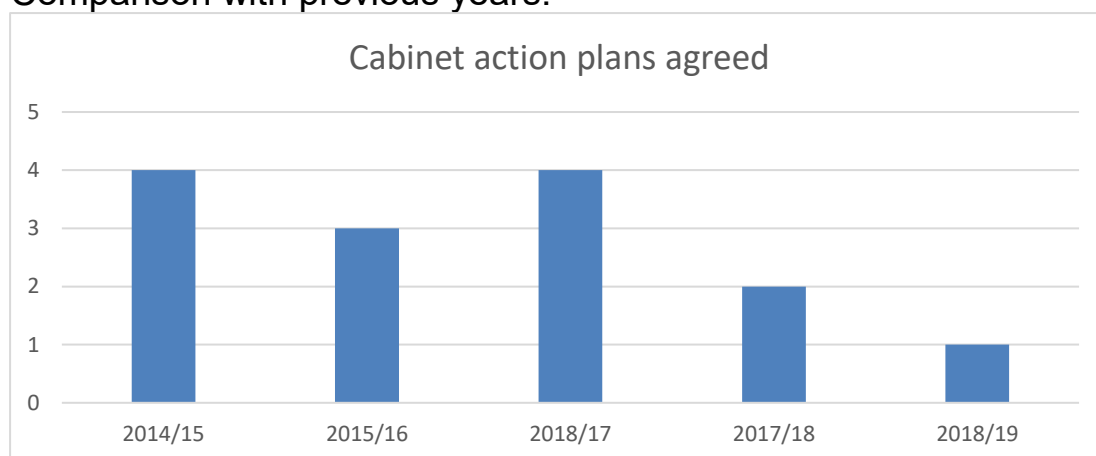


3.14 Cabinet action plans agreed = 1

Once recommendations and an action plan have been agreed by cabinet, scrutiny will follow up on progress with implementation and impact. The following action plans were agreed following in-depth inquiries that were originally carried out during 2017-18:

- Regional Working (Cabinet meeting August 2018) – all 11 recommendations were accepted.

Comparison with previous years:



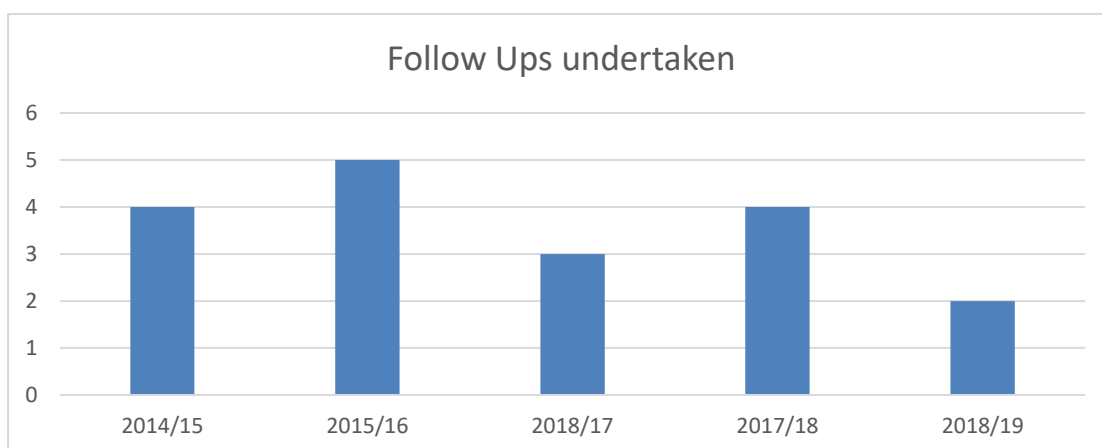
3.15 Follow ups undertaken = 2

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.

In order 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 for that inquiry. Both previous scrutiny inquiries that required a follow up during 2018-19 were followed up:

Inquiry	Convener	Monitoring Status
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services	Cllr. Mary Jones	Complete
Tackling Poverty	Cllr Sybil Crouch	Complete

Comparison with previous years:



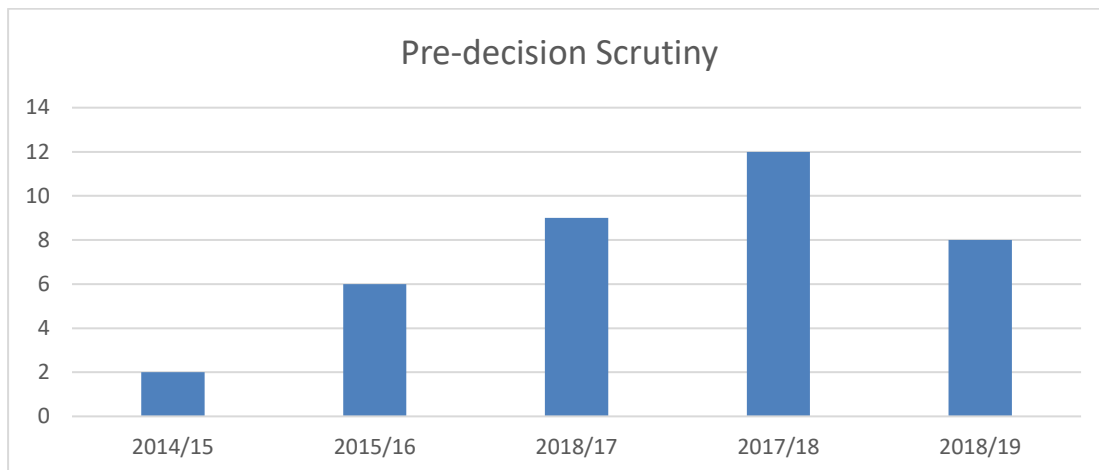
3.16 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre-decision scrutiny = 8

Pre-decision scrutiny involves scrutiny councillors considering cabinet reports before cabinet makes a final decision. Taking into account strategic impact, public interest, and financial implications, the following 8 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
More Homes Parc Yr Helyg Site Options Appraisal	Homes & Energy	21 Jun 2018	Committee
Cultural Services Commissioning Review	Investment, Regeneration & Tourism	21 Jun 2018	Service Improvement & Finance Panel
The Future Structure and Delivery of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit	Education Improvement, Learning & Skills	19 Jul 2018	Schools Panel
Outcome of Residential Care & Day Services for Older People Consultation	Care, Health & Ageing Well	20 Sep 2018	Adult Services Panel
Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022	Homes & Energy	15 Nov 2018	Committee
Swansea Central Phase 1 Project Update and FPR7	Economy & Strategy (Leader)	29 Nov 2018	Service Improvement & Finance Panel
Small School Review & School Organisation Linked to the Welsh Education Strategic Plan	Education Improvement, Learning & Skills	20 Dec 2018	Schools Panel

