

Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18



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1. Chair's Foreword

Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee



I am proud to present our first annual report of this new Council term. I was pleased to be again elected as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

We started off scrutiny this year with an induction into the subject mindful that 19 new Councillors were elected. I believe this induction is important equally for new and returning councillors. We also used that session to focus on effective questioning techniques.

We are at the start of our five year scrutiny journey. Though I feel it is important to build upon the good work that has already been carried out and continue to develop scrutiny moving forward. We talked at the start of the year about the powerful opportunities that scrutiny provides for questioning, inquiry, monitoring, and providing challenge to decision-makers. 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 making 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

We cannot look at everything so we have focussed on and aligned our work to the Council priorities, but balanced that with issues of community concern.

It was a significant and challenging year which included a review of our scrutiny arrangements by the Wales Audit Office. I am pleased to say that they found many positives in our practice and we welcome their suggestions for improvement.

Finally, a word of thanks to all of the councillors who have contributed to scrutiny over the past year. We look forward to another busy and productive year!

Mary Jones

2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2017-18

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 = 13 ↔ (13) 2. Number of panel & working group meetings = 69 ↓ (91) 3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1 ↓ (4) 4. Number of working group topics completed = 7 ↑ (4) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 100% ↑ (97%) 6. Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 100% ↑ (45%) 7. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 68% ↑ (67%) 8. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 80% ↑ (76%) 9. Councillors who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 91% ↑ (88%) 10. Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 79% ↑ (63%) 11. Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 85% ↓ (89%) 12. Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 92% ↑ (39%)
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"> 13. Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 63 ↓ (77) 14. In depth inquiries reported to Cabinet = 1 ↓ (4) 15. Action plans agreed = 2 ↓ (4) 16. Follow ups undertaken = 4 ↑ (3) 17. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 12 ↑ (9) 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 = 92% ↑ (81%) 20. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 74% ↓ (93%) 21. Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 84% ↑ (69%) 22. Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 92% ↑ (41%) 23. Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 85% ↑ (77%) 24. Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 75% ↑ (34%)

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

3. About the Indicators

A. How much scrutiny did we do?

3.1 Number of committee meetings = 13

The Council has a single overarching Scrutiny Committee, called the Scrutiny Programme Committee, which met 13 times during the 2017-18 municipal year.

The Committee is responsible for developing and managing the overall Scrutiny Work Programme. This was informed by the annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference which took place in June 2017, open to all non-executive councillors. Specific scrutiny activities included in the work programme are carried out either by the Committee or by establishing informal Panels and Working Groups.

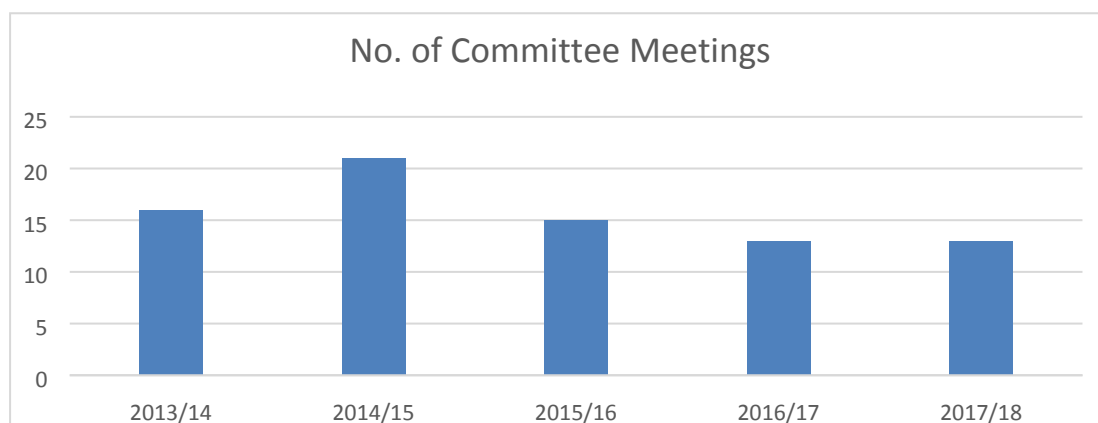
Formal committee meetings for scrutiny are held in public and give councillors the opportunity to hold cabinet members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues.

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:

- Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report
- Oceana Building Demolition
- Children & Young People's Rights Scheme – Compliance & Progress
- Sustainable Swansea Programme – Commissioning Reviews: Service Areas – Post Implementation Updates

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 March 2018.

Comparison with previous years:



3.2 Number of panel & working group meetings = 69

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 2017-18:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Working (complete) Natural Environment (continued during 2018-19) 	Cllr. Lyndon Jones Cllr. Peter Jones

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

Performance Panels 2017-18:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service Improvement & Finance (monthly) Adult Services (monthly) Schools (monthly) Child & Family Services (every two months) Public Services Board (every two months) Development & Regeneration (quarterly) 	Cllr. Chris Holley Cllr. Peter Black Cllr. Mo Sykes Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams Cllr. Mary Jones Cllr. Jeff Jones

Working groups are one-off meetings established when a matter should be carried out outside of the committee but does not need a panel to be set up, enabling a 'light-touch' approach to specific topics of concern.

Working Groups 2017-18:	Convener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Planning & Resilience Community Cohesion & Hate Crime Car Park Charges Tethered Horses Roads & Footway Maintenance Local Flood Risk Management (meets annually) Renewable Energy Homelessness (completed in June 2018) 	Cllr. Mary Jones Cllr. Elliot King Cllr. Will Thomas Cllr. Jeff Jones Cllr. Sam Pritchard Cllr. Peter Jones Cllr. Sam Pritchard Cllr. Peter Black

In our annual councillor survey 96% of those asked felt that scrutiny activities are well-planned (45 respondents).

3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 1

Work on the following in-depth inquiry was completed during 2017-18:

- Regional Working: *How can the Council, along with its partners, develop and improve regional working for the benefit of Swansea and its residents?*

3.4 Number of working group topics completed = 7

Work on the following topics was completed during 2017-18 through meetings of Working Groups:

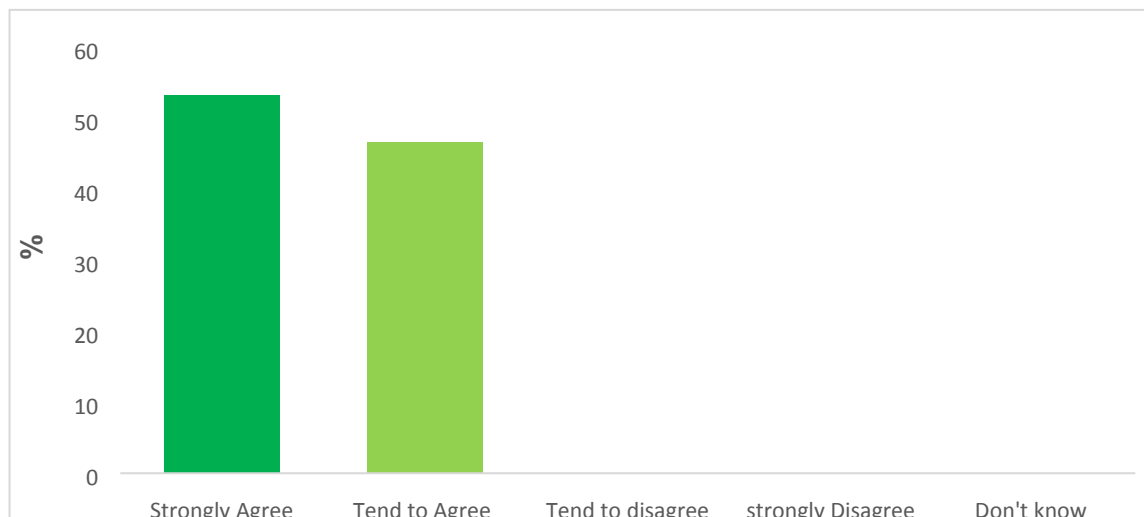
- Emergency Planning & Resilience
- Community Cohesion & Hate Crime
- Car Park Charges
- Tethered Horses
- Roads & Footway Maintenance
- Local Flood Risk Management (meets annually)
- Renewable Energy

Work on Homelessness was completed during the current municipal year 2018/19.

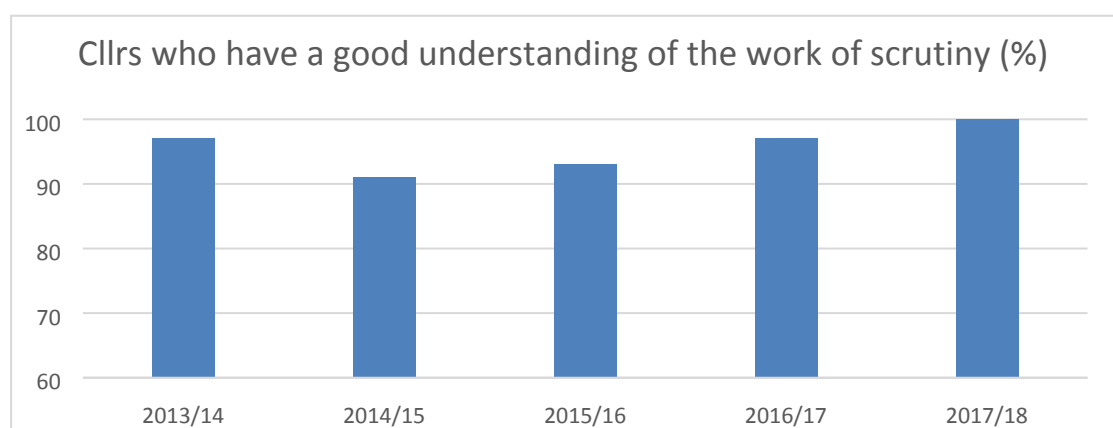
B. How well did we do?

3.5 Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 100%

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of Councillors (and co-opted members). Many of the questions asked are based on characteristics of effective scrutiny identified by Centre for Public Scrutiny / Wales Audit Office. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 44 (61% of all councillors). This included 40 out of 61 non-executive Councillors (66%). The data also includes the response of 5 co-opted members who were also surveyed. 45 responders were asked this question, representing those who had attended a scrutiny meeting in the last year. 4 non-executive councillors who responded to the survey had not attended a scrutiny meeting during 2017-18.



