



# Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21



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### **Appendices:**

1 - Scrutiny Dispatches Impact Report

# 1. Chair's Foreword

*Councillor Peter Black, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee*



I am proud to present the fourth annual report of this Council term, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. This report covers the work of scrutiny between October 2020 and May 2021.

It has been another challenging year for the Council and has included living with the COVID pandemic. I am pleased to say that scrutiny activity has continued to be responsive and flexible taking into account pressures on the organisation. As a consequence of the pandemic the 2020/21 Council year was a short one, therefore the amount of scrutiny activity is not that of a typical council year, making comparison with other years less meaningful.

Scrutiny remains a vital part of local democracy and good governance. The work covered by this report ensures the Council remains accountable and transparent, effective and efficient. Questioning and providing challenge to decision-makers also helps the Council to achieve its objectives and drive improvement.

We have continued to conduct all scrutiny meetings on-line via Microsoft Teams, which has proved to be no less effective in carrying out our work.

Our report focuses on how scrutiny has made a difference in Swansea, and our efforts to support continuous improvement and good practice.

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

- How much scrutiny we carried out
- How well we did it
- How scrutiny impacted on 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 decision making in Swansea.

Finally, I would like to give my thanks to all of the councillors who have led or participated in scrutiny over the past year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Councillor Peter Black

## 2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2020/21

Scrutiny Practice	<b>A. How much scrutiny did we carry out?</b>	<b>B. How well did we do?</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of Committee meetings = 7 ↓ (18)</li> <li>2. Number of Panel &amp; Working Group meetings = 31 ↓ (54)</li> <li>3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 0 ↓ (1)</li> <li>4. Number of Working Group topics completed = 2 ↑ (1)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 86% ↑ (73%)</li> <li>6. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 66% ↑ (62%)</li> <li>7. Meetings with public observers = 24% ↓ (50%)</li> <li>8. Meetings with public input = 13% ↓ (21%)</li> <li>9. Meetings attracting media coverage = 32% ↓ (33%)</li> </ol>
Scrutiny Outcomes	<b>C. How did scrutiny impact on the business of the Council?</b>	<b>D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Number of Chairs' Letters sent to Cabinet Members = 46 ↓ (77)</li> <li>11. Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 24 days ↑ (22)</li> <li>12. Letters responded to within 21 day target = 52% ↓ (69%)</li> <li>13. Number of scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 0 ↓ (2)</li> <li>14. Cabinet action plans agreed = 0 ↓ (3)</li> <li>15. Follow ups undertaken = 1 ↓ (3)</li> <li>16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 3 ↓ (5)</li> <li>17. Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 0 ↔ (0)</li> <li>18. Cabinet Members who attended at least one Scrutiny meeting = 100% (n/a)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = n/a (90%)</li> <li>20. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = n/a (48%)</li> </ol>

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

### **3. About the Indicators**

#### **A. How much scrutiny did we carry out?**

##### **3.1 Number of Committee meetings = 7**

The Council has a single overarching Scrutiny Committee, called the Scrutiny Programme Committee, which is scheduled to meet every 4 weeks, with extra meetings added as necessary. During 2020/21 the Committee met 7 times (not including the meeting following Council AGM to elect the Committee chair/vice-chair).

The Committee is responsible for developing and managing the overall Scrutiny Work Programme. Overarching priorities were shaped by a work planning conference, which took place in October 2020 (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.