Budget	Economy & Strategy (Leader)	14 Feb 2019	Service Improvement & Finance Panel
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Comparison with previous years:



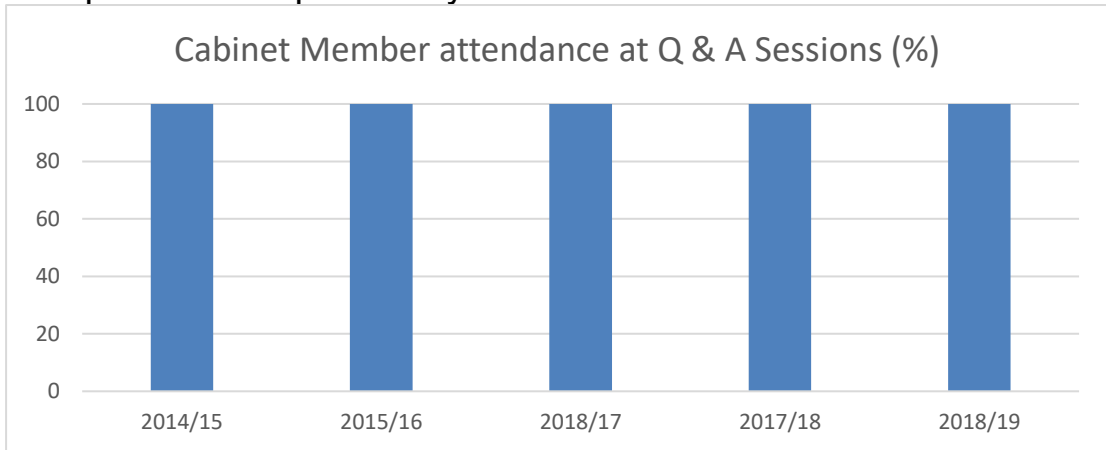
3.17 Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 1

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 leads 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 a large number of call-ins are not anticipated. However, one cabinet report was subject to call-in over the past year, concerning cabinet decision on 21st Century Schools Programme - New Build For Gorseinon Primary School.

3.18 Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee – 100%

Cabinet members attend scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information. Cabinet attendance at scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the 'holding to account' role of scrutiny is functioning well. In 2018/19 every Cabinet Member attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee, enabling the committee to explore their work, looking at priorities, actions, achievements and impact. It ensures that scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers.

Comparison with previous years:

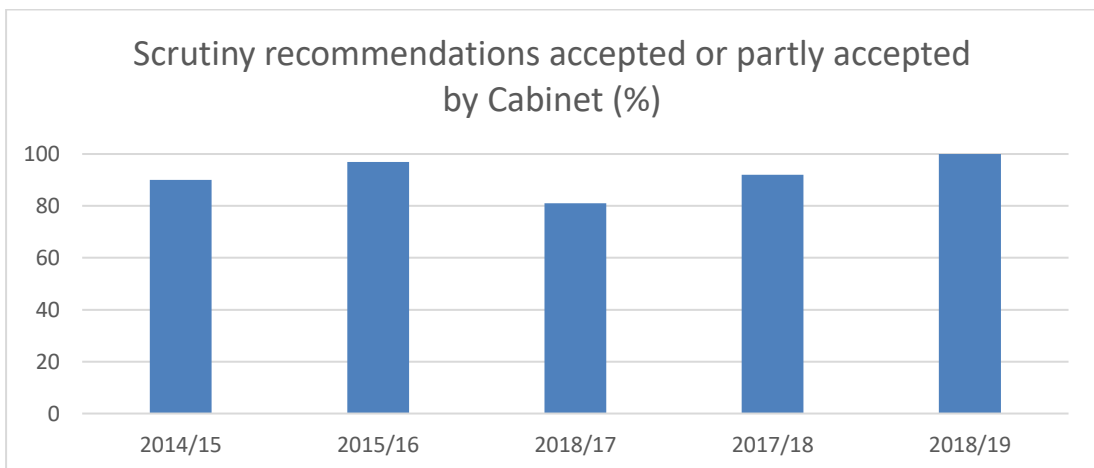


D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

3.19 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 100%

The rate that cabinet accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. Cabinet responded to 11 scrutiny inquiry recommendations in 2018-19 which were all accepted.

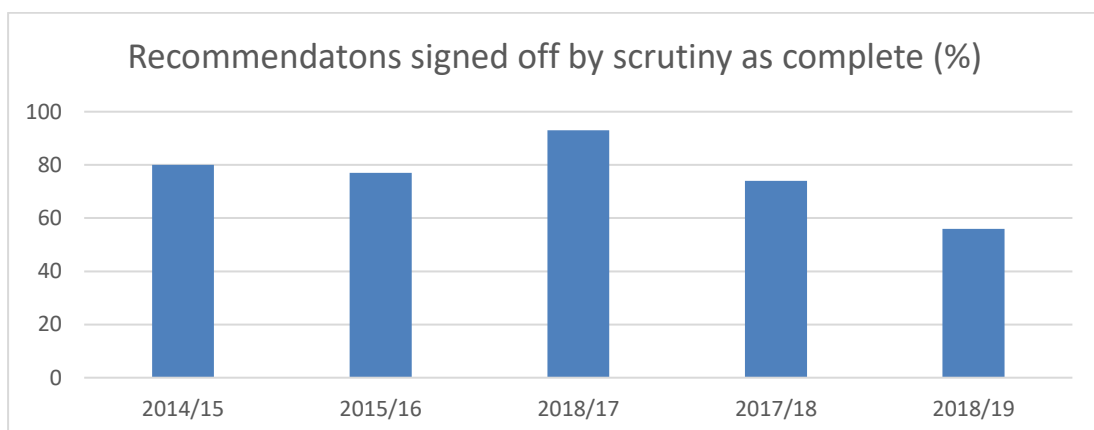
Comparison with previous years:



3.20 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 56%

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 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, taking into account the evidence they are presented with about the changes that have happened following scrutiny and its impact. This indicator represents the percentage of recommendations accepted by scrutiny as being completed for the year, and relates to the follow up of recommendation made by the Tackling Poverty Inquiry and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services Inquiry (27 recommendations were considered of which 15 were considered as complete). In respect of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services although pleased with progress the Panel recognised that there is some way to go to implement all of the recommendations and achieving significant improvement. The Panel agreed to conclude formal monitoring however it was agreed that the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel was best placed for continued monitoring of CAMHS.

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 that report to Cabinet
- 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

4.1.2 The Scrutiny Programme Committee produced a quarterly summary of the headlines from the work of scrutiny for council and the public, which focussed on impact and how scrutiny is making a difference. The Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee reports the summary, known as Scrutiny Dispatches, to Council.