Comparison with previous years:

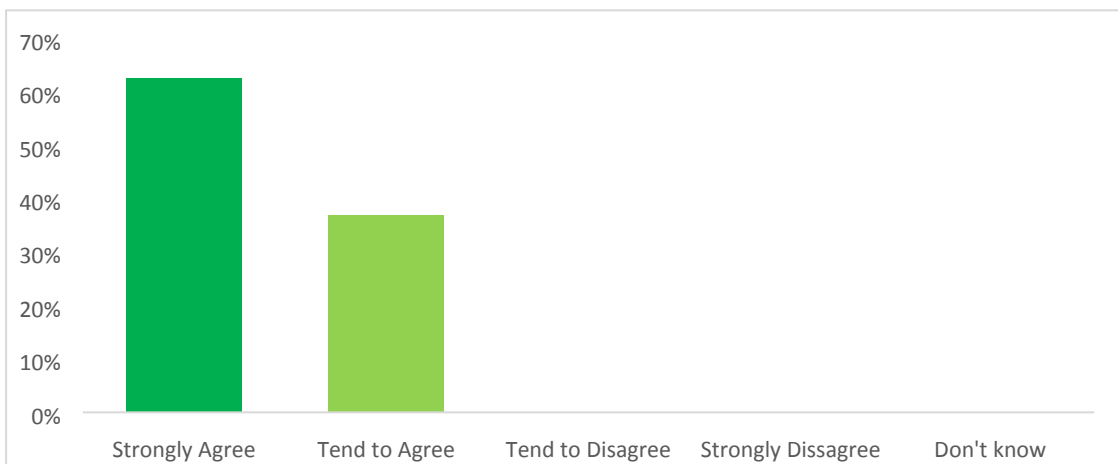


3.6 Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 100%

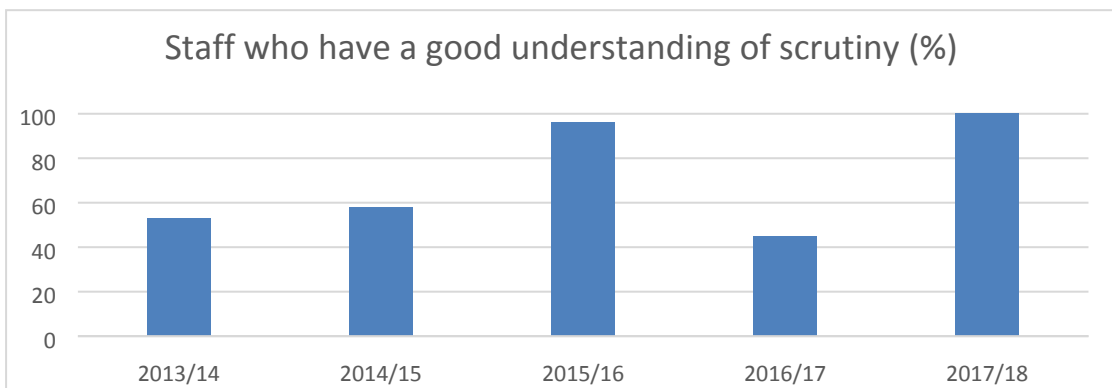
Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of senior members of staff (Corporate Directors, Heads of Services and Senior Managers).

In previous years this question was asked of all staff however the low number of responses meant it was difficult to draw meaningful conclusions. The staff survey is now aimed at senior members of staff, providing a more meaningful indication of understanding amongst those staff in the organisation who will most likely need to be engaged in scrutiny. Overall response rate: 39 staff members - estimated 31% of those surveyed - with an almost even split of staff across the 3 Council Directorates – People, Place & Resources. This question was asked of those who told us that they had some involvement with scrutiny over the last year (24 out of the 39 respondents, or 61.5%)

At the same time we have tried raise awareness of scrutiny and basic understanding amongst all staff generally, through improved online content and staff news stories.



Comparison with previous years:



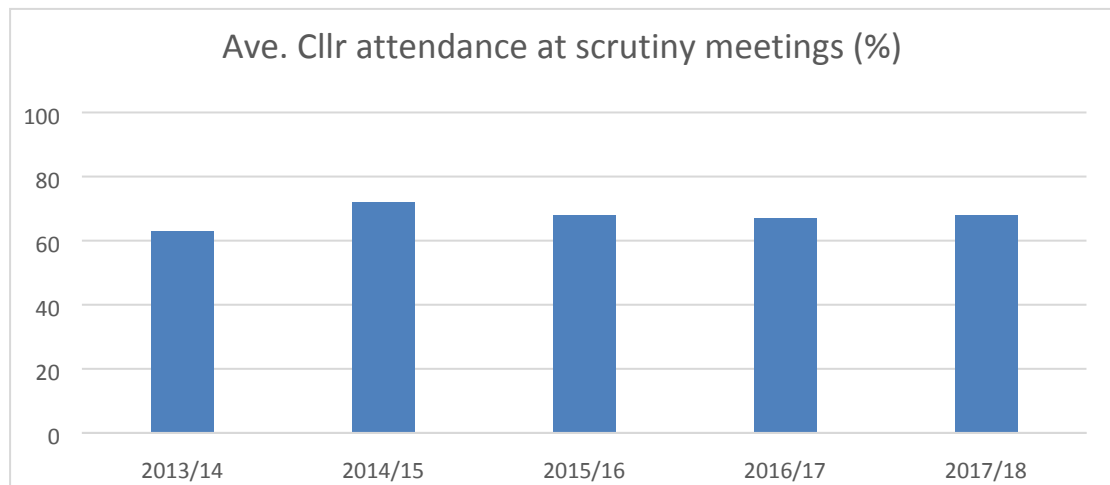
3.7 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 68%

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. 2017/18's figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panel meetings and the working groups.

Comparison with previous years:



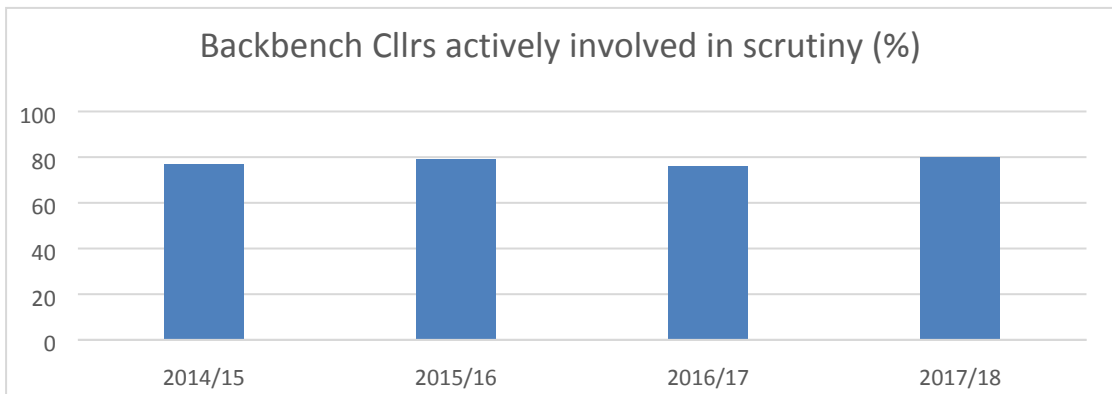
3.8 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 80%

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.

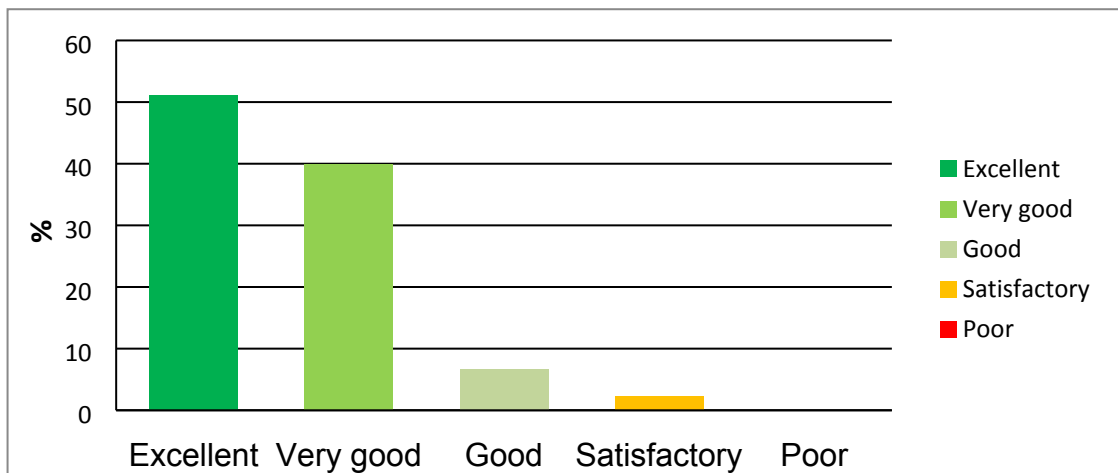
In our annual councillor survey 98% of those asked agreed that non-executive members have good opportunities to participate in scrutiny (41 respondents).

Comparison with previous years:

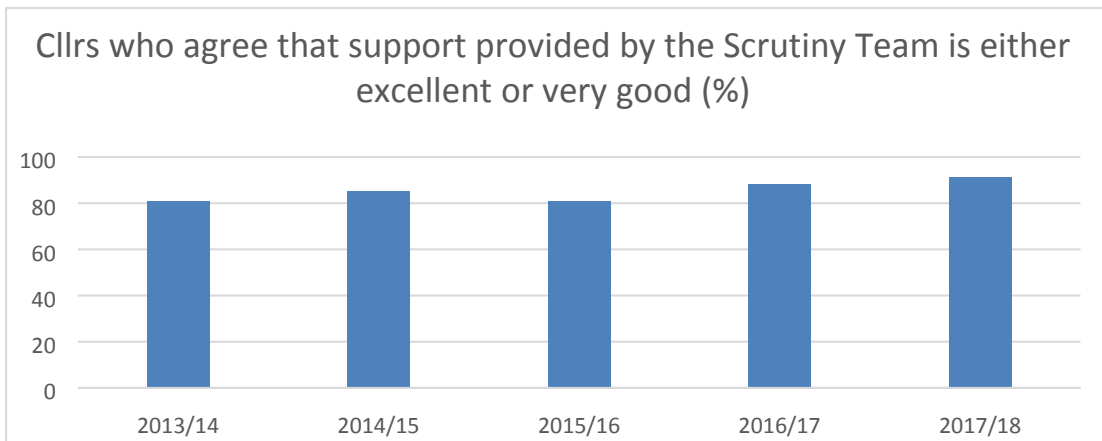


3.9 Councillors who have used the service who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 91%

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data is collected via our annual survey of councillors. The number of councillors answering this question was 45 (those who had attended a scrutiny meeting during the last year).



Comparison with previous years:

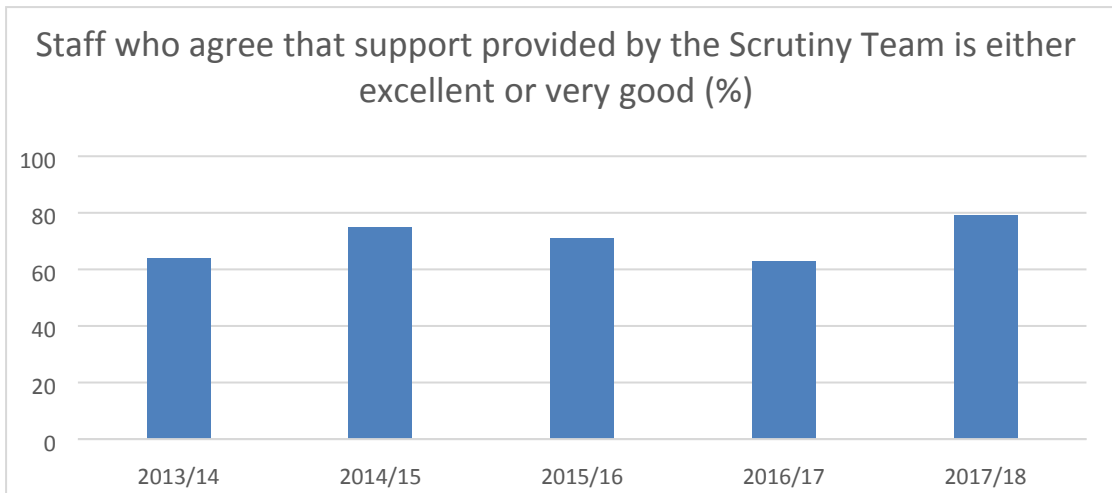


3.10 Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 79%

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data was collected via our annual survey of senior members of staff. Only those who told us that they have had some involvement in scrutiny over the past year were asked this question. The number of people answering this question was 24.

