

Guide to Scrutiny

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1. Introduction

Scrutiny is undertaken by non-executive* members. They work together to ensure that the executive, i.e. Cabinet, is held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public. Cabinet Membership may be viewed at www.swansea.gov.uk/cabinet

* all Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet.

The broad aim of the Scrutiny function is to carry out a constructive programme of scrutiny that will engage non-executive councillors in activities that will:

- help improve services, policies, and performance
- provide an effective challenge to the executive
- engage the public in its work

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, where scrutiny can make a difference.

It also needs to be:

- manageable, realistic, and achievable given resources available to support activities
- relevant to council priorities
- adding value and having maximum impact
- coordinated and avoids duplication

The overall aim is to make sure scrutiny is contributing to better services, policies and decisions, and a better Swansea.

2. Arrangements

How is scrutiny arranged in Swansea?

The Scrutiny function is delivered through the Scrutiny Programme Committee together with a number of Scrutiny Inquiry and Performance Panels and Working Groups.

Scrutiny Programme Committee (SPC)

All scrutiny activity within the Authority is managed by the SPC through a single workplan. Specific work is undertaken both through the Committee and by establishing informal Panels, for in-depth activities, or one-off Working Groups.

The Committee will develop a Scrutiny Work Programme, usually informed by an annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference. All non-executive Councillors are invited to the Conference providing opportunity to contribute ideas about what topics Scrutiny should focus on. The Conference will review the existing work programme, hear about Council priorities & strategic challenges, with also specific suggestions gathered from councillors and the public being fed into the discussion.

Prioritisation of scrutiny activities is vital in view of limited scrutiny time and resources. Aligning the amount of scrutiny with available resources helps to sharpen the focus on the quality of scrutiny and impact. A limited number of Panels and Working Groups can be supported in any given year, keeping a degree of flexibility to adapt to issues that may emerge during the year. The work programme will also include any collaborative scrutiny with other Local Authorities for topics / issues of shared interest or concern, and models of regional working.

The work programme is kept under constant review by the Committee, with changes made as necessary. The SPC retains the flexibility to adapt and re-prioritise the work of scrutiny, to ensure the continued relevance of the programme.

The Committee is made up of 13 Councillors, and has the power to co-opt others to help them carry out their work, e.g.:

- We are required to appoint Statutory Education Co-opted Members providing opportunity for two Parent Governors, representing Primary & Secondary schools, and two Church representatives to participate in scrutiny.
- There is provision for co-option to support requirements for Crime & Disorder Scrutiny – but this is optional.
- The Committee currently co-opts those Councillors acting as Conveners (or chairs) of the various Scrutiny Performance Panels that it has established.

See **Appendix 1** for Committee Who's Who?

The chair of the Committee is a paid position taken up by a member of the opposition.

The positions for the Statutory Co-opted Members are advertised and people fill the posts for a specified term.

Other Councillors can be invited to a particular meeting in relation to a specific agenda item:

- Cabinet members where the item relates to their portfolio
- Ward Members where the item affects their ward
- Conveners on completion of an Inquiry Panel or Working Group where report or letter is presented to the SPC

Additional co-optees can be appointed to serve on the Committee to add value and expertise to the committee's work, without voting rights, at the discretion of the Committee. Co-optees can also be considered to support other scrutiny activities.

The SPC holds 1) pre-meetings & 2) formal meetings on a monthly basis.

- 1) These are for Committee members to prepare for the formal meeting and hence are held before it, either on another day or on the day itself, as agreed by the Committee.
- 2) The formal meeting is open to the public, providing it is not a Closed Item.

The dates for the Scrutiny Programme Committee can be found on the council website [Agenda & Minutes](#) page.

Panels & Working Groups

Panels

Informal Scrutiny panels are established by the Committee.

There are 2 types of Panel:

a) Inquiry Panels

These undertake discrete in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis. The topics will come from various sources, such as the annual Scrutiny Conference to which all non-executive councillors are invited, or from non-executive councillors during the year, or at the SPC itself. These will be significant topics where scrutiny can make a real difference. Inquiry Panels will produce a final report at the end the inquiry, informed by the extent of evidence gathered, and present recommendations to Cabinet for decision.