4.1.3 It is important to know that the work and the efforts of scrutiny councillors are having a positive impact and are delivering effective scrutiny. We make sure that the recommendations we make, in whatever scrutiny forum, are followed up to check on implementation and assess the impact of this work.

4.1.4 The difference made and impact of the overall work of scrutiny is also communicated via:

- press releases to the local media;
- regular posts to our Swansea Scrutiny blog;
- an email monthly subscription newsletter; and
- use of social media, including Twitter.

4.1.5 A selection of stories from the past year of scrutiny from Scrutiny Dispatches, which demonstrate the impact made, are **appended**. This includes reference to:

- **Developing Regional Working** (*Regional Working Inquiry*)
- **Promoting Community Cohesion** (*Community Cohesion Working Group*)
- **Tackling Poverty** (*Tackling Poverty Inquiry*)
- **Improving Scrutiny** (*Scrutiny Programme Committee*)
- **Helping to shape the Council's new Homelessness Strategy** (*Homelessness Working Group / Scrutiny Programme Committee*)
- **Reducing Air & Noise Pollution** (*Air & Noise Pollution Working Group*)
- **Improving Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services** (*Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services Inquiry*)
- **Maintaining & Enhancing Our Natural Environment** (*Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry*)
- **Improving Community Safety** (*Scrutiny Programme Committee*)
- **Dealing with Welfare Reform** (*Welfare Reform Working Group*)
- **Managing Environmental Enforcement** (*Environmental Enforcement Working Group*)

5. Feedback and Improvement

5.1 Improving Scrutiny

5.1.1 It is good practice for those involved in the scrutiny function to undertake regular self-evaluation of this work. Taking into account characteristics of effective scrutiny and 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 held within the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panels.

5.1.2 The Scrutiny Programme Committee attended an 'Improvement & Development' workshop in May 2018 as part of the process to identify improvement objectives for scrutiny for the year ahead. They reviewed findings from the Scrutiny Annual Survey carried out in early 2018 and in particular shared views on where things could be better, as well as reflecting on their own experience, and other feedback received throughout the year.

5.1.3 Members reflected positively on:

- Inquiry Panels – felt to be well supported and work well, allowing a lot of ground to be covered, with a high level of external / public engagement (leading to more vibrant scrutiny), and produces results
- Performance Panels – recognised as the bedrock of the scrutiny work programme, allowing time and space to explore performance in some detail
- The support provided by officers in the Scrutiny Team.

The Committee also agreed:

- Adjustment to the work programme to improve alignment with Council priorities / Corporate Plan and enable monitoring of the delivery of the Council's commitments around natural environment & biodiversity
- The Committee's Cabinet Member Q & A Sessions could be improved by focussing on a small number of key issues, rather than an overall look at portfolio responsibilities.

- Standing Performance Panels should be asked to appoint the convener, rather than be determined by the Scrutiny Programme Committee.
- Budget scrutiny remains an area for development

5.1.4 From the self-evaluation and reflection emerged a clear sense about what priorities for improving scrutiny should be. This related to: Councillor involvement in scrutiny; reports to cabinet and reporting arrangements, Cabinet engagement in scrutiny / tracking their response to scrutiny, visibility of impact, and public engagement.

5.2 Scrutiny Improvement Objectives

5.2.1 The following Improvement Objectives were subsequently agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee:

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

5.2.2 In order to address both Wales Audit Office Proposals for Improvement (issued in July 2018 following their review of our scrutiny arrangements), and specific issues identified by the scrutiny councillors, the Scrutiny Programme Committee reflected on priorities and agreed an action plan in January 2019 to help deliver the clear set of Scrutiny Improvement Objectives. This means having a co-ordinated and comprehensive single improvement plan for scrutiny, for the issues that matter most.

5.2.3 This has already resulted in improvements to the scrutiny process and its effectiveness, and efforts are being made in a number of areas to support councillors, take practice forward and improve the quality of scrutiny, for example:

1. *Councillor Participation*

Whilst there is a healthy level of engagement we want to ensure all scrutiny councillors have opportunity to participate so we are trying to understand whether there are any barriers to councillor participation in scrutiny and see what can be done to facilitate the engagement of those not actively involved. We recognise that councillors have a range of demands on their time and it may not be possible for all to be actively engaged, but it is important to remove any barriers that might exist.

2. *Training & Development*

We are considering what needs doing to develop scrutiny councillors in their role. We have already asked councillors to identify the areas where skills could be improved. The following areas could be usefully explored: Chairing Skills; Questioning Skills; Public Participation; Ad-hoc briefings to improve knowledge of Council services / working, as well as refresher session(s) on the Scrutiny Process. There may be other areas that need to be developed, such as understanding around the Well-being of Future Generations Act and how scrutiny can support its impact on local services, policies and decision-making. We will look at how best to develop and deliver a training & development programme for scrutiny councillors and it is work in progress for 2019/20.

3. *Reporting to Cabinet*

There are now more opportunities for scrutiny councillors to report their findings and recommendations directly to Cabinet. Whilst we have a well-established practice of writing letters to Cabinet Members, sometimes this work may merit formal reporting to Cabinet because of the issues that have been raised following scrutiny and / or implications across cabinet portfolios. This means that Scrutiny Working Groups and Scrutiny Performance Panels can consider whether reporting to Cabinet is necessary, for formal response.

4. *Pre-decision Scrutiny*

We have been calling for more time to consider proposed cabinet reports to enable the more meaningful involvement of scrutiny members in the decision-making process, as a 'critical friend'. Early sight to such reports will also enable more time for Cabinet to think about any issues and concerns that may be flagged up by scrutiny. When it sees each Cabinet Member, the Scrutiny Programme Committee encourages them to share information about future key

decisions that the Committee may want to discuss to challenge and inform decision-making. Cabinet Members are also encouraged to build in time for a 'scrutiny stage' as a sounding board for significant decisions at an early stage in the process. Scrutiny engagement with the Council's new Homelessness Strategy was a good example of early influence.

5. *Scrutiny Impact*

We have been increasing visibility of the impact of scrutiny through regular stories published via our Scrutiny Blog, Newsletter, and Dispatches, as well as in reports to the Scrutiny Programme Committee. We have also improved the Scrutiny Annual Report to reflect more about scrutiny activity and impact. Scrutiny Working Group recommendations are being monitored by the Scrutiny Programme Committee to assess impact / outcomes, with input from respective conveners, who themselves can act as rapporteurs and liaise informally with cabinet members and relevant officers to keep abreast of progress. However, we will try to do more to strengthen the evaluation of impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity. We will identify performance indicators and measureable outcomes relevant to topics for scrutiny that could help evidence change / difference following scrutiny. We will also develop mechanisms for feedback from Cabinet Members, Officers, and other stakeholders about impact e.g. post-meeting evaluation; via Annual Survey etc.