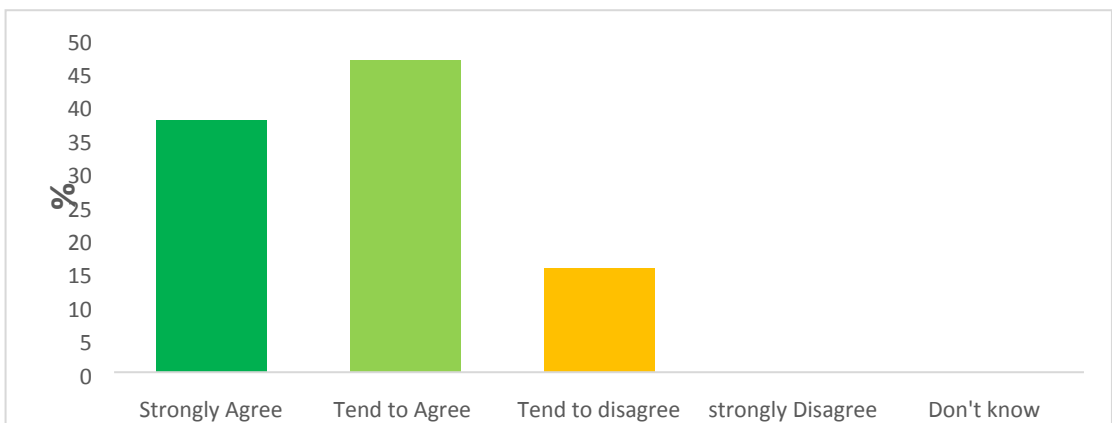
Comparison with previous years:



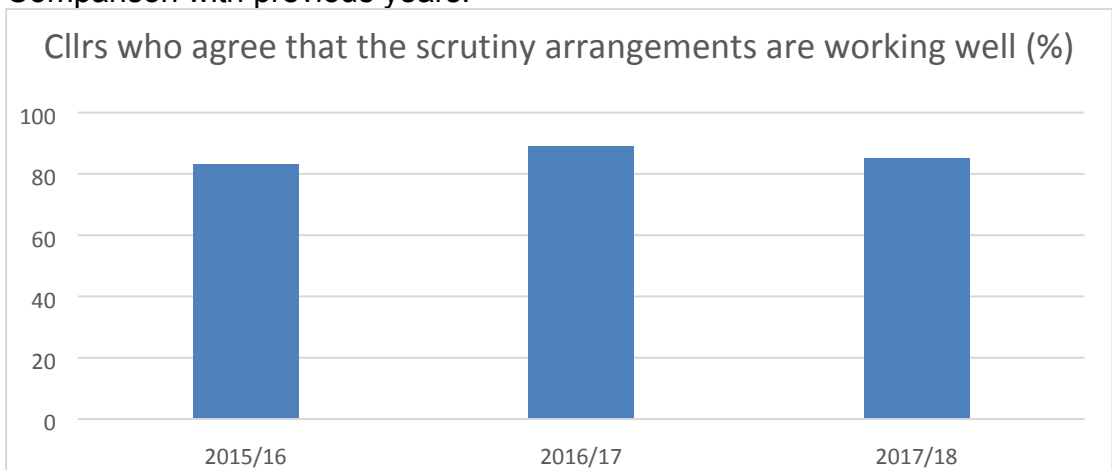


3.11 Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 85%

As part of an annual survey, councillors are asked whether they feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. The number of councillors answering this question was 45 (those who had attended a scrutiny meeting in the last year). This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.

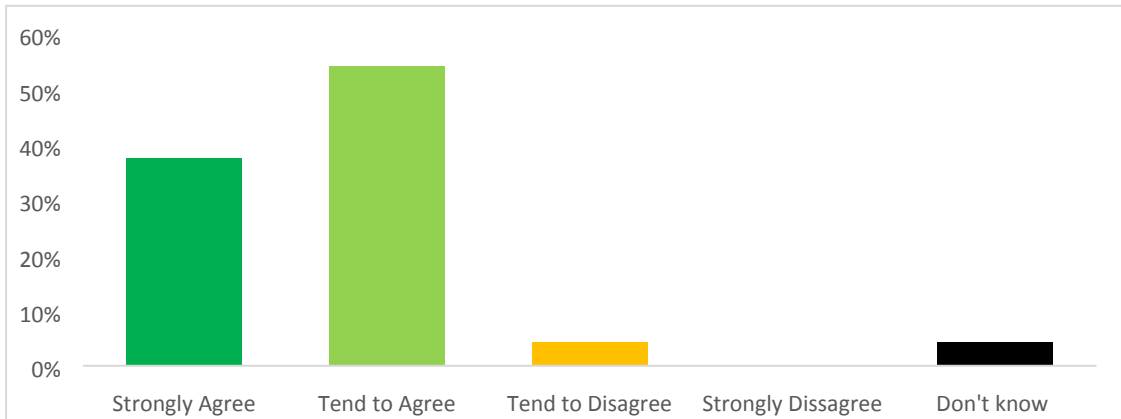


Comparison with previous years:

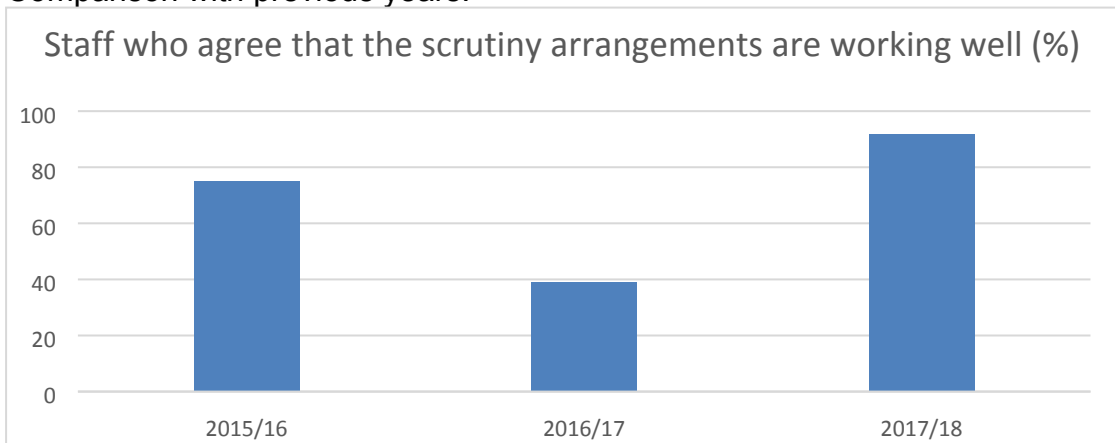


3.12 Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 92%

As part of an annual survey, senior members of staff were asked whether they feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. Only those who told us that they have had some involvement in scrutiny over the past year were asked this question. The number of people answering this question was 24. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.



Comparison with previous years:

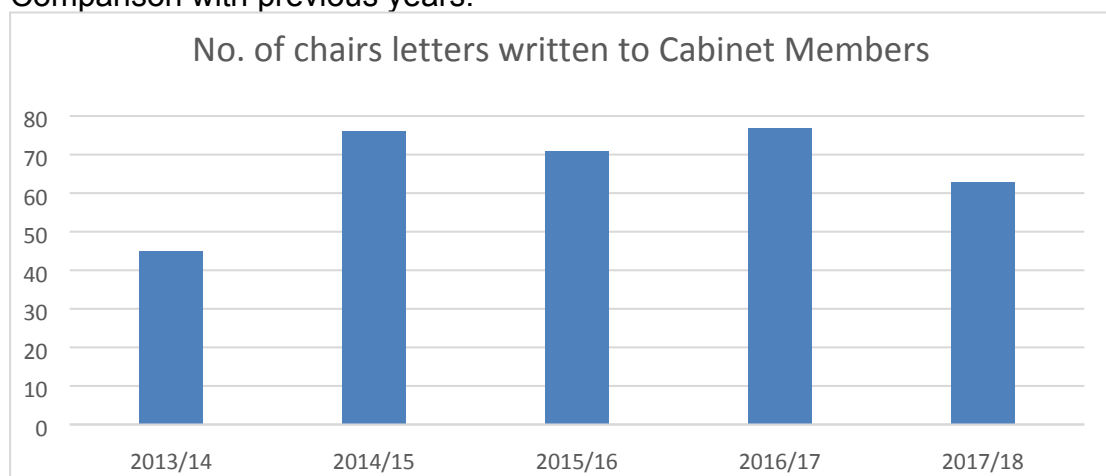


C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?

3.13 Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 63

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 discussion at committee / panel / working group meetings. Letters are effectively 'mini-reports' with conclusions and proposals from scrutiny – and where necessary require a response. Average response time for letter sent during 2017-18: 19 days (against target of 21 days). 71% of the 48 letters requiring response were responded to within time.

Comparison with previous years:

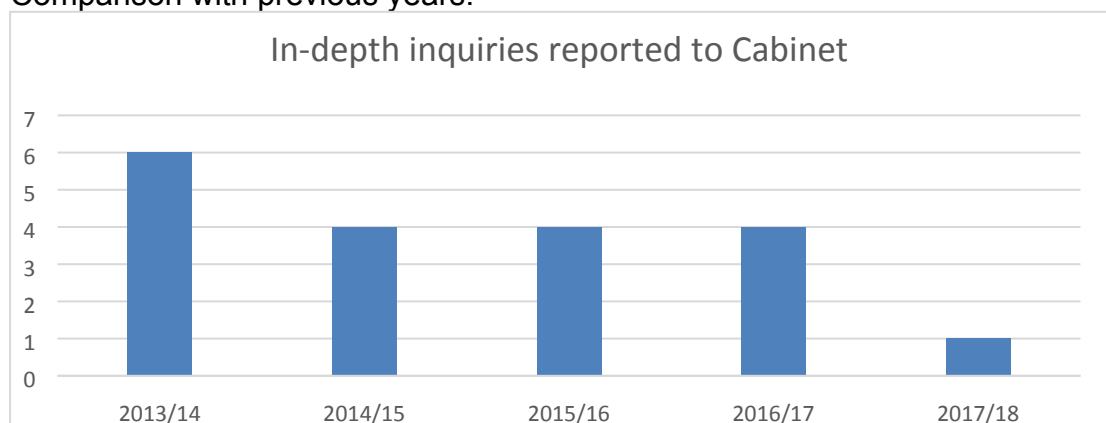


3.14 In-depth inquiries reported to Cabinet = 1

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 in brackets:

Regional Working (11)

Comparison with previous years:

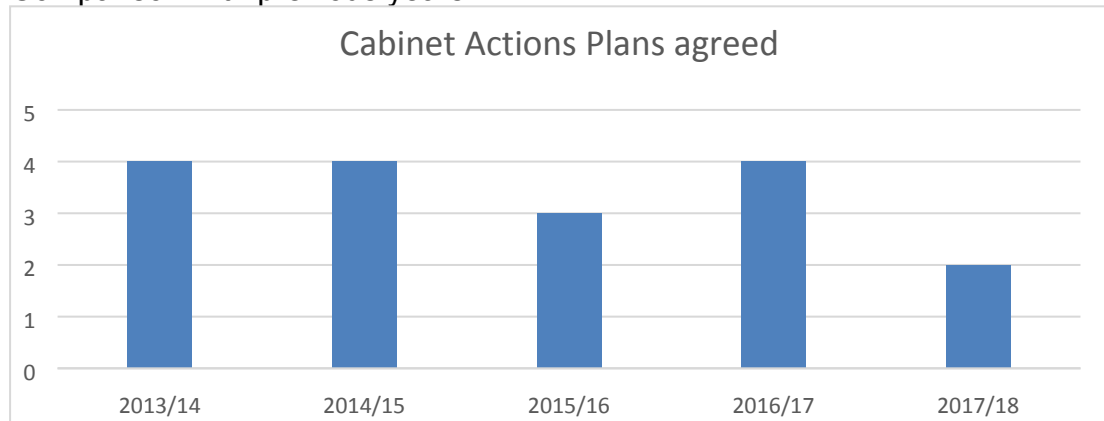


3.15 Action plans agreed = 2

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 2016-17:

- School Readiness
- Tackling Poverty

Comparison with previous years:



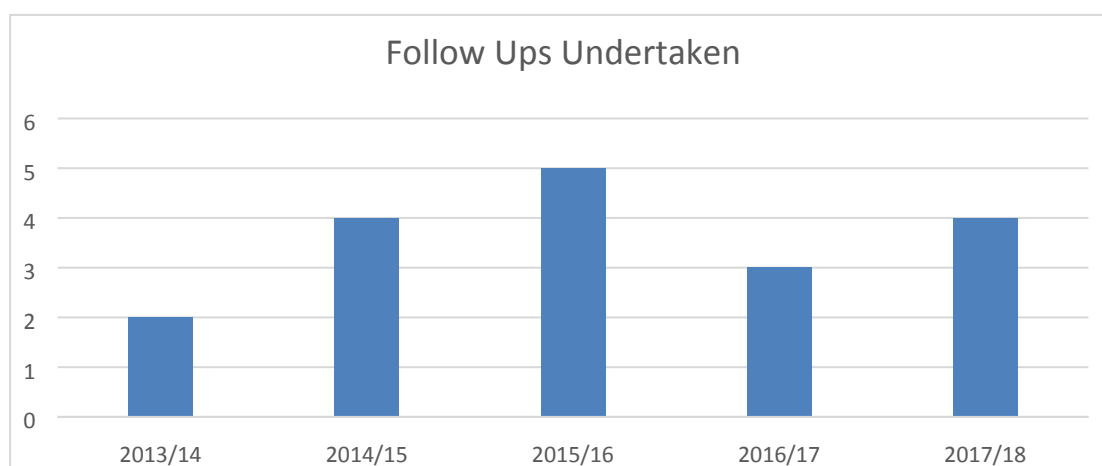
3.16 Follow ups undertaken = 4

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. The following previous scrutiny inquiries were followed up during the year:

- School Governance (monitoring complete)
- Building Sustainable Communities (monitoring complete)
- School Readiness (monitoring complete)
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (further follow up in November 2018)

Comparison with previous years:

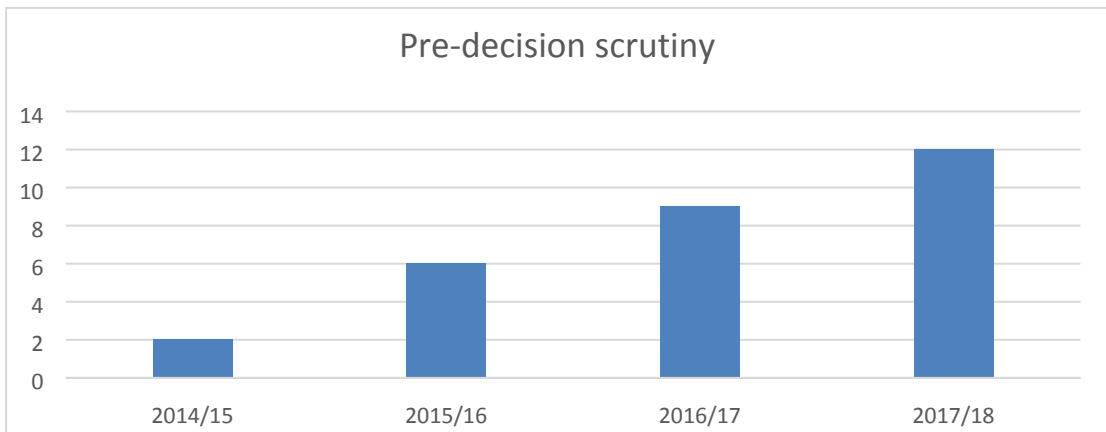


3.17 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 12

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 12 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:

- Adult Services Commissioning Reviews Consultation Outcome
- Catering Services Commissioning Review
- Planning & City Regeneration Commissioning Review
- Public Protection Commissioning Review
- Castle Square Regeneration
- Family Support (Children with Additional Needs & Disability) Commissioning Review
- More Homes Pilot Scheme
- Liberty Stadium
- Transfer of Management of Allotments
- Highways & Transportation Commissioning Review
- Budget
- Residential Care and Day Services for Older People Commissioning Review

Comparison with previous years:

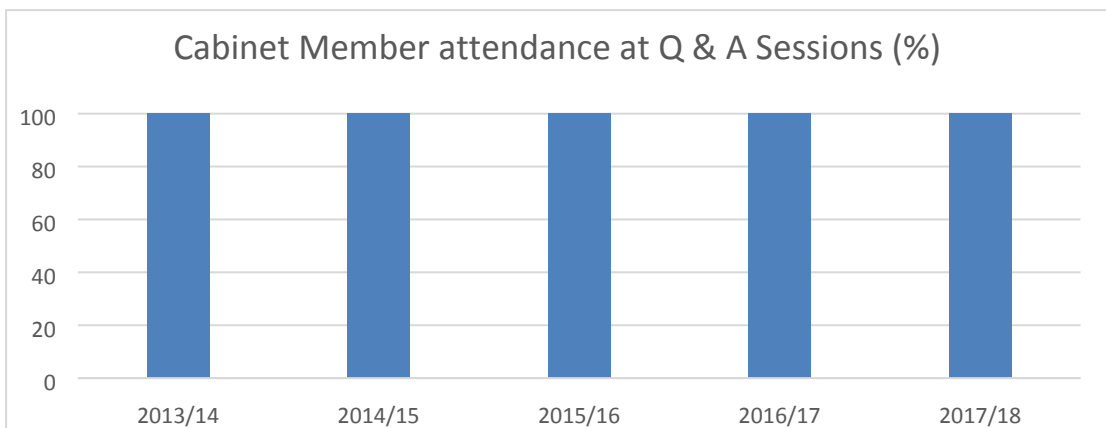


3.18 Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee – 100%

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 2017/18 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. This indicator was added in 2013/14.

In our annual councillor survey 89% of those asked felt that scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers (45 respondents).

Comparison with previous years:

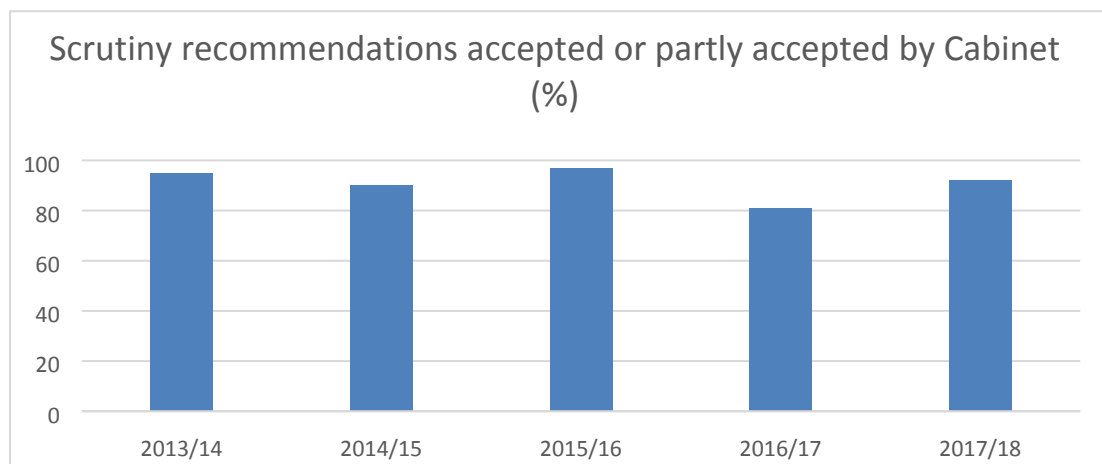


D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

3.19 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 92%

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 24 scrutiny inquiry recommendations in 2017-18 of which 21 were accepted and 1 were partly accepted. 2 were rejected.

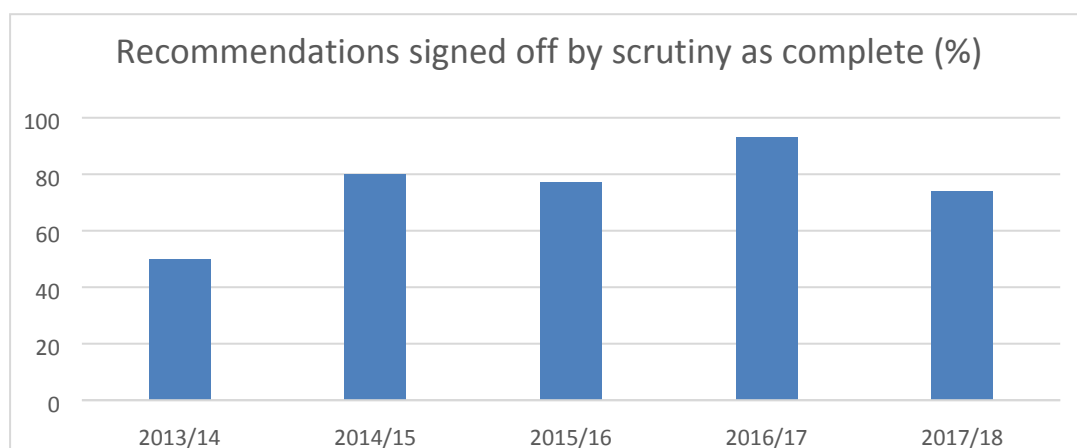
Comparison with previous years:



3.20 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 74%

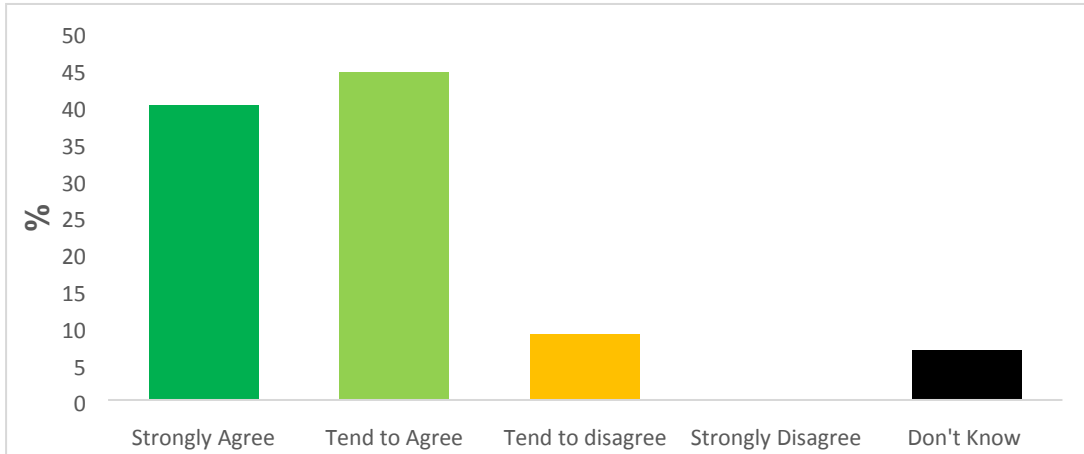
When follow up reports are presented to scrutiny (usually within 12 months following original cabinet decision) they detail which of the recommendations from the in depth inquiry have been completed in line with the cabinet member's action plan and which have not. Scrutiny councillors then consider whether they agree with the assessment taking into account the evidence they are presented with. This indicator represents the percentage of recommendations accepted by scrutiny as being completed for the year (35 recommendations were considered of which 26 were considered as complete).

Comparison with previous years:

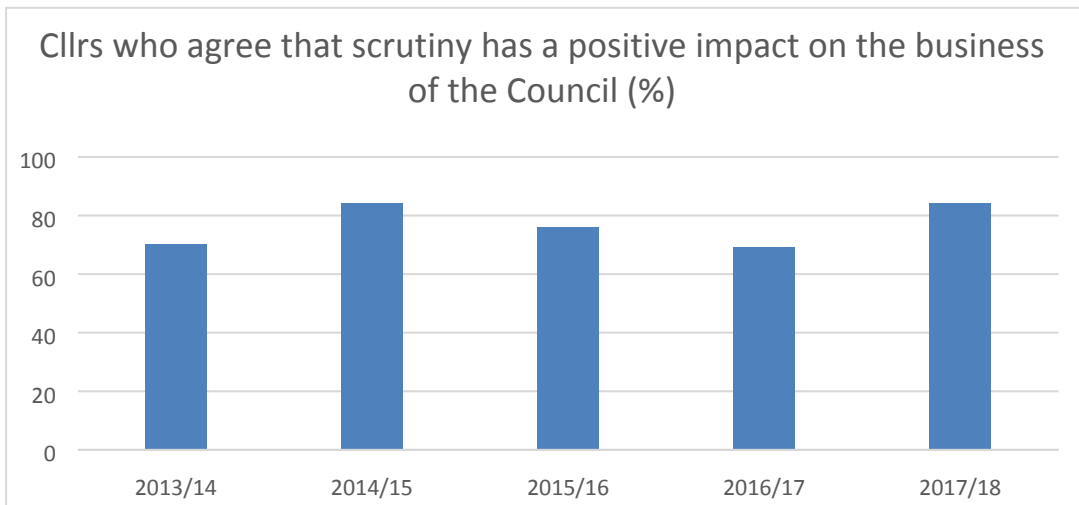


3.21 Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 84%

As part of our annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 45 (those who had attended a scrutiny meeting in the last year).

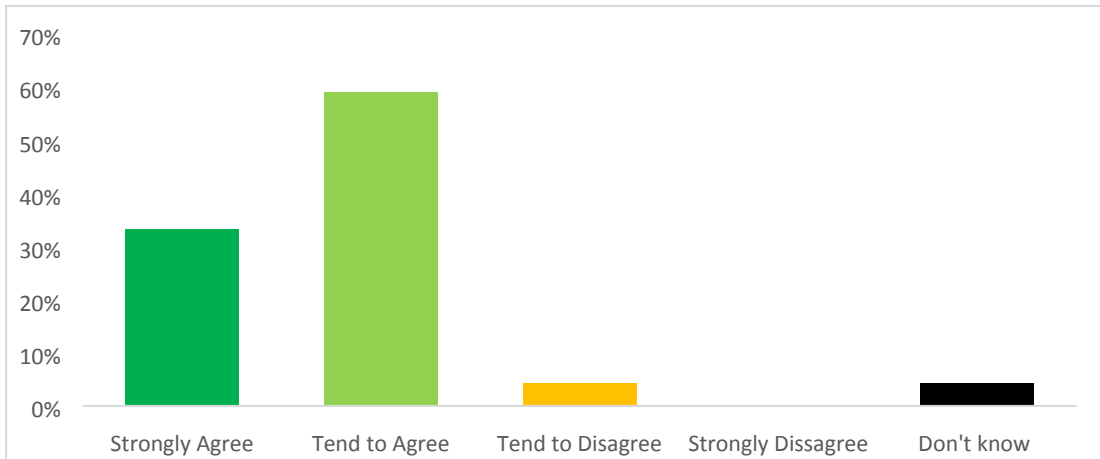


Comparison with previous years:

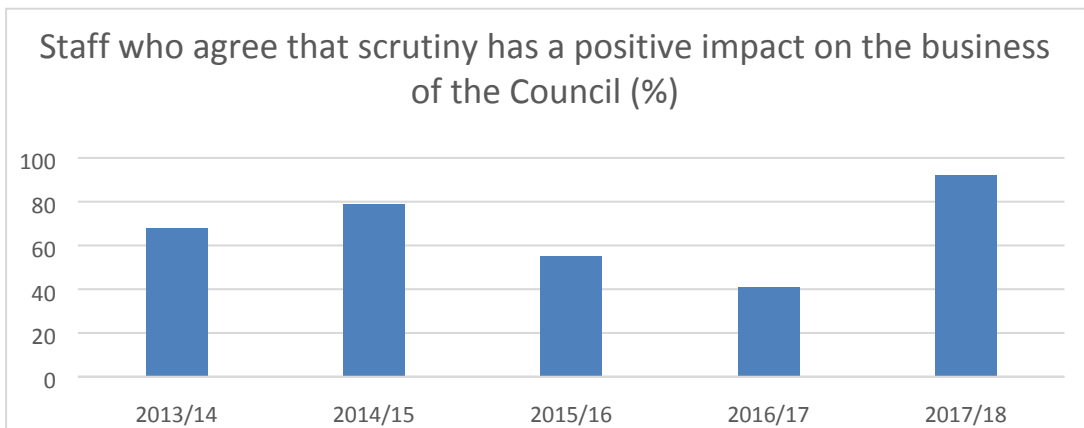


3.22 Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 92%

As part of an annual survey, senior members of staff were asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The number of people answering this question was 24.



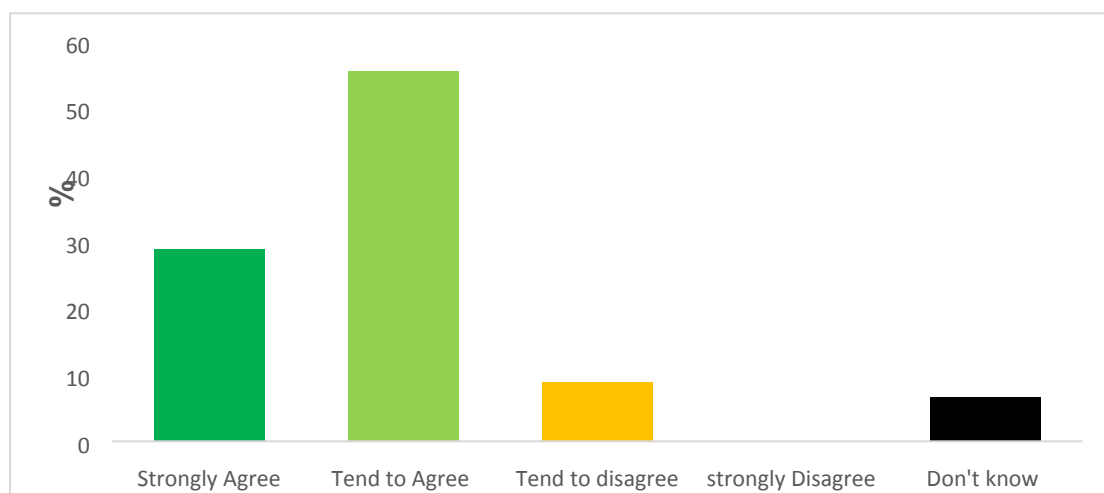
Comparison with previous years:



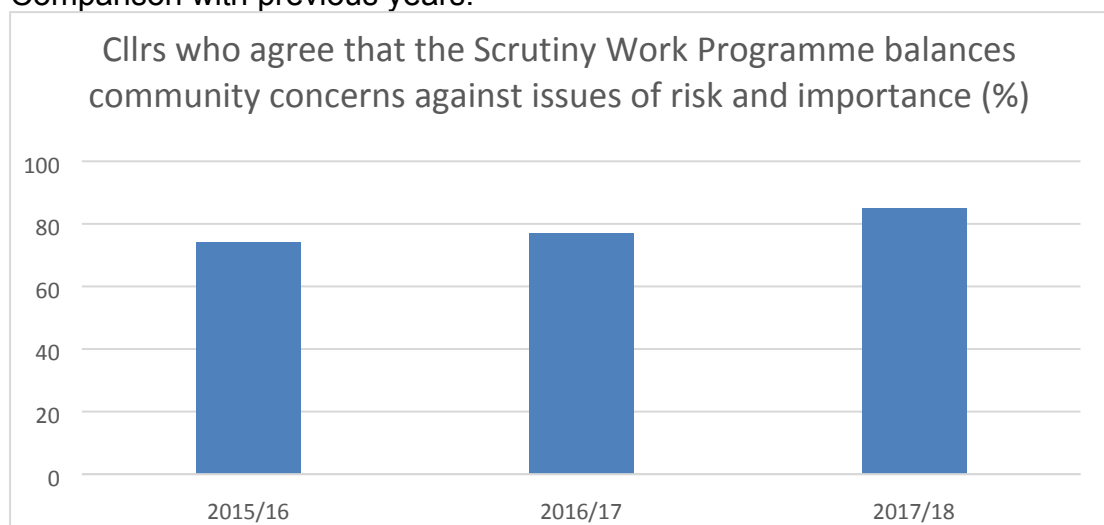
3.23 Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 85%

Overarching priorities are shaped by an annual work planning conference (open to all non-executive councillors) that hears a range of perspectives on what should be included. All councillors can suggest particular topics of concern for possible scrutiny. The 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.

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.