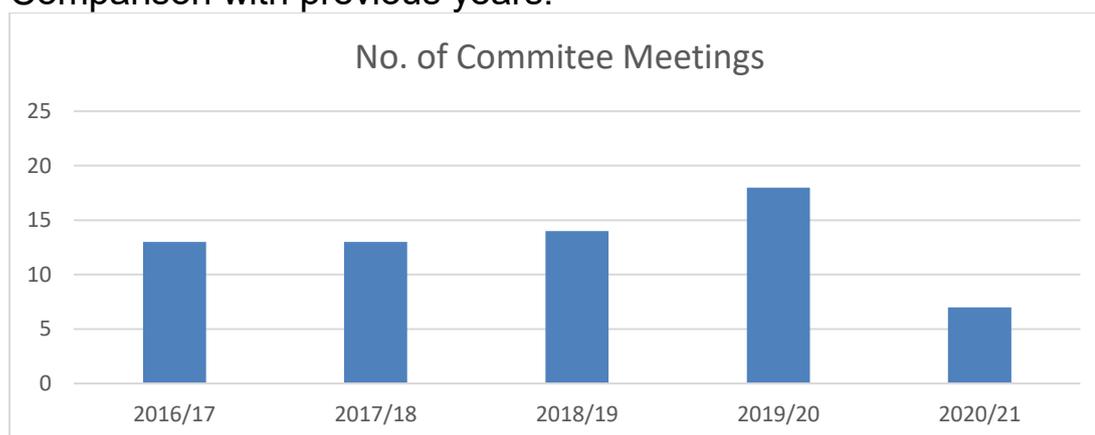
The Committee agreed a work programme that would cover the period until the end of the current Council term, in May 2022. Specific scrutiny activities included in the work programme are carried out either by the Committee or by establishing informal Panels and Working Groups. All meetings are held in public.

Formal Committee meetings gave councillors the opportunity to hold cabinet members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues. Except for a standing questioning session with the Leader of the Council, for 2020/21 the Committee moved away from routine monthly Cabinet Member Q & A sessions to a more targeted approach, creating space within its own work plan to focus on specific issues of concern, and address any gaps in the scrutiny work programme. The Committee is also the Council's designated Committee for statutory scrutiny of Swansea Public Services Board, and Crime & Disorder Scrutiny of the Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership.

The following topics were also examined by the Committee:

- COVID-19 - Update on Impact and Response
- Council's Recovery & Transformation Plan
- Active Travel Consultation Process
- Children & Young People's Rights Scheme
- Delivery of Homelessness Strategy

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.2 Number of Panel & Working Group meetings = 31

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. The Committee considers what specific topics should feature in the programme so that it is focussed 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, usually around six months, and will produce a final report at the end of the inquiry with conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet (and other decision-makers), informed by the evidence gathered.

<b>Topics examined</b>	<b>Convener</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Procurement</b> Key Question: What is the Council doing to ensure it procures locally, ethically, and greenly while being cost effective and transparent in its practices?</li> </ul>	Cllr. Chris Holley	Pre-inquiry planning meeting held 24 Oct 2019 to agree focus of inquiry. Work was placed on hold in later 2019 due to resources and then delayed due to the pandemic. The Inquiry was re-started in June 2021.

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

The following key changes were agreed at the start of the municipal year:

- Changing the frequency of the Adult Services & Child & Family Services Performance Panels, aligning them both to a 6-weekly cycle, reflecting their equal importance.
- Increasing the frequency of the Natural Environment Performance Panel from quarterly to every two months, reflecting the growing seriousness of issues around biodiversity and climate change and their importance.
- Removing the Public Services Board Performance Panel – this work now carried out by the Committee.

<b>Performance Panels</b>	<b>Convener</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service Improvement &amp; Finance (monthly)</li> <li>• Education (monthly)</li> <li>• Adult Services (6-weekly)</li> <li>• Child &amp; Family Services (6-weekly)</li> <li>• Development &amp; Regeneration (every two months)</li> <li>• Natural Environment (every two months)</li> </ul>	Cllr. Chris Holley Cllr. Lyndon Jones Cllr. Sue Jones Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams Cllr. Jeff Jones  Cllr. Peter Jones

Performance Panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant cabinet members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, about services. Performance Panels will hold relevant Cabinet Members to account with clear opportunities for questioning, to explore their work, looking at priorities, actions, achievements and impact. Performance Panel conveners provide a regular update to the Committee to enable discussion on key activities and impact.

**Working Groups** are one-off meetings established to enable a 'light-touch' approach to specific topics of concern, to consider a specific report or information, resulting in a letter to the relevant Cabinet Member(s) or report to Cabinet with views and recommendations.

Four one-off Working Groups were included in the work programme, to be completed as time and resources allow. The following Working Group meetings were held during 2020/21:

<b>Working Groups</b>	<b>Convener</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workforce</li><li>• Digital Inclusion</li></ul>	Cllr Cyril Anderson Cllr Lesley Walton

### **3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 0**

The planned re-start of the previously identified inquiry on Procurement was delayed during 2020/21 due to the pandemic and its impact on the scrutiny work programme. The inquiry was re-convened at the start of the 2021/22 municipal year, in June 2021.