6. *Roles & Responsibilities*

We are mindful to ensure there are no issues of duplication between scrutiny and Policy Development Committee activity or negative impact on the role and work of scrutiny. There were no issues of overlap or adverse effect on scrutiny, and should any issues arise in the future these will be addressed through dialogue between the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee and relevant Policy Development Committee Chair(s). We have made sure that the Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panel Conveners are aware of Policy Development Committee agendas and work plans. The Committee already has a well-established relationship with the Audit Committee to ensure respective work plans are coordinated to avoid duplication or gaps.

7. Public Engagement

We are working more closely with the Council's Communications Team to identify opportunities to raise awareness and promote public engagement in scrutiny, and generate more media coverage of scrutiny activities. There is now more dialogue between teams about the work programme and upcoming meetings. Communications staff are signposted to scrutiny agendas / information to facilitate more about scrutiny being reported in the media and increase awareness / public engagement. Media coverage of scrutiny has increased significantly over the past year due to active local government press reporting, leading to stories in print and on-line media (South Wales Evening Post, Wales Online, and Western Mail). The Scrutiny Team continue to develop a social media presence including Swansea Scrutiny blog, Twitter, and there are plans to develop a Facebook page which may provide an effective way to promoting the role, activities, impact of scrutiny and enable interaction.

5.2.4 We will reflect on the delivery of the action plan and achievements against agreed improvement issues and objectives in next year's annual report.

5.3 Feedback from Scrutiny Performance Panels

5.3.1 Performance Panels each reflected on the year and amongst notable observations were the following:

a) Schools:

- Panel's work means being able to keep abreast of changes and challenges in relation to education matters.
- Pleased with scrutiny of individual schools and visiting some schools to see the work happening on the ground and speaking to headteachers, staff, governors and pupils.
- Officers have told us that performance scrutiny has been challenging but constructive, especially the searching questions that have been asked around vulnerable learners, and it benefits the education department. Topics discussed have helped develop these services, particularly work in relation to Education Other Than at School and the Small Schools Review.
- Some learning points identified:
 - Co-ordination around planning for future school visits and timing

- More context around some subjects being discussed would be helpful.

b) Adult Services

- Good level of quality in the debate and commitment from Panel Members. The Panel has been persistent and brought things out into the open.
- Good level of support from staff.
- There has been real challenge to Cabinet Members and officers from the Council and Local Health Board. The engagement of health officials with the Panel has managed to unblock some of the issues.
- There has been some progress in respect of changing thinking on budget
- Panel is developing a better understanding of performance data, which is now more focused and detailed.
- Some learning points identified:
 - Visiting social services establishments and engaging directly with service users / user groups about their experience will provide Panel with a better perspective on performance.
 - Need to review how best to examine performance of the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Health & Social Care Programme.

c) Child & Family Services

- Good level of detail in performance reports.
- Panel is able to drill down into the detail and the officer contribution is very informative. Relationship with service officers good and very open.
- Debate has been good and happy with response Panel is getting from officers
- Pleased with officer support.

d) Development & Regeneration

- Pleased at the range of projects looked at by the Panel – will continue to have this variation in the coming year.
- The detail behind some projects is still opaque – Panel will continue to explore more throughout the coming year
- Some learning points identified:
 - More focus on the 'health' of the City Centre.

e) **Service Improvement & Finance**

- Panel happy with the mix of work this year, annual reports and one-off topics, with performance & financial monitoring the major role.
- Planning process is a topic of interest for the coming year

f) **Public Services Board**

- Good meetings particularly meeting with Future Generations Commissioner. Interactions with Future Generations Commissioner going very well.
- Some learning points identified:
 - More focus on direction of travel from each of the PSB objective areas needed, actions plans / delivery and clarity about outcomes

For further information:

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Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2018/2019 (No. 1)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

Developing regional working

(Lead: Councillor Lyndon Jones)

Work carried out by scrutiny councillors will help develop and improve the way the Council and partners work with each other across the region for the benefit of citizens.

An in-depth Scrutiny Inquiry into Regional Working published findings that were presented to Council in June. The report includes a view on the current picture, the national reform agenda, challenges to collaborative working, and arrangements for the accountability of regional working. Scrutiny Councillors held a number of evidence gathering sessions including discussion with different council departments and partners to discuss the experience of regional working activities that are taking place.

All 11 recommendations made by the cross-party Scrutiny Panel were agreed by Cabinet in August. This means action on the following:

- A review of governance arrangements of the three main regional partnerships (Education, through Regional Working, Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme; and Swansea Bay City Region) to ensure they are fit for purpose.
- The authority undertaking a lessons learnt exercise across the three main regional collaborations and develop an action plan/s with resource implications to address any specific and remaining barriers.
- An assessment of the value to the Council from being involved in existing or new partnerships, including an analysis of costs and benefits.
- Greater use of technology e.g. on-line meetings, amongst partners to reduce travelling and Councillor / officer time and further encourage participation in partnership working.
- More engagement of the third sector in existing partnerships.
- Pressure on Welsh Government for a more streamlined grant process to support regional working
- An annual report to Council on the progress made across main regional collaborations.

The Panel had particular concerns about the accountability to local councillors of some regional collaborations. They stressed the need for the big three partnerships to have clear accountability and scrutiny process built into their governance arrangements.

Councillor Lyndon Jones, convener of the Panel said:

‘We felt it was important to look at this issue because there was some concern about the transparency of current regional working and the extent to which the public understood such activities. We found regional working in Wales to be a complex and confusing picture. Regional working must have a real benefit for the people of Swansea and therefore needs to add value and not be seen as another layer of bureaucracy, and be accountable. We hope that this piece of scrutiny will go some way in helping Swansea map the way forward for its regional working activities.’

The Inquiry Panel will reconvene during 2019 in order to follow up on the implementation of recommendations and assess the impact of their work.

Promoting Community Cohesion

(Lead: Councillor Louise Gibbard)

Scrutiny has been myth busting whilst looking at what the Council is doing to support and promote community cohesion.

Having already looked at efforts to tackle hate crime in the area last year a Scrutiny Working Group met in June to focus on this issue, and spoke with representatives from the Councils Poverty and Prevention Team, South Wales Police and the Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator.

The Working Group considered progress and wrote to the Cabinet Member for Better Communities (People), Councillor Mary Sherwood, highlighting a number of issues and suggested areas for improvement. One of these was around myth busting. Councillors found that there is good [myth busting information](#) available but felt that it needed to be shared/used more widely.