The SPC will decide on the topics to be scrutinised and broad aim, with the Panel then meeting to plan the work and, taking relevant advice, agreeing the key question that is to be explored and terms of reference. The SPC will usually expect the panel to take around 6 months to carry out and complete the inquiry.

b) Performance Panels

These provide ongoing in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas. Performance Panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant Cabinet Members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, holding them to account for service performance. They are:

- Education
- Adult Services
- Child & Family Services
- Development & Regeneration
- Service Improvement & Finance
- Climate Change & Nature

Performance Panel meeting frequency is set by the SPC.

Working Groups

These are established when the SPC decides that the subject matter should be carried out outside of the Committee but it is agreed by the SPC that it does not need a panel to be set up, but only needs to take a single meeting to be carried out. This method of working is intended to be light-touch scrutiny for specific topics of concern.

The Working Group will produce a letter to send to the relevant Cabinet Member, with recommendations and comments, or report to Cabinet as deemed necessary.

Outcomes from Working Groups are reported to the SPC, and the SPC is responsible for follow up and any monitoring, unless otherwise agreed on actions arising from any recommendations made.

If the Working Group agree that the subject matter requires a fuller inquiry they can go back to the SPC with the recommendation that a full Inquiry Panel is set up.

Panel and Working Group Membership

All non-executive councillors will have the opportunity to participate in scrutiny work regardless of committee membership. Panel / Working Group topics will, once agreed, be advertised to all non-executive councillors and expressions of interest sought. The membership will then be confirmed by the SPC. The SPC will appoint conveners to chair Inquiry Panels and Working Groups, and will confirm this with the appropriate councillor, together with advice about the topic to be scrutinised that will help the councillor take ownership of the scrutiny activity and prepare. Although it has the power to appoint Performance Panel conveners, the SPC has agreed that Performance Panels can appoint a convener from within the agreed membership at their first meeting each municipal year (except in the first year of a Council term), and report this back to the SPC.

More than one political group should be represented on each Panel / Working Group. These bodies also need to be of a manageable size in terms of team working and effective questioning. A minimum of 3 members should be present at all meetings.

Reporting

Scrutiny will regularly send letters to Cabinet Members communicating findings, views and recommendations for improvement and, where appropriate, by producing reports. These will be sent by Panel / Working Group conveners, reflecting on discussion at meetings.

Although much of the work of scrutiny is carried out by informal Panels and Working Groups these meetings are accessible to the public. Agendas, reports, and letters relating to all such scrutiny activities are published, in the same manner as the Committee, on the Council's modern.gov online platform:

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Role of the Scrutiny Programme Committee (SPC)

Its many roles include:

- Developing and managing the scrutiny work programme
- Establishing informal Panels and Working Groups to undertake specific scrutiny activities
- Appointing councillors as conveners to chair Panels / Working Groups in agreement with the councillor concerned
- Holding Cabinet Members to account in a formal public setting
- Asking questions on a broad range of policy and service issues
- Meeting the Council's statutory responsibilities for overview and scrutiny
- Coordinating pre-decision scrutiny i.e., scrutiny of proposed Cabinet decisions
- Responding to urgent issues and referrals from Council

Role of the Scrutiny Programme Committee Chair

The Chair of the SPC shall maintain overall responsibility for the work and timetable for scrutiny, and ensuring that the work is carried out, in conjunction with the SPC itself.

Role of Scrutiny Conveners

The Scrutiny Convener will be responsible for:

- a. Liaising with the relevant Scrutiny Officer to draw up the agenda and convene meetings of the relevant Panel or Working Group
- b. Chairing meetings of the relevant Panel or Working Group
- c. Ensuring that the Panel or Working Group undertakes work to the specifications and timescales agreed by the SPC
- d. Reporting back to the SPC with findings, conclusions, and recommendations as appropriate

4. Process

Inquiry Panels

- An initial Pre-Inquiry Meeting is held for the Panel to have a briefing from relevant Cabinet Member(s) and officers that will help inform the focus and direction of the inquiry. With support from the Scrutiny Officer the Panel will scope and plan out the inquiry, i.e., the key question, the structure of how the subject matter will be scrutinised, consideration of possible co-option of others onto the panel, lines of enquiry, who to invite to formal panel meetings, and on any officer reports required, etc.
- Gather evidence via:
 - ✓ Consultation
 - ✓ Site Visits
 - ✓ Research
 - ✓ Invited speakers
- Discuss & finalise a Findings Report using draft compiled by Scrutiny Officer to produce a Final Report that will include conclusions and recommendations from the Inquiry.
- Reconvene to follow up on the implementation of agreed recommendations and the impact of their work – usually 6-12 months following cabinet decision. A further follow up will be arranged if required before formal monitoring is concluded.