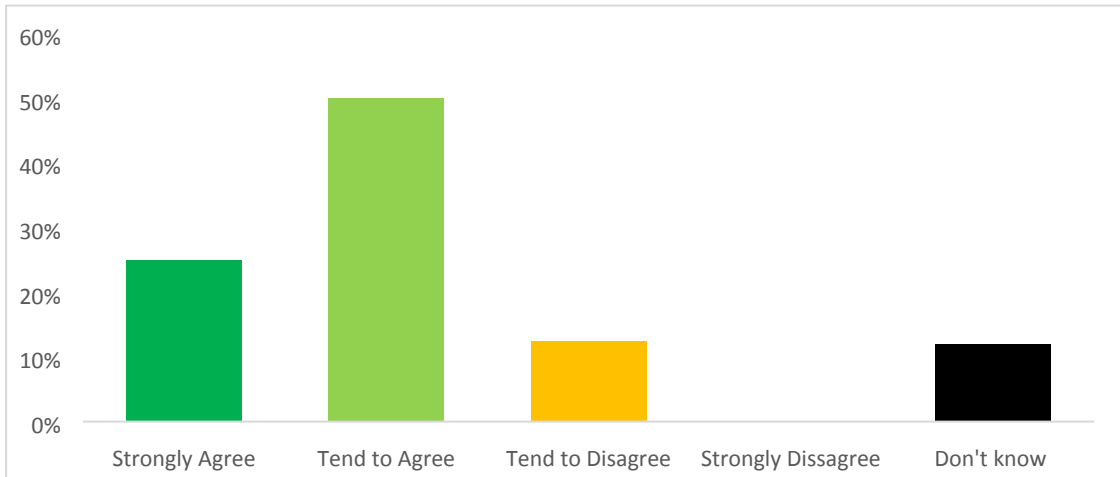


Comparison with previous years:

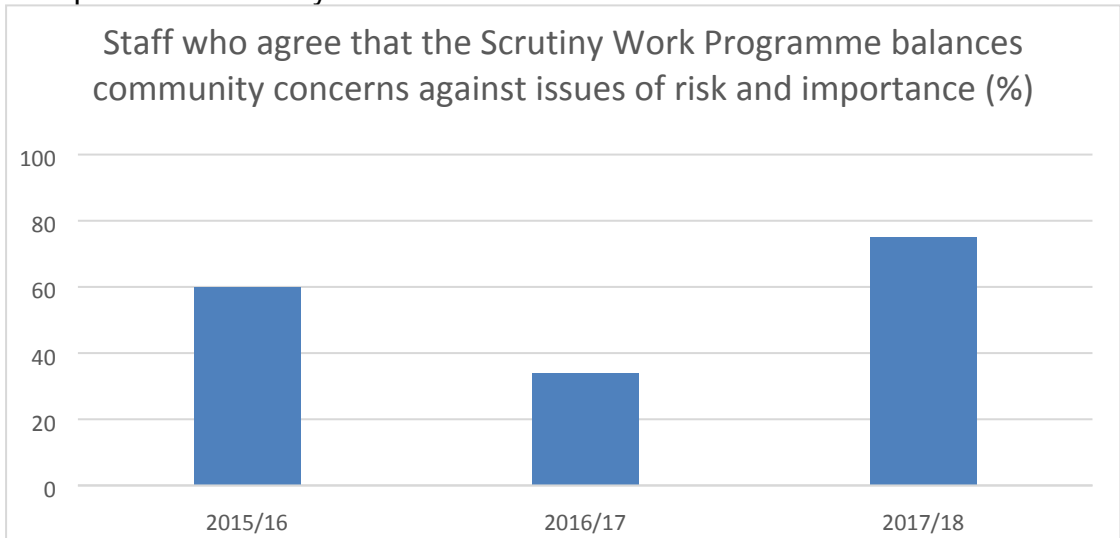


3.24 Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 75%

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, senior members of staff were asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. This was a new indicator added in 2015/16.



Comparison with last year:



4. Impact

4.1 How Scrutiny Councillors have made a difference

4.1.1 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. It was reported to Council in January and April 2018.

4.1.2 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.

4.1.3 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.

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

- Identifying ways in which school readiness can be improved (School Readiness Inquiry)
- How communities can be better supported to take control of local services (Building Sustainable Communities Inquiry)
- Strengthening emergency planning and resilience (Working Group)
- Improving school governance e.g. recommended closer working between governing bodies and school challenge advisors (School Governance Inquiry)
- Scrutiny of Commissioning Reviews - questioning Cabinet Members on proposals, e.g. rationale, potential impact / implications, options considered, consultation undertaken, and presenting views to Cabinet ahead of decisions.
- Developing regional scrutiny of school improvement services (Education Thorough Regional Working)
- Improving the welfare of tethered horses through partnership working (Working Group)
- Challenging our schools in order to ensure that pupils in Swansea are receiving a high quality education and that they are meeting objectives to improve schools standards and pupil attainment. (Schools Performance Panel)
- Raising debate about the management of the Council's car parks and charges, including the effect of the introduction of winter charges on tourism and footfall, and the quality of provision (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.
- 5.1.2 In previous years efforts have included a focus on improving communication with cabinet members, the alignment of scrutiny work with corporate priorities and things that matter most, getting more coverage in the media to raise awareness of scrutiny, and getting more public engagement in scrutiny meeting.
- 5.1.3 This annual report marks the start of a new five year Council. The end of the first year was marked by scrutiny councillors with a look back at work carried out, achievements and the effectiveness of scrutiny.
- 5.1.4 Opportunities for those involved or interested in scrutiny to feedback views are provided each year though well-established surveys, as well as through annual review discussions within the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panels.

5.2 How people see Scrutiny

Some further findings from Annual Survey about how scrutiny is viewed:

Statement	Agreed	
	Councillor Survey	Staff Survey
The Work of Scrutiny is Councillor-Led	98%	92%
Scrutiny works in a cross-cutting fashion and is not restricted to departmental silos	83%	83%
Scrutiny has the officer support it needs to be effective	89%	92%
Scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers	89%	92%
Scrutiny is important as a mechanism for community Engagement	87%	84%
Scrutiny councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake the role effectively	78%	46%

5.3 What people like about scrutiny

These are the sort of things that people have told us they like about scrutiny:

1. *The scrutiny role itself*

The scrutiny role itself and various opportunities it provides to discuss issues (often cross-cutting) in some depth and challenge and hold to account decision-makers, and reflect on service performance. It operates in a constructive environment. There is praise for the open, transparent, democratic, informed debate that takes place.

2. *Member-led*

The Member-led process provides freedom for Councillors to explore what matters to them, and require responses to issues raised, and act quickly upon requests from councillors and the public to look at specific matters. People have also praised scrutiny councillors for listening to issues, in order to make informed assessments about service delivery and performance.

3. *The Work Programme*

People feel that the work programme is balanced and focussed on the key issues, including a continued focus on the two most significant areas of council spending - social services and education. Balancing strategic and local issues and timely involvement is nevertheless an ongoing challenge.

3. *Cross-party Working*

There is good cross-party working, and 'all in it together' attitude - working together to improve Swansea. Inclusive and giving every councillor a voice.

4. *Pre-decision Scrutiny*

The number of times that pre-decision scrutiny was used continues to increase and is valued as an opportunity to feed directly into decision-making.

5. *Learning & Development*

There are opportunities to learn and develop, e.g. involvement in Performance Panels enables councillors to build up in-depth knowledge and expertise in specific service areas, and Working Groups enable councillors to learn more about a topic.

6. *Officer Support*

We have very good and well-established Officer support for scrutiny which means activities are well-managed and supported effectively, and there is good communication all round, fostering good working relationships between members and officers.

7. *Involving the Public*

Scrutiny provides the ability to involve the public, and is open and welcoming to input e.g. requests for scrutiny. People like the regular updates published about the work of scrutiny. To support public engagement there has been a good level of media coverage for scrutiny work over the last 12 months.

5.4 Things that could be improved

While overall feedback was positive there were nevertheless a number of general improvement issues raised.

Some of the issues that stood out included:

1. Councillor Involvement

A number of survey respondents felt that there should be a wider range of councillors actively involved in the work of scrutiny. We will need to understand the barriers to participation and see what can be done to facilitate the engagement of those not actively involved, e.g. timing of meetings.

2. Cabinet Responses

Councillors would like better information in order to be able to track Cabinet Member responses to scrutiny views and recommendations, and therefore more easily see what impact / difference is being made.

3. Public Engagement

Despite efforts to raise awareness and promote opportunities to engage in scrutiny low levels of public engagement have been highlighted and requires attention. In our Public Survey we received response from 85 people. Almost half of these had not heard of the Council's Scrutiny function and the work of Scrutiny.

4. Resources

Although our agile scrutiny arrangements have received praise, a number of councillors have observed the ongoing challenge of balancing scrutiny activity with available resources. There are limitations on the amount of scrutiny work that can be carried out, but at the same time ever-growing demands for scrutiny, and pressure to deliver effective scrutiny.

5. Impact

Councillors recognise the difficulty in demonstrating the impact of scrutiny. Feedback from decision-makers will help to show the contribution that scrutiny makes to improvement. We will need to consider how the visibility of impact both internally across the Council and externally can be increased.

6. Duplication

It is important that Councillors and officers have understanding of the role that different bodies play in the overall decision-making and governance of the Council, and their connectivity. There have been issues raised about the respective role of scrutiny and role of the Council's Policy Development Committees, which need to be considered.

5.5 Five Improvement Objectives

5.5.1 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 and in particular feedback on where things could be better, as well as reflecting on their own experience, and other feedback received throughout the year. From this emerged a clear sense about what priorities for improving scrutiny should be. Amongst the issues the Committee felt merited attention were: Councillor involvement in scrutiny; reports to scrutiny and reporting arrangements, Cabinet engagement in scrutiny / tracking their response to scrutiny, visibility of impact, and public engagement.

5.5.2 This process of reflection and self-evaluation has helped to guide improvement actions for scrutiny in Swansea for the coming year. The following improvement objectives emerged from this process, reflecting the issues that matter most to scrutiny councillors, and were 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.

5.5.3 At the time of writing we are giving thought to specific actions that will help us to achieve these improvement objectives, for example findings from Working Groups being presented via short reports to Cabinet instead of via letter to relevant Cabinet Member, working more closely with communications officers to increase media coverage, holding some meetings in the community. We look forward to writing about these objectives / actions, and progress, in next year's annual report.

5.6 Wales Audit Office Review of Scrutiny

5.6.1 The past year was also significant because the Wales Audit Office carried out a review of scrutiny arrangements in all Welsh local authorities. As well as carrying out a desktop review the Wales Audit Office held focus groups with councillors and interviewed relevant officers. Their findings from their review, dubbed 'Overview & Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?', were published in July 2018.

5.6.2 Overall it is a positive report which recognises good scrutiny practice. The report concludes that scrutiny in Swansea:

- is well-placed to respond to future challenges;
- regularly challenges decision-makers; and
- has arrangements to review its own effectiveness.

5.6.3 The report does however contains some proposals for improvement which will need to be addressed, suggesting that we should:

- develop a training & development programme for scrutiny members
(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
(this relates mainly to measuring the impact and outcomes of activity on citizens and 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 overlap remains)

5.6.4 The Audit report also comments on current arrangements for pre-decision scrutiny and suggests that 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. This links to one of the improvement objectives identified by the Committee.