Having now received a response from the Cabinet Member this piece of scrutiny is leading to action on:

- Developing a stronger role for Councillors and Local Area Co-ordinators in mainstreaming community cohesion.
- Myth busting information being made available online and shared via social media.
- Better links with and information to Governing Bodies, so they can have a direct impact on community cohesion in Swansea schools.
- Making more use of local media including using corporate communications to get more good news stories and myth busting out into local community.

Tackling Poverty

(Lead: Councillor Sybil Crouch)

Scrutiny heard about the impact it has made in tackling poverty, following an in-depth inquiry carried out in 2017.

The Panel of Councillors which carried out the scrutiny met in October to follow up on the implementation of inquiry recommendations and assess the difference made. The inquiry had focused on ways in which the Council could improve its Tackling Poverty Strategy. Their main conclusion was that, when developing and delivering a strategy it is vital that those people experiencing poverty were not only involved, but involved in a powerful and meaningful way.

The Panel recently heard that the inquiry and its recommendations:

- has supported raising the profile of the tackling poverty agenda as everyone's business, and improved understanding and awareness
- has provided the role of a critical friend, supporting and reaffirming the direction of travel that the development of the revised Tackling Poverty Strategy took
- engaged a number of partners and organisations including The Bevan Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Leeds Truth Commission, whose input has proved useful in the development of the revised plan

The Panel Convener, Councillor Sybil Crouch, said about the original inquiry that: 'Tackling Poverty is key to delivering the health and well-being of our citizens and of our city. We heard powerful testimony from people experiencing poverty and I am especially grateful to them for taking time to tell us what they face on a daily basis. I was moved by their testimony and by their courage in the face of complex problems. The Tackling Poverty Strategy lays considerable emphasis on the need to involve people experiencing poverty, without whom there is no delivery'.

Scrutiny – fit for the future?

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Our scrutiny arrangements have received positive feedback from Wales Audit Office (WAO).

Following an external audit to assess whether scrutiny was fit for the future the review praised a number of aspects of scrutiny practice in Swansea. The WAO report recognised that scrutiny is well-placed to respond to future challenges, regularly challenges decision-makers, and has arrangements to review its own effectiveness. Whilst there is much to be pleased about the report also makes a number of proposals for improvement to develop scrutiny further. This challenges us to think about development needs for scrutiny councillors, the relationship between scrutiny and the Council's Policy Development Committees, and how we can better demonstrate the impact and outcomes of scrutiny.

Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee said: 'We welcome the auditor's assessment of scrutiny in Swansea. Overall it is a positive report and this is down to the hard work everyone in Swansea has put into developing scrutiny over many years. But it is also a reminder that we must keep on pushing and continue to develop. We will be preparing an action plan to address the proposal for improvement.'

The Wales Audit Office published its findings having conducted a review of scrutiny in all Welsh Councils, looking at the environment scrutiny is operating in, practice, and its effectiveness. As well as desktop research, the WAO held a number of focus groups with Councillors here, interviewed key officers, and observed meetings.

Chair's Roundup:

This is my first quarterly roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2018/19, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Priorities for 2018/19

The Scrutiny Work Programme was agreed by the Committee in July, following a Work Planning Conference in June. Every year we invite all scrutiny councillors to participate in an informal discussion on priorities for scrutiny, and invite suggestions. The Conference reflected on last year's programme, and heard about council priorities and challenges, and views gathered from surveys, including issues raised by the public. The Work Programme contains a varied selection of topics that show the focus for scrutiny over the coming year. It represents strategic issues balanced with community concerns to ensure that scrutiny is always looking at the right things, and making good use of limited time and resources. A significant feature of the Work Programme is regular in-depth monitoring and challenge of performance in key areas, including Education and Social Services, through a number of Performance Panels. However we also identify topics either for in-depth Inquiry or light-touch Working Groups. The first inquiry will look at Equality issues and a 'call for evidence' has just been issued by the Inquiry Panel. This invites interested people to submit views that will help the Panel to explore how effectively the Council is meeting and embedding requirements under the law. This inquiry will go on until March 2019. The already in progress inquiry on the Natural Environment is coming to a conclusion and will report before the end of 2018. In terms of one-off Working Groups, this will include a look at Air & Noise Pollution, Residents Parking, Welfare Reform, Environmental Enforcement, Tourism, Anti-Social Behaviour, Digital Inclusion and the Archive Service.

Annual Report published

Looking back at 2017/18 the Scrutiny Annual Report was presented to Council (Oct). It highlights the work carried out, shows how scrutiny has made a difference, and supports continuous improvement for the scrutiny function. It gives examples of specific activities to demonstrate impact, and show our contribution to better services, policies and decisions. I think it gives good indication about the 'health' of scrutiny – using facts and opinions – and there is much to be pleased about.

Improving scrutiny

One of the hallmarks of an effective scrutiny function is one that reflects on and learns from experience. Following a process of self-evaluation the Committee has identified five 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. An action plan to address the WAO proposals and deliver the Committee's own improvement objectives is being developed.

Questioning Cabinet Members

The Committee continues to focus on holding cabinet members to account, through monthly Q & A sessions to discuss their work. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member for Care, Health & Ageing Well in December. Acting as a 'critical friend' we question and challenge them on their priorities, actions, achievements and impact. We invite the public and all scrutiny councillors to contribute ideas to ensure the Committee asks the right questions. A summary of each session and views of the Committee are published in a letter to relevant Cabinet Members. We have recently put questions to the Cabinet Members for Children Services, Education Improvement, Learning & Skills, Business Transformation & Performance, and Homes & Energy.

Challenging proposed decisions

Pre-decision scrutiny enables us to question Cabinet Members on proposals and present views and any concerns to Cabinet ahead of decisions. Since May scrutiny has looked at reports on: More Homes Parc Yr Helyg Site Options Appraisal (Jun); The Future Structure and Delivery of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit (Jul); and the future of Residential Care & Day Services for Older People (Sep). The Committee has also given views on the draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 ahead of formal pre-decision scrutiny that will take place in November.

Calling-in decisions

Scrutiny has the power to call-in Cabinet decisions following the agreement of new arrangements by Council in July. Any valid call-in of cabinet decisions will now 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 or by any four councillors by giving notice in writing to the Head of Democratic Services within a specific call-in period.

Scrutinizing the City Deal

A new Joint Scrutiny Committee has been established to provide accountability and challenge to the agreed Swansea Bay City Deal. Swansea councillors will work with councillors from Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot Councils, also involved in the City Deal, who together will scrutinise the work and decisions of the Joint Committee responsible for delivering the regional City Deal Programme. Scrutiny of local City Deal projects remain a matter for each authority so our Development & Regeneration Performance Panel will be keeping a close eye on work happening in Swansea.

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Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2018/2019 (No. 2)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

Helping to Shape the Council’s new Homelessness Strategy

(Lead: Councillors Peter Black / Mary Jones)

Scrutiny Councillors have contributed to the Council’s new Homelessness Strategy.