### **3.4 Number of Working Group topics completed = 2**

Work on the following topic(s) was completed through meetings of Working Groups:

- Workforce
- Digital Inclusion

NOTE: There are also regional scrutiny arrangements that Swansea is involved in, which enabled scrutiny councillors to look at the work of the Education Through Regional Working (ERW) School Improvement Consortia, and progress / delivery of the Swansea Bay City Region City Deal programme.

## **B. How well did we do?**

### **3.5 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 86%**

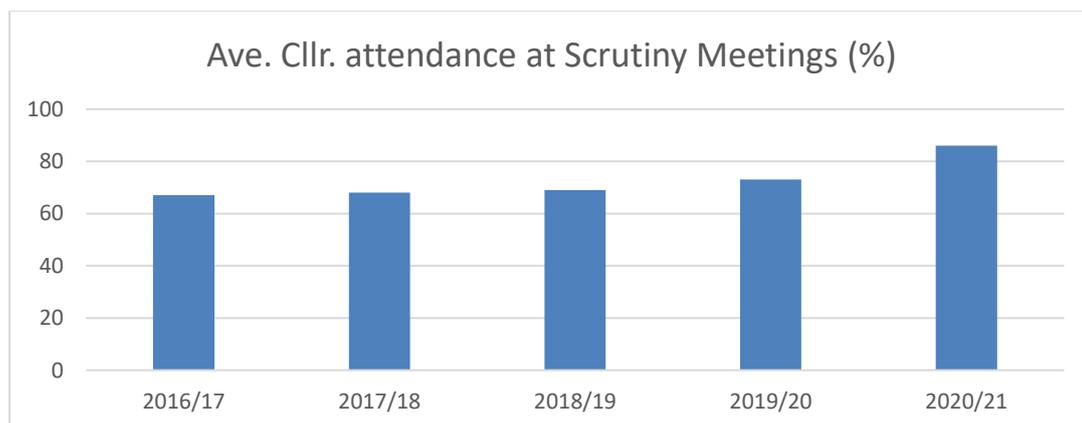
The rate of councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process.

Council determines the membership of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. 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. Our figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, Panel meetings and Working Groups. Attendance at the Committee meetings was 90%.

It is good to see a healthy increase on previous years, possibly helped by the ability for councillors to join meetings remotely.

Comparison with previous years:

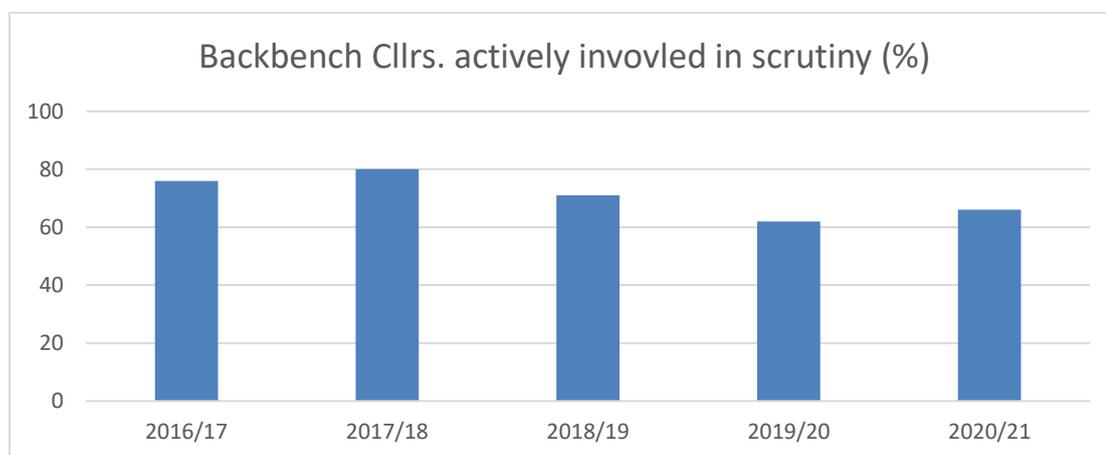


### **3.6 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 66%**

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

Comparison with previous years:



### **3.7 Meetings with public observers = 24%**

Scrutiny is important as a mechanism for community engagement. The extent to which the public observes meetings may indicate whether there is a significant focus of scrutiny on matters of public interest. All scrutiny meetings, whether the Committee or Panels and Working Group, are conducted in public, subject to specific items of business that on rare occasions may contain exempt information. On average, almost a quarter of the 38 scrutiny meetings held were observed by members of the public who joined the remote meeting on request or in order to ask a question.