5.6.5 We will be preparing an appropriate action plan that will address the proposals for improvement, and taken together with the already identified improvement objectives we will arrive at a co-ordinated and comprehensive single improvement plan for scrutiny.

5.6.6 Positive feedback from auditors:

- a) Scrutiny is well-placed to respond to future challenges. The Council has an active scrutiny function that benefits from a flexible approach:
- The work of the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Performance Panels includes consideration of the Council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements.
 - The Scrutiny Team is well regarded and as well as supporting the delivery of the work programme play a significant role in promoting scrutiny activity through the Council's website, scrutiny blog and social media.
- b) The scrutiny function regularly challenges decision-makers:
- The Council holds an Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference.
 - There are arrangements for engaging in evidence based challenge of decision makers.
 - Meetings are well run with challenging and focused questioning from scrutiny members.
 - Cabinet Members are regularly held to account by scrutiny members.
 - The relationship between Cabinet and the scrutiny function is generally constructive, with Cabinet Member regularly considering and responding to scrutiny questions and recommendations.
 - Meeting settings / room layouts promote understanding of the distinctive roles of Cabinet and scrutiny members.
 - Q & A sessions with Cabinet members are well-structured– scrutiny members are well informed from the papers which support each session and build on previous questioning to develop lines of enquiry. Supports constructive dialogue between the scrutiny function and Cabinet.
 - The Council has sought to improve the way in which overview and scrutiny activity informs, and engages with, stakeholders – scrutiny members frequently invite stakeholders to provide evidence as part of scrutiny activity.
 - The Council has an established approach to promoting the work of its scrutiny function, particularly through social media and its website – Scrutiny Officers work with the Council's Communications Team to generate scrutiny content for Council news pages and press releases. The Scrutiny Team manage dedicated scrutiny web pages, blogs and twitter feeds. The Team also work with scrutiny members to produce Scrutiny Dispatches, a quarterly impact report to Council, and also produce monthly newsletters available to the public to subscribe to.
 - The Council tries to help the public and other stakeholders to understand the proceeding of scrutiny meetings, should they attend.

- c) The scrutiny function has arrangements to review its own effectiveness:
- Inquiry Panels reconvene to follow up on implementation of recommendations and difference made.
 - The Scrutiny Team monitors Cabinet responses to scrutiny letters.
 - The Council produces an annual scrutiny report to assess the scrutiny function's effectiveness as a whole.
 - Scrutiny Dispatches – focuses on achievements and difference made by the work of scrutiny.

For further information:

Making the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible

All scrutiny agenda packs are now available on the Council's '[agenda and minutes](#)' [webpage](#). There you can also find all scrutiny letters sent to cabinet members following meetings and responses. All scrutiny meetings are open to the public and anyone living or working in Swansea can [suggest a topic for scrutiny](#). There are also opportunities to suggest questions, and [submit views](#). If you would just like to keep an eye on what's going on we have webpages, a blog and a newsletter, you could even follow us on Twitter – links below.

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Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2017/2018 (No. 1)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

Is your child school ready?

(Lead: Councillor Hazel Morris)

Scrutiny councillors have identified ways in which children’s readiness for school can be improved, following an in-depth inquiry.

The cross-party Panel published its report earlier this year. Amongst its key findings the scrutiny inquiry found that:

- There is a wealth of evidence that suggests investment in early year’s services including children’s school readiness is hugely beneficial not only to children and their families, but society as a whole. There is evidence that this investment can help to break the cycle of disadvantage in our communities by changing children’s life chances.
- There are gaps in service provision for families in Swansea – for example multi-agency support via [Flying Start](#) is only available to around one quarter of children and families in Swansea. Whilst this is focused on areas of greatest need, there are children across Swansea who could benefit from this programme.

During evidence gathering the Panel saw many examples of good practice that helps make children and parents school ready. This included a visit to St Helen’s Primary School and Flying Start where they are aspiring to be a school that is at the heart of the community, and has been praised by parents. They also visited [Stepping Stones](#) and the [Swansea Children Centre](#) where they are working to develop children’s physical and emotional school readiness and preparing children and their parents for the transition to school.

All [nine recommendations](#) made by the Panel were agreed by [Cabinet in June](#).

The Panel Convener, Councillor Hazel Morris, said:

‘An interesting finding from our inquiry was that it is not only children and parents that need to become more school ready but schools themselves need to be more ‘child ready’. We felt that there could be more robust challenge for schools on this aspect. We have asked for guidance to be drafted on what constitutes a ‘child ready’ school and for schools and governing bodies to develop a community engagement strategy which clearly identifies how they will work with parents pre-school and in the early years. The inquiry looked at the cause and effect of school readiness and tried to identify practical steps that could be taken, informed by good practice, to help our children to be prepared. We need to keep early years high on the agenda and we hope that our recommendations go some way in helping to improve school readiness in Swansea. We recognise that successful outcomes depend on effective working between the Council, Health Board and Third Sector’.

Scrutiny has contributed to this vital debate by providing:

- Evidenced proposals that will lead to improved school readiness
- The views of key stakeholders
- Good practice / research elsewhere
- Raised awareness and increased councillor understanding about issues affecting school readiness

The Panel will meet in March 2018 to follow up on the actions taken to implement the scrutiny recommendations and assess the impact made by the inquiry.

Helping to support community groups

(Lead: Councillor Terry Hennegan)

The work of scrutiny has helped to improve the support provided to community groups and volunteers to run services in their own communities.

A [scrutiny inquiry](#) was carried out last year focussing on the Council priority to build sustainable communities, and was recently [followed up](#) to look at how its recommendations have been implemented and effect this has had.

Councillor Terry Hennegan, convener of the Scrutiny Inquiry, said: 'Our work looked at how the Council is developing and promoting community action that could sustain local services, and build capacity. We were pleased to find that there is now a stronger focus on supporting volunteer participation in relation to community buildings and open spaces, with a range of guidance material available. Overall we are happy with the delivery of actions against our recommendations, including action on improving communication with community groups and establishing an annual celebration of community work.'

The monitoring of this inquiry is now complete.

Emergency planning and resilience

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Scrutiny councillors have shone a spotlight on the Council's Emergency Management service, a topic of heightened interest across the UK.

A [Scrutiny Working Group](#) asked about the arrangements and resources that are in place, the level of preparedness for emergencies, and challenges to the service.

Amongst recommendations made, the Working Group asked for consideration to be given to establishing a formal Council Committee to monitor and support emergency planning. Scrutiny Councillors were also concerned whether there was enough communication and information with local councillors to support emergency planning and response, and asked for this to be addressed.

The convener of the Working Group, Councillor Mary Jones, said: 'Following our scrutiny meeting in October we wrote a letter to the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation & Business Operations and we are pleased that his response confirms action will be taken against each of the scrutiny recommendations, including the establishment of a Members Emergency Planning Forum.'

Improving School Governance

(Lead: Councillor Fiona Gordon)

Scrutiny recommendations to improve school governance were also [followed up](#) recently.

The Inquiry Panel reconvened in September and heard about progress with the implementation of recommendations and impact of the scrutiny inquiry.

The inquiry was credited with prompting reflection on the support and training provided to school governors, and highlighting the need for closer working between governing bodies and school challenge advisors.

The monitoring on the inquiry is now complete but the Panel has written to the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Lifelong Learning with its view on how things have changed since the scrutiny inquiry and outstanding issues that need attention.

The scrutiny annual report for 2016/17

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Our [annual report](#) of the work of scrutiny was published and presented to Council in July. It aims to highlight the work carried out by scrutiny and show how scrutiny has made a difference.

Set out as a simple scorecard, the report highlights a small number of indicators to illustrate four performance questions, informed by the results of our annual scrutiny survey and feedback from those involved:

- How much scrutiny did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?
- What was the impact of scrutiny?

In order to support continuous improvement for the scrutiny function the report provides a reflection on what has worked well and what has not worked so well, to prompt improvement action. For example, this means doing even more to:

- Promote and raise awareness of scrutiny across the organisation and to the public
- Engage with cabinet members to ensure maximum consideration and recognition of our work
- Increase the number of non-executive councillors involved in scrutiny

Chair's Roundup::

This is my first quarterly roundup of the work of [scrutiny](#) for 2017/18, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Preparing for new year of scrutiny

We welcomed new and returning [councillors](#) following May's Council elections before preparing for a new year of scrutiny. Scrutiny Induction sessions were held in early June which provided an opportunity for better understanding of the role of scrutiny and how it can make a difference. We plugged the powerful opportunities that it provides for questioning, inquiry, monitoring, and providing challenge to decision-makers. We debated approaches to questioning and discussed key components of effective scrutiny.

Choosing priorities for 2017/18

A [new work programme](#) was agreed by the committee in July with a varied selection of topics, representing both continuity and renewal to ensure that scrutiny is always looking at the right things. This was informed by our annual work planning conference, open to all non-executive councillors to make suggestions and debate priorities. This involved looking back at the previous plan, considering the Council's Corporate Priorities, and thinking about views from the public gathered from various consultations.

With guiding principles in mind (strategic and significant, focussed on issues of concern, and representing a good use of time and resources) the committee agreed to continue with previous Performance Panels to monitor key services and retain focus on social services and education, but added a sixth to focus on regular monitoring of Development & Regeneration activities, given significant plans for city centre re-development and the Swansea Bay City Region Deal.

The programme also includes two inquiry topics, Regional Working (currently in progress), and Swansea's Natural Environment. In terms of one-off Working Groups a list of issues were identified and prioritised. Upcoming topics include Roads & Footway Maintenance, Homelessness, Community Cohesion, and Renewable Energy.

Questioning Cabinet Members

[The committee](#) has continued to focus on holding cabinet members to account and each month's meeting features a Q & A session with a Cabinet Member to discuss their work. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member for Environment Services in February. Acting as a 'critical friend' we question and challenge them on their priorities, actions, achievement and impact. We invite members of 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 the form of a letter to relevant Cabinet Members. We have recently put questions to the Leader / Cabinet Member for Economy & Strategy, and Cabinet Members for Stronger Communities, Health & Wellbeing, Children, Education & Lifelong Learning.

Challenging proposed decisions

One of the ways in which scrutiny hold the cabinet to account is to carry out pre-decision scrutiny. This means questioning Cabinet Members on proposals, taking into account strategic impact, public interest and financial implications, and presenting views and any concerns to [Cabinet](#) ahead of decisions. Amongst these are Commissioning Reviews where Cabinet is taking significant decisions about the future of our services, under the backdrop of financial pressures and sustainability. Scrutiny has already looked at the Catering, Planning & City Regeneration, and Public Protection Commissioning Reviews. Other Cabinet reports looked at have included: Castle Square Regeneration, More Homes Pilot Scheme, and Liberty Stadium Lease Arrangements.

Monitoring the Public Services Board

We have a multi-agency Scrutiny Panel which aims to find out what difference the Swansea Public Services Board (PSB) is making for citizens. The Panel recently scrutinised the Draft Wellbeing Plan which has been developed by the PSB. The Plan is subject to [public consultation](#) until 13 February and Panel Members took the opportunity to make [comments](#). The draft final Plan will be reported back to the Panel before agreement by the PSB.