Homelessness has been a topic of significant interest and concern over the last year for scrutiny. Scrutiny councillors were able to influence the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan for 2018-2022 through a series of meetings to discuss the issues, challenges, and plans. The Strategy, approved by Cabinet in November, took on board issues and suggestions made by scrutiny councillors. Scrutiny contributed initially through a cross-party Working Group, chaired by Councillor Peter Black, mid-2018 to look at the Council’s activities to manage homelessness, the current position, performance of relevant services and the challenges faced. This work benefitted from the involvement of a number of interested parties including: Swansea Homeless Sanctuary, Shelter Cymru, Crisis, Wallich Dinas Fechan, Caer Las, Zac’s Place, Matthew’s House, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board and the relevant Cabinet Member and officers from Swansea Council. This led to a number of issues being raised with Councillor Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy.

The Scrutiny Programme Committee, chaired by Councillor Mary Jones, which oversees the Scrutiny Work Programme, then met early October to review a consultation draft of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that its views can be fully considered in drawing up the final document. This led to a detailed consultation response being submitted to the Cabinet Member including views including around:

- Service user involvement and co-production
- The development of pre-eviction protocols
- Use of the private rented sector / loss of rented accommodation
- Working with Registered Social Landlords to alleviate homelessness
- Barriers to accessing temporary accommodation
- Proposals / timescales for increased support for people with mental health / complex needs
- Plans for a holistic “solutions centre” for services for rough sleepers
- Support to children affected by parental homelessness
- Monitoring, evaluation and review of success / impact of the Strategy

The Committee also carried out ‘pre-decision scrutiny’ in November which enabled it to review the contents of the final Strategy and Action Plan ahead of Cabinet decision. Councillor Mary Jones said ‘I am pleased to see our impact on the final document, and shows the value of the early engagement of scrutiny in such important decisions. We particularly welcomed:

- Recognition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and children’s voice, and plan to develop a separate Homelessness Charter for children and young people
- The revision of timescales for the development of a holistic ‘solutions centre’ and clarity about what will be achieved e.g. the feasibility study will be carried out within a period of six months
- That there will be an annual progress report on the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.’

The contribution made by scrutiny to improve the Strategy and Action Plan, which saw amendments being made to the consultation draft, was praised by the Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy, ahead of its approval by Cabinet on 15 November.

Reducing Air & Noise Pollution

(Lead: Councillor Joe Hale)

Scrutiny councillors have had their say about air and noise pollution in Swansea.

A Working Group has looked at the situation in Swansea and the effects, how pollution is measured and monitored, and efforts to tackle problems and reduce pollution. As a result of their views and issues raised with Councillor Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure Management, action will include:

- Working with academic and health colleagues to complete specific air quality research projects aimed at engaging members of the public and achieving compliance with objective concentrations and reducing exposure to pollutants.
- Continued assessment of The Out of Hours Noise Control Service to seek efficiencies during times of austerity to enable continued delivery of this service.
- Looking at ways to reinvigorate the presentation of data on the Council's air pollution webpages and working with ICT service to redesign the site in order to engage the public in its content, including integrating the Nowcaster System within the site.
- The Air Quality Action Plan investigating pollution around schools and behaviour of parents when bringing their children to school to enable behavioural change and the reduction in pollutant concentrations.
- Working with colleagues in the School of Management and Life Science in Swansea University to investigate several themes around air quality and public health.

The views of the Working Group, which met in November 2018, and Cabinet Member response can be read in full here:

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=647&MId=8323&Ver=4&LLL=0>

Improving Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Scrutiny councillors have made a positive impact in efforts to improve Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Following an in-depth inquiry carried out in 2017, councillors involved in this work met in November 2018 to follow up on the implementation of inquiry recommendations and assess the difference made. The Inquiry Panel was pleased to hear about a greater focus on prevention, better joint working between local authorities and the ABMU Health Board and improved response to urgent cases. They also welcomed changes to some of ABMU's commissioning arrangements, simplified processes to access the service, and the greater involvement of parents and Third Sector representatives.

A number of people addressed the Panel on progress, including the Cabinet Member for Children Services (Early Years), Director of Social Services, Head of Child & Family Services, and representatives from the Local Health Board.

The Cabinet Member for Early Years has recognised the contribution made by the scrutiny inquiry in highlighting the issues and in the progress made to improve services.

Although pleased with progress the Panel recognised that there is a long way to go to implement all of the recommendations and achieving significant improvement. The Panel agreed that the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel was best placed for continued monitoring of CAMHS. Read more here:

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=598&MId=8389&Ver=4&LLL=0>

Supporting the Natural Environment & Biodiversity

(Lead: Councillor Peter Jones)

The call from scrutiny councillors for the Council to give priority to the Natural Environment & Biodiversity has been answered.

The Council has recently adopted a sixth, and new, priority: Maintaining and enhancing Swansea's natural resources and biodiversity - so that we maintain and enhance biodiversity, reduce our carbon footprint, improve our knowledge and understanding of our natural environment and benefit health and well-being. Over the past year a Scrutiny Inquiry has been looking at what the Council should be doing to maintain, enhance and promote its natural environment and biodiversity, and in doing so promote the resilience of eco-systems. The Inquiry Panel will be publishing its final report shortly - more on that in the next edition. Both before and during this piece of in-depth scrutiny, which has shone a light on this topic, repeated calls (in different forums) were made for the Council to recognise the growing importance of the natural environment and biodiversity on well-being and future generations, something already recognised by the Public Services Board in its Well-being Plan and 'Working with Nature' objective. Councillor Peter Jones, convener of the Natural Environment Inquiry Panel, said: 'This is a scrutiny success - something we raised over a year ago. The decision by the Council is not only welcome but overdue, and supports our findings. Indeed the action taken pre-empts one of the recommendations that the Panel would certainly have made. I look forward to presenting the Panel's final report to Cabinet in the knowledge that the natural environment and biodiversity is now looked upon as a key priority, and our scrutiny report will offer our thoughts about how this priority can be delivered.'

Chair's Roundup:

This is my second roundup of the work of [scrutiny](#) for 2018/19, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Progressing our priorities for 2018/19

We have made good progress over the year so far. The work programme is dominated by our six Performance Panels, which meet on an ongoing and regular basis. This has ensured continued focus on in-depth monitoring performance and challenge concerning Adult Services, Child & Family Services, Schools, the Public Services Board, and Development & Regeneration. The Service Improvement & Finance Panel keeps an eye on performance & spending across the Council. We have two in-depth inquiries in progress. Our examination of the Natural Environment is almost complete and a final report, with conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet, will be presented soon. The inquiry into Equalities is currently evidence gathering, looking at how effectively the Council is meeting and embedding requirements under the law. Both of these inquiries have generated public interest, and it is pleasing that a number of people have responded to the 'call for evidence' and taken the opportunity to submit their views. Each Panel has also been proactive in seeking evidence from a wide range of sources, including people and groups involved or affected. We have arrangements in place to check on implementation of previous inquiry recommendations and assess the impact of our work. Because of good progress Councillors were able to conclude monitoring of the inquiries on Tackling Poverty and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services. We also arrange Working Groups for a 'light-touch' look at issues and this has enabled scrutiny to look at, and make improvement recommendations, on the following: Hate Crime, Homelessness, Local Flood Risk Management, Air & Noise Pollution, Welfare Reform, and Environmental Enforcement.