Committee meetings were live-streamed, however Panel / Working Group meetings were not. However all meetings were recorded, with video subsequently published on the Council's website / YouTube account for viewing. The move to remote meetings during the pandemic has affected our ability to report accurately on the number of public observers, other than those we know to have been specifically invited into meetings. A scan of YouTube views, however, shows Committee meetings seem to attract up to 50 viewers, significantly more people than who would have watched meetings pre-COVID from the public gallery. There are similarly good figures across other scrutiny meetings.

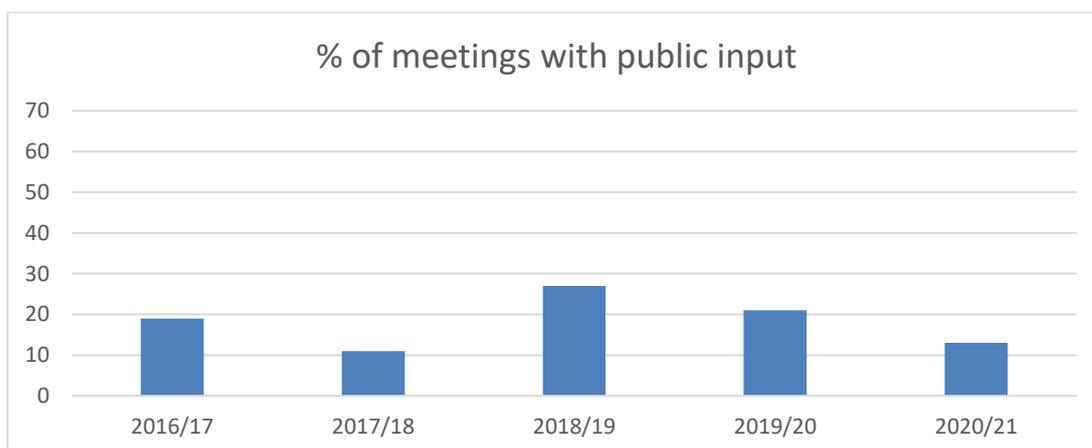
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.8 Meetings with public input = 13%

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. 13% 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.

Comparison with previous years:

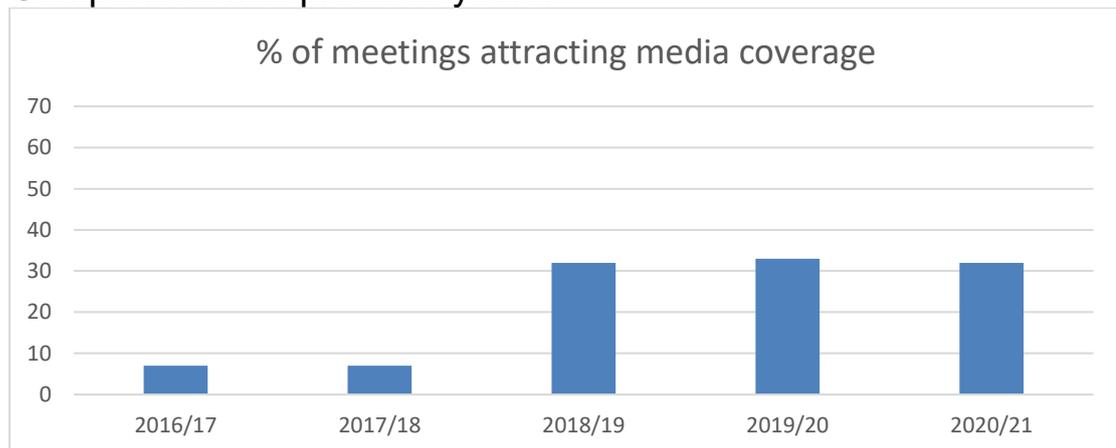


### 3.9 Meetings attracting media coverage = 32%

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, e.g. in print in the South Wales Evening Post or Western Mail, and/or on websites including WalesOnline, BBC etc. Across all activities there were at least 13 scrutiny discussions reported in the local press (print and on-line).