All formal meetings are open to members of the public, providing it is not a Closed Item.

Performance Panels

- Ongoing so plan meetings, gather evidence, and invite speakers, as/when required.
- Letters sent to relevant Cabinet Members, following meetings, with views, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Performance Panel conveners are required to provide the SPC with regular progress reports on the work and impact of their Panels.

All formal meetings are open to members of the public, providing it is not a Closed Item.

Working Groups

- Pre-meeting with members and Scrutiny Officer to plan the meeting, information required, necessary participants, and questions.
- Topic dealt with in a single meeting, or a second meeting if necessary.
- Letter, or report, produced with views, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Follow up carried out by SPC

All formal meetings are open to members of the public, providing it is not a Closed Item.

5. Support

The work of scrutiny is supported by a specialist unit of officers. The key roles and responsibilities, of the officers, in liaison with the members of the Panel or Working Group include:

- Work Programme Manager – including developing work programmes, project management of specific activities, review, and evaluation.
- Researcher – including research planning and design, evidence gathering for inquiries, consultation exercises, and analysis and summary of complex information.
- Facilitator – including organising meetings / events, and arranging the attendance of those that scrutiny councillors want to hear from.

Every scrutiny activity is supported by a dedicated Scrutiny Officer. Officers support all Scrutiny Councillors but in particular will provide 1-2-1 support for Chairs and Conveners, and assist with the drafting of scrutiny letters and reports and other communication to convey the views of scrutiny.

The work of scrutiny also relies on council departments, external organisations, and members of the public to provide information and evidence. Officers will liaise with Cabinet Members, officers, partners, and the public.

The practical arrangements for formal Committee meetings are made by officers within Democratic Services. This includes the preparation and distribution of agendas and the minuting of meetings. Additional support is provided to the Committee from the Council's Legal Team.

6. Case Studies & Further Information

Further information can be found at: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny>

or on our blog at: <http://www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk>

7. Contact Us

The officers in the Scrutiny Team can be contacted using the following details:

Post	Scrutiny Team, Guildhall, Swansea SA1 4PE
Telephone	01792 637732
Email	scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1 - Who's Who on the Scrutiny Programme Committee?

The Scrutiny Programme Committee is responsible for developing and managing the overall scrutiny work programme. The Committee establishes informal Panels and Working Groups to undertake specific scrutiny activities, such as holding inquiries or monitoring the performance of services.

The Committee's work itself is focused on holding Cabinet Members to account and providing challenge on specific themes which may cover a broad range of policy and service issues.

Members of the Committee:



Councillor Peter Black (Chairman)



**Councillor Terry Hennegan
(Vice-Chairman)**



Councillor Wendy Fitzgerald



Councillor Rebecca Fogarty



Councillor Victoria Holland



Councillor Matthew Jones



Councillor Hannah Lawson
(also Climate Change & Nature
Panel convener)



Councillor Wendy Lewis



Councillor Peter May



**Councillor Francesca
O'Brien**



Councillor Sam Pritchard



Councillor Mark Tribe



Councillor Mike White

Co-opted Councillors (Scrutiny Performance Panel Conveners):



Councillor Chris Holley
(Service Improvement & Finance;
Development & Regeneration)



Councillor Lyndon Jones
(Education)



Councillor Susan Jones
(Adult Services)



Councillor Paxton-Hood Williams
(Child & Family Services)

Statutory Education Scrutiny Representatives:



Beth Allender
(Parent Governor –
Primary)



Dr. Elizabeth Lee
(Parent Governor –
Secondary)

Vacancy

Church in Wales

Vacancy

Catholic Church

Each committee meeting is supported by a Scrutiny Officer, Democratic Services Officer and a member of the Council's Legal Team.

For further information on the work of scrutiny:

Tel: 01792 637732; Web / Email: www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny / scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk Twitter: [@swanaseascrutiny](https://twitter.com/swanaseascrutiny); Blog: www.swanaseascrutiny.co.uk