Getting praise from inspectors

Recent reports by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) have praised the work of scrutiny. The Council's Child & Family Services and Foster Swansea Service were the subject of external inspections, which have identified good practice with positive outcomes for children and young people. As well as positive findings about the service provided, the inspectors commented that there are robust scrutiny arrangements in place for accountability and challenge in these areas.

Improving scrutiny

I wrote previously about the process of improvement and development, with challenge provided by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) and the Committee identifying five scrutiny improvement objectives. I am happy to say that we have now agreed a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan to address the WAO proposals for improvement and deliver our own objectives. This means action on: meeting development needs for scrutiny councillors; the relationship between scrutiny and the Council's Policy Development Committees; and better demonstrating the impact and outcomes of scrutiny. It also means a focus on getting more of our work formally reported to cabinet, earlier involvement in cabinet decision-making, improving councillor participation in scrutiny, strengthening the follow-up of recommendations, and getting more of our work in the media to raise awareness and public engagement in scrutiny. The Committee has previously identified the need to develop closer links with regulators and inspectors so that we can provide a more coordinated and effective challenge. The Scrutiny Work Programme will also now include consideration of relevant WAO reports. Scrutiny will expect assurance from Council leads about their response to WAO reports and provide challenge to monitor and ensure improvement.

Questioning Cabinet Members

The Committee continues to focus on holding cabinet members to account, through monthly Q & A sessions to discuss their work. Acting as a 'critical friend' we question and challenge them on their priorities, actions, achievements and impact. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism in March. We invite the public and all scrutiny councillors to contribute ideas to ensure the Committee asks the right questions. A summary of each session and views of the Committee are published in a letter to relevant Cabinet Members. We have recently put questions to the Cabinet Members for Care, Health & Ageing Well, Economy & Strategy (Leader), and Environment & Infrastructure Management.

Challenging proposed decisions

Pre-decision scrutiny enables us to question Cabinet Members on proposals and present views and any concerns to Cabinet ahead of decisions. Since September scrutiny has looked at reports on: Homelessness Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2022 (Nov); Swansea Central Phase 1 (Nov); proposed closure of Craigcefnparc School - report on Small School Review (Dec); and YGG Felindre - report on School Organisation Linked to the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (Dec).

Developing regional scrutiny

The regional Scrutiny Councillor Group continues to meet to consider progress with school improvement across the ERW (Education Through Regional Working) region. In January the Group met with the Chair of the ERW Joint Committee, Lead Chief Executive, and Lead Officer for ERW concerning the ERW Review and Reform Programme. Also, the new Joint Scrutiny Committee looking at the Swansea Bay City Deal Programme met for the first time on 20 November. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee were confirmed as: Councillor Arwyn Woolcock (Neath Port Talbot) and Councillor Rob James (Carmarthenshire) respectively, for a two year period. The Committee held an extra meeting on 31 January for update on internal and external reviews of the City Deal Programme, and recent developments.

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Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2018/2019 (No. 3)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

Maintaining & Enhancing Our Natural Environment

(Lead: Councillor Peter Jones)

Scrutiny councillors have told the Council what it should be doing to maintain, enhance and promote its natural environment and biodiversity, and in doing so promote the resilience of eco-systems.

An in-depth Scrutiny Inquiry into the Natural Environment published findings in a report that was presented to the Cabinet meeting on 21 March. The Inquiry Panel, led by Councillor Peter Jones, spent much of the last year looking at this topic. It took in a range of perspectives, from both within the Council, from partners and the public, and the report makes twenty recommendations for Cabinet to respond to, on an issue that is now a matter of priority for the Council.

The report includes a view on how this priority can be delivered effectively. It recognises that the Council is one of the leading public authorities in Wales in thinking through and exploring how best to deliver on the Welsh Government environmental and sustainability legislation. However, the task is to meet expectations and to deliver on and embed requirements, and the inquiry report serves as a contribution to that effort.

Some of the recommendations have been identified by the cross-party Inquiry Panel as ‘quick wins’, other as more medium and long-term actions, touching upon all areas of the Council’s work. This includes calling for action on:

- Raising the profile of the Natural Environment and Biodiversity internally and externally.
- Maintaining and increasing the specialist and high quality work currently delivered by the Council.
- Recognising the benefits of ‘nature based’ prevention projects, such as to limit air pollution and for flood risk management etc.
- Cost sharing across the Council in providing additional resources to maintain and enhance the natural environment, and more cross-departmental working
- The authority working co-productively with external partners, including voluntary groups, Community Councils and the public in maintaining and enhancing the Council’s green spaces.
- Making a commitment to natural environment education in schools.

Councillor Peter Jones, convener of the Panel said:

‘This work has been an extensive undertaking. We found that a lot of positive action was evident but it is clear that there was much to be done. This report concentrates on biodiversity loss and how we, as a Council, can and must set about halting and reversing this process, not least to meet the 2020 target set by the Welsh Government which aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and take steps toward recovery. However, the Panel is clear that delivery will be difficult without financial support to meet, in particular, additional staffing requirements.’

The final report can be found [here](#).

A decision on the inquiry recommendations is expected within the next two months – more on that in the next edition.

Improving Community Safety

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Scrutiny councillors have shone a light on the community safety issues facing Swansea and actions to tackle these.

The performance of the local Community Safety Partnership is looked at each year as part of the scrutiny work programme – in Swansea this is known as the Safer Swansea Partnership. In April, the Scrutiny Programme Committee met with representative(s) from South Wales Police and the Council who are involved in the joint-chairing arrangement for the Safer Swansea Partnership Steering Group.