Issues which generated coverage included scrutiny discussion on: COVID-19 impacts, and particularly the impact on social care services, Mental Health Services, Domestic Abuse, Active Travel, Welsh Housing Quality Standards, Council Budget, Crime & Disorder, and School Buildings.

Comparison with previous years:

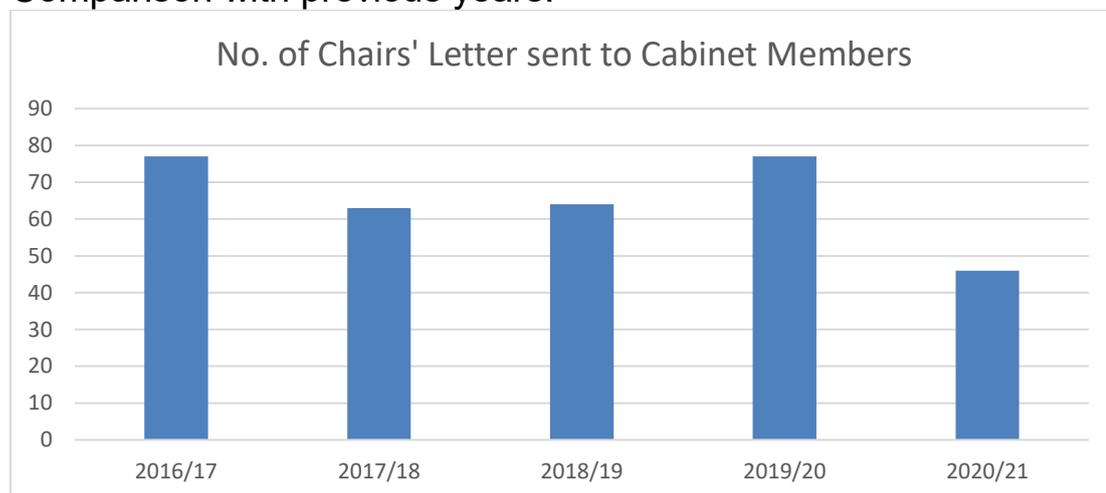


## C. How did scrutiny impact on the business of the Council?

### 3.10 Number of Chairs' Letters sent to Cabinet Members = 46

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. 46 letters were sent to Cabinet Members.

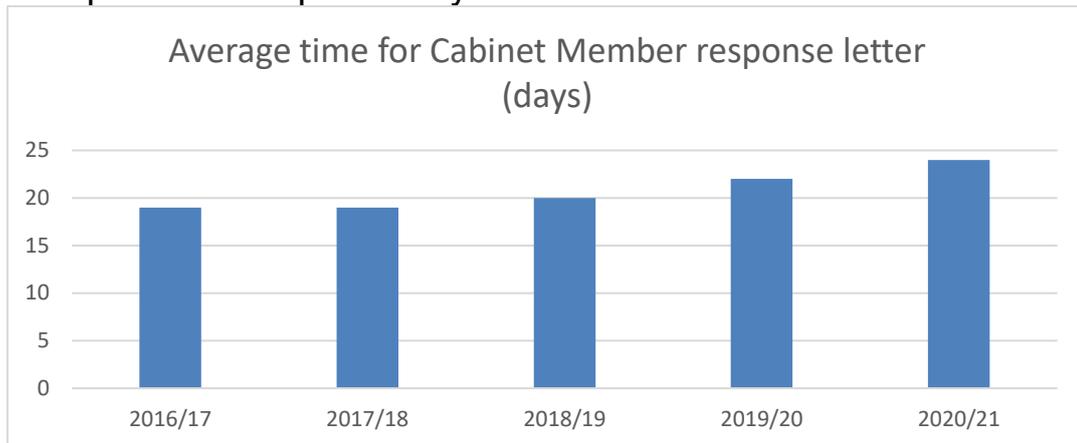
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.11 Average time for Cabinet Member response letter = 24 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 was 24 days, which indicates that scrutiny is generally getting a timely response to views, concerns, and any suggested action for Cabinet Members.