Preparing for an audit of scrutiny

We have been informed that Swansea's scrutiny arrangements are going to be the subject of a [Wales Audit Office](#) (WAO) inspection. They intend to review how 'fit for the future' the Council's scrutiny function is. As well as looking at the environment scrutiny is operating in, our practice, and its effectiveness, they are particularly interested in how some of the challenges facing the Council are being considered within scrutiny activity, such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (and scrutiny of the Public Services Board), financial pressures, and regionalisation. WAO intend to observe a committee meeting in the New Year and a number of Performance Panels, and will be reviewing associated documentation and information about scrutiny in Swansea. Their fieldwork will take place during February when they will hold a small number of interviews with key officers and focus groups with key councillors. They will produce a report at the end of the review (around March), and also plan to arrange a shared learning seminar around April / May informed by findings not just here but across Wales.

Making the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible

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Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2017/2018 (No. 2)

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

Developing regional scrutiny

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Scrutiny Councillors in Swansea have helped blaze a trail for regional scrutiny by working with Councillors from five other Councils. Together they are looking at the work of the regional school improvement alliance, known as ERW (Education Through Regional Working).

The purpose of the ERW Scrutiny Councillor Group, which was set up in September 2015, is to help ensure the best educational outcomes for children in the region by supporting effective scrutiny to:

- support consistent scrutiny across the six councils
- share scrutiny good practice
- encourage shared scrutiny approaches and avoid the duplication of scrutiny work
- provide critical and objective challenge to ERW on topics of interest as required
- contribute to the good and effective governance of ERW

At present this involves two meetings per year and each Council in turn hosts and chairs the meeting. The Group last met on 9 March 2018, hosted by Carmarthenshire Council and discussed the educational outcomes across the region, the effects of poverty in rural wales and progress with the recently established ERW Review and Reform Programme Board. They also met with the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, about the future of regional working.

After each meeting the Councillor Group writes a letter to the ERW Joint Committee feeding back their views and recommendations. The ERW Joint Committee is made up of the six local authority Leaders and advised by ERW Board of Directors, external school improvement experts, Headteacher representatives and the Managing Director.

For example the Group has raised concern, and called for action, on:

- the current capacity of Challenge Advisors across the region and consistency of support
- progress being made with the ERW Review and Reform Programme to ensure more effective working for pupils across the region

Swansea is represented by the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Councillor Mary Jones, and Convener of the Schools Performance Panel, Councillor Mo Sykes. Councillor Jones said: ‘The fact that more and more services are being delivered on a regional basis presents a challenge for future scrutiny. There is a need for those involved in carrying out scrutiny to match the regional working to ensure the accountability and transparency of regional bodies. The experience of ERW scrutiny has been positive and could provide a model for developing scrutiny of other bodies, such as the Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme.’

Swansea’s Scrutiny Team is providing the support for the Scrutiny Councillor Group as the Council’s contribution to ERW. Regional work will become an increasingly important feature of scrutiny over the next few years so it is good that Swansea’s provision of support for scrutiny of ERW has worked well and been well received. The ERW Managing Director, Betsan O’Connor, has praised the work of the Scrutiny Councillor Group stating that: “It is coordinated well and the feedback is good”

The next meeting will take place in September 2018 and will be hosted by Neath Port Talbot.

Improving the welfare of tethered horses

(Lead: Councillor Jeff Jones)

There has been a significant progress and improvement in the welfare of tethered horses since scrutiny councillors shone a spotlight on this issue in 2016.

Having arranged a follow up meeting in January with the Cabinet Member for Environment Services, Council officers, and representatives from the RSPCA and FOSH (Friends of Swansea Horses) councillors have found that the outcomes have been positive and constructive:

- hotspot areas have been identified and action taken to inform the public that horses are not permitted, and these locations are now monitored on a monthly basis. This resulted in a reduction in the number of horses being tethered across these areas by 60% since May 2016.
- there has been work on education and building closer relationships with horse owners
- the ideas and suggestions from the original Working Group in 2016 have resulted in a framework for dealing with tethered horses in a partnership approach with the RSPCA and the Hillside Animal Sanctuary.
- the relationship between the Council, RSPCA and Hillside remains strong and effective and there are clear procedures for dealing with tethered horses in Swansea.
- the Council and partners have established a 'Swansea Equine Forum' to maintain communication and improvement.
- Friends of Swansea Horses (FOSH) have now disbanded as they feel their aims have been achieved, which is excellent news.

This has been recognised as an example of successful partnership working. The Working Group received positive feedback and thanks from the RSPCA and FOSH for their support and raising awareness of the issue through scrutiny. The Convener of the Working Group, Councillor Jeff Jones also highlighted that the improvements seen were a team effort which could not have been achieved without all agencies involved. He said 'We are pleased there has been great progress but we need to keep this momentum going and continue to improve the conditions at which horses are kept in Swansea'

Challenging our schools

(Lead: Councillor Mo Sykes)

Scrutiny councillors have been talking directly to schools to assess and monitor performance.

The Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel provides ongoing challenge to schools performance in order to ensure that pupils in Swansea are receiving a high quality education and that they are meeting objectives to improve schools standards and pupil attainment. As well as discussing a range of education improvement issues that affect all schools, the Panel identifies a small number of schools each year to engage directly with, based on relevant performance data. The Panel has recently focused on Morrision Primary School. The Panel met the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, and Challenge Advisor, to look at their current performance and prospects for improvements. The Panel praised the work going on at Morrision Primary and commitment to driving improvement at the school following an Estyn rating of 'adequate' last year. The Panel concluded that there was now a much improved picture at the school. Overall, councillors were pleased to see a strong leadership team at the school emerging along with a supportive and challenging governing body.

Looking at different ways in which scrutiny can engage with schools the Panel also met with pupils, headteachers, Chair of Governors and the challenge advisors for Parklands Primary and Olchfa Comprehensive Schools. The Panel found out about the collaboration work they are doing, as pioneer schools, in relation to the New Curriculum for Wales. They were able to ask pupils how they feel the new curriculum is improving their learning. Councillors were impressed with both schools' commitment and drive in improving the outcomes of their pupils. They recognised that both schools have embraced this opportunity to shape new practice.

Reviewing car park charges

(Lead: Councillor Will Thomas)

Scrutiny councillors have raised debate about the management of car parks and charges.

The Working Group discussed a range of issues relating to car parks and charging, including: the effect of winter charges; effect of charges on tourism and city centre footfall; and, quality of provision. As well as speaking to the relevant Cabinet Member and officers, the Panel was able to hear views from a number of members of the public about matters relating to foreshore car parks. The convener of the Working Group, Councillor Will Thomas, said: 'Following our scrutiny meeting in November we wrote a letter to the Cabinet Member for Environment Services and we are pleased that his response confirms action will be taken against each of the scrutiny recommendations, including looking at options as to how winter charges in foreshore car parks could be reviewed. One of the options is to look at increasing summer charges to compensate for a reduction in winter charges'

The Working Group had also raised concerns about the problems associated with car parking ticket machines across our managed car parks. The Cabinet Member has confirmed that officers have been working with neighbouring authorities, through the British Parking Association, to develop a joint procurement opportunity, which will provide a number of benefits including greater purchasing power, better technical support from the chosen manufacturer, and greater emphasis for any contractor to perform as failure will affect future contracts from this region. It is expected that combined procurement and bargaining power will bring about an improvement in the service.

Chair's Roundup:

This is my second quarterly roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2017/18, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Progressing our priorities for 2017/18

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 a continued focus on monitoring performance of Adult Services, Child & Family Services, Schools, and the Public Services Board. The Service Improvement & Finance Panel keeps an eye on performance & spending across the Council. Our sixth and new Panel focussing on Development & Regeneration Panel is meeting quarterly. We have two in-depth inquiries in progress - our examination of Regional Working is almost complete and a final report will be published soon. Work on Swansea's Natural Environment has just started, and the Panel will be shortly agreeing the key question and focus for this inquiry which may take up to six months. We arrange Working Groups for a 'quick look' at issues and I am pleased that scrutiny has been able to look at the following issues so far: Emergency Planning & Resilience, Community Cohesion & Hate Crime, Car Park Charges, Tethered Horses, Roads & Footway Maintenance, Local Flood Risk Management, and Renewable Energy. All of this work leads to the views and recommendations for improvement, of scrutiny councillors, being sent to Cabinet Members. We also 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 School Governance and Building Sustainable Communities.

Questioning Cabinet Members

The committee continues to focus on holding cabinet members to account. Each monthly meeting features a Q & A session with a Cabinet Member to discuss their work. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member for Commercial Opportunities & Innovation in May. 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 Future Generations, Culture, Tourism & Major Projects, and Environment Services.

Challenging proposed decisions

One of the ways in which scrutiny hold the Cabinet to account is to carry out pre-decision scrutiny. This means questioning Cabinet Members on proposals, taking into account strategic impact, public interest and financial implications, and presenting views and any concerns to Cabinet ahead of decisions. Amongst these are Commissioning Reviews where Cabinet is taking significant decisions about the future of services, given financial pressures and importance of sustainability. In the last quarter scrutiny has looked at the Commissioning Reviews on Family Support (Child Disability) and Highways & Transportation, as well as Cabinet reports on the Council Budget, and the Transfer of Allotments to Management Associations.

Appointing Education Scrutiny Statutory Co-optees

We have a seat for parent governor representatives and church representatives on the Scrutiny Programme Committee who will be able to participate in scrutiny of education services. We have invited interest to fill vacant positions, and await the outcome. We look forward to their contribution to scrutiny.

Raising Awareness of Scrutiny

Whether members of staff have just started working for the Council or have many years of service there's a good chance that no one has ever explained what scrutiny is all about. We've recognised that we need to raise awareness amongst council staff. We have tried to bridge the gap by putting together a staff news story to explain the 'why', the 'how', and the 'what' of scrutiny and spread the message, and the feedback has been good. This could also be a good starting point for anyone, not just council officers, to learn about scrutiny.

Getting feedback

One of the hallmarks of an effective scrutiny function is one that reflects on and learns from experience. For this reason we have been busy over the last month carrying out our Annual Councillor Scrutiny Survey. We will be closely looking at the results to help guide future practice. Also, we are currently inviting feedback from senior members of staff, and will shortly be issuing a public survey. The surveys also help us to collect views about the focus of future scrutiny. Any topic suggestions received will be fed into the upcoming Scrutiny Work Planning Conference.

Awaiting the results of the audit of scrutiny

As well as survey findings we await with interest the view of the Wales Audit Office (WAO), who recently carried out a review of our scrutiny arrangements. Their review focussed on assessing how 'fit for the future' the Council's scrutiny function is, looking at the environment scrutiny is operating in, our practice, and its effectiveness. As well as desktop research, the WAO held a number of focus groups with Councillors, interviewed key officers, and observed meetings. We understand that WAO will issue a report but also are planning a shared learning seminar informed by findings not just here but across Wales.

Making the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible

All scrutiny agenda packs are available on the Council's ['agenda and minutes' webpage](#). There you can also find all scrutiny letters sent to cabinet members following meetings and responses. All scrutiny meetings are open to the public and anyone living or working in Swansea can [suggest a topic for scrutiny](#). There are also opportunities to suggest questions, and submit views. If you would just like to keep an eye on what's going on we have webpages, a blog and a newsletter - you could even follow us on Twitter – links below.

Councillor Mary Jones

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