The vision of the Safer Swansea Partnership is ‘a place where all members of society can feel safe at all times’, and its key purpose being ‘to create a safe and welcoming environment in which to live, work, visit, trade, study, relax and retire’. A discussion about the performance of the Safer Swansea Partnership, looking at partnership priorities, actions, and impact, highlighted the achievements against objectives and crime and disorder challenges, covering the following:

- Safe, Confident and Resilient Communities
- County Lines and Substance Misuse
- Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
- Hate Crime and Community Tension Monitoring
- Evening and Night Time Economy

The scrutiny session generated much media interest, with a number of stories in the local press, in particular around tackling issues relating to High Street and its regeneration. The session also has contributed to a public conversation about crime recorded in Swansea, with performance and crime statistics from the past two years being revealed – showing challenges around drug trafficking and substance misuse, organised crime, robberies, and sexual offences. Councillors also raised some concerns around the visibility of policing, limited powers of PCSOs, the 101 telephone reporting system, and the effectiveness of existing approaches to community engagement, and the level of engagement and information sharing with local Councillors.

Dealing with Welfare Reform

(Lead: Councillor Louise Gibbard)

Scrutiny councillors have made recommendations to help manage the impact of welfare reform on people in Swansea.

A cross-party Scrutiny Working Group met in January to look at the impacts of Welfare Reform in Swansea and works / measures in place to support citizens and mitigate problems. The one-off focused meeting also received evidence from Citizen’s Advice Swansea Neath Port Talbot, in respect of queries handled by them during the 12 months since the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) in Swansea.

As a result of this scrutiny action is expected, including:

- talking to local Department for Work & Pensions partners about UC processes
- rolling out quick reference resources which councillors could use when supporting someone with money worries
- developing an online benefits awareness course, mandatory for all staff in the Council

Further scrutiny may result from this work, looking into how well welfare rights support and advice, and commitment to tackling poverty is being delivered across the Council e.g. by staff working in Social Services, Housing and by others in direct contact with vulnerable people.

Managing Environmental Enforcement

(Lead: Councillor Jeff Jones)

Scrutiny Councillors have asked questions about what is being done in relation to the enforcement and prevention of a range of environmental issues, concerns about which are regularly raised by the public.

A one-off Working Group took place in February to discuss the work of the Council and issues such as fly tipping, dog fouling, litter, pavement parking, overhanging branches and undergrowth, public footpaths and highways etc. Councillors met with the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management and relevant officers, who provided the Working Group with a briefing on this topic on activities to improve the local environment. It was recognised that this was a challenging area for the Council, with enforcement action being the final step.

Following this scrutiny activity, the Cabinet Member confirms actions will be taken, including around:

- raising public awareness about the cost of fly tipping to the Council, publicising fly tipping prosecutions and highlighting successes
- improving public information about disposal of dog waste
- developing a policy for the enforcement of verge and pavement parking
- providing information around the enforcement contract with 3GS and its focus, for possible review

More details about the discussion, and correspondence between the Working Group and Cabinet Member following the meeting, can be found [here](#).

Chair's Roundup:

This is my third roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2018/19, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Delivering the priorities for 2018/19

We have approached the end of another year of scrutiny and again delivered a range of scrutiny activities targeted at the things that matter most, through the work of the Committee, in-depth inquiry, ongoing detailed performance and financial monitoring, and one-off Working Groups.

The Natural Environment Inquiry came to an end in March, as reported in the main feature of this paper. With evidence gathering complete, the Inquiry into Equalities is about to conclude. The Inquiry Panel is reflecting on the findings, and will draw conclusions and recommendations. This piece of scrutiny has been looking at how effectively the Council is meeting and embedding equality requirements under the law. It has included councillors undertaking a number of informal evidence gathering activities including engagement with a range of groups / networks who represent people with protected characteristics.

Each of the Performance Panels played a part in scrutinizing the draft Council budget in February. Their examination of service specific proposals and implications supported the work of the Service Improvement & Finance Performance Panel, which plays the lead role in financial monitoring. Feedback was provided to Cabinet ahead of Cabinet decision-making and scrutiny helped to prepare councillors for the budget debate at Council.

Since I wrote to Council previously we have also been able, through Working Groups, to look at, and make improvement recommendations, on the Council's work regarding Local Flood Risk Management, Anti-Social Behaviour, and Tourism.

Questioning Cabinet Members

The Committee continues to focus on holding all cabinet members to account, through monthly Q & A sessions to discuss their work. Acting as a 'critical friend' we question and challenge them on their priorities, actions, achievements and impact. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Members for Delivery, and Investment, Regeneration & Tourism in May. We invite the public and all scrutiny councillors to contribute ideas to ensure the Committee asks the right questions. We have recently put questions to the Cabinet Members for Better Communities, Councillors June Burtonshaw and Mary Sherwood. A summary of each session and views of the Committee are published in a letter to relevant Cabinet Members.

Challenging decisions

Following the agreement of new arrangements by Council the first scrutiny call-in of a Cabinet decision took place in March. Any valid call-in of cabinet decisions leads to the calling of a meeting of the Committee. The Cabinet report on the New Build for Gorseinon Primary School was called in and the Committee was able to question the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning & Skills and lead officers who responded to satisfy the concerns raised.

Supporting Joint Scrutiny

With scrutiny of the City Region City Deal and regional Education Improvement body (ERW) already in place, and the possible development of further regional scrutiny arrangements, we welcome the launch of a new Joint Scrutiny Handbook in June. I will be attending the national launch that will be led by the Welsh Government Minister for Housing and Local Government, on 17 June in mid-Wales. We look forward to the advice and guidance that the handbook will provide to support and strengthen the development of collaborative scrutiny in Wales.

End of Year Review

At the end of each year it is good practice to look back on the year's work and achievements, and consider its effectiveness. All councillors were invited to give their views and along with feedback from an informal workshop in early May to help members to reflect and discuss issues, the Committee reviewed the year's work at its meeting on 13 May. Alongside this reflection and self-evaluation by scrutiny councillors, Scrutiny Procedure Rules are being reviewed by the Head of Service to ensure they are not only up-to-date, but provide the best reflection of scrutiny practice / process, and take into account any issues raised by councillors.

Developing a new work programme

A Work Planning Conference will take place on 10 June (in place of the scheduled Committee meeting) that will help the Committee to consider and identify priorities for scrutiny for the coming year. All scrutiny councillors will be invited to participate in this. As well as new topics the Committee will need to consider the continuation of current activities in the Work Programme for 2019/20 because of their importance or because work may be incomplete. Following the Work Planning Conference, the Scrutiny Programme Committee will meet on 8 July to reflect on feedback from the Conference, and other relevant considerations, and agree the work programme for 2019/20. We look forward to a new year of scrutiny, and making an even bigger difference!

Making the work of scrutiny transparent and accessible

Scrutiny agenda packs are available on the Council's ['agenda and minutes' webpage](#). There you can also find scrutiny letters sent to cabinet members following meetings and responses. Our meetings are open to the public and anyone living or working in Swansea can [suggest a topic for scrutiny](#). There are also opportunities for anyone to suggest questions, and submit views. To keep an eye on what's going see the links below, subscribe to our newsletter, or even follow us on Twitter.

Councillor Mary Jones

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