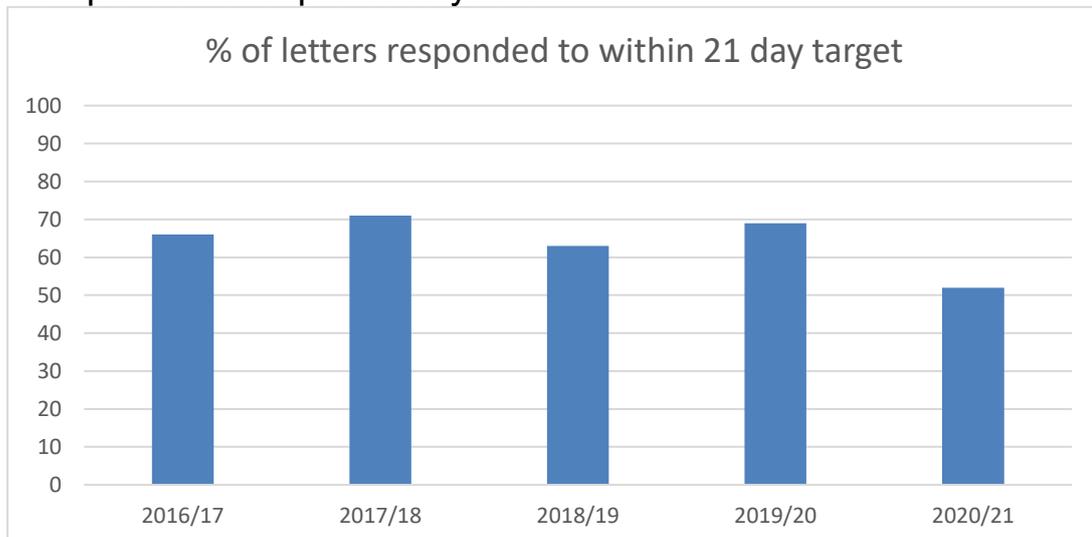
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.12 Letters responded to within 21 day target = 52%

Whilst the response to scrutiny letters was on average 24 days, some letters did take longer. The number of letters responded to within the 21 day target was 52% (12 out of 23 letters).

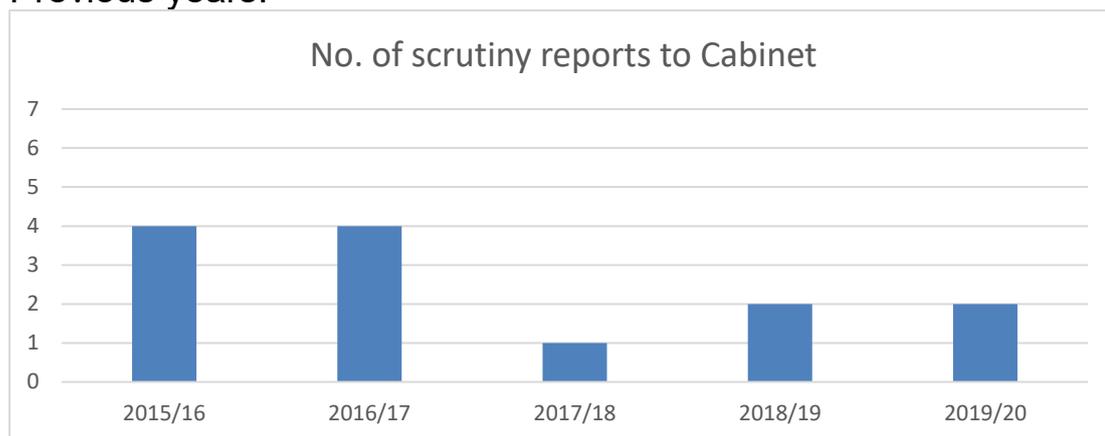
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.13 Number of Scrutiny reports to Cabinet = 0

In-depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations agreed by scrutiny and its action plan on how the recommendations will be implemented. Scrutiny Working Groups also have the option of either writing a letter to relevant Cabinet Member(s) or report to Cabinet, depending on outcomes from discussion. There were no reports presented to Cabinet during 2020/21.

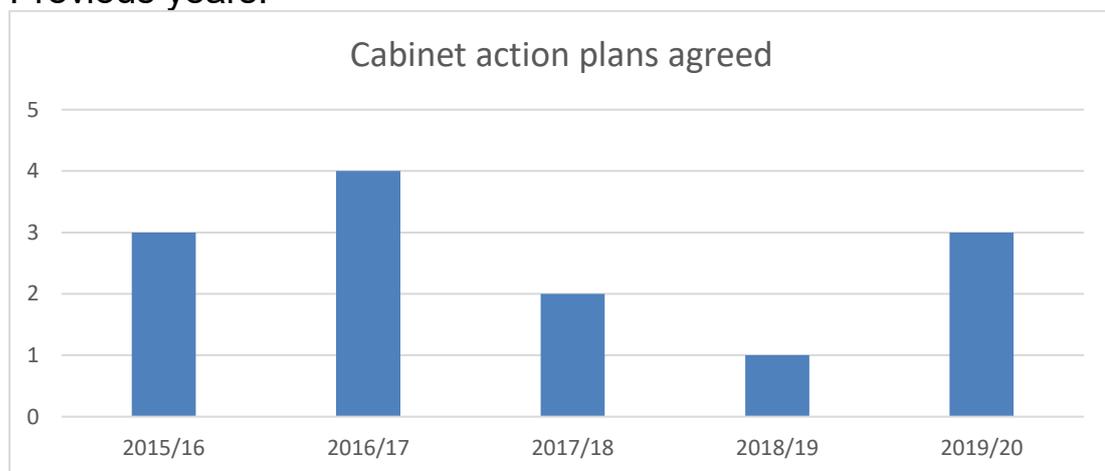
Previous years:



### 3.14 Cabinet action plans agreed = 0

Once recommendations and an action plan have been agreed by Cabinet, scrutiny will follow up on progress with implementation and impact. 2020/21 did not feature any action plans being published and agreed by Cabinet, as there were no reports from scrutiny requiring response.

Previous years:



### 3.15 Follow ups undertaken = 1

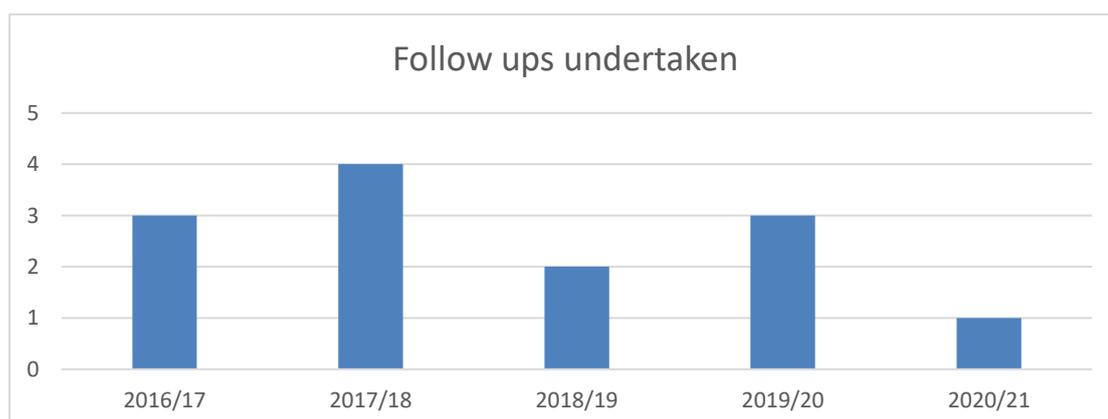
Inquiry Panels reconvene to follow up on the implementation of agreed recommendations and Cabinet action plans, and assess the impact of their work. A meeting will usually be held 6-12 months following Cabinet decision, with a further follow up arranged if required.

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. Previous scrutiny inquiries that required a follow up were followed up:

Inquiry	Convener	Cabinet Action Plan agreed	Monitoring Status
Equalities	Cllr. Lyndon Jones	November 2019	In progress - follow up meeting held 28 Jan 2021; further follow up tba Nov 2021

The Scrutiny Programme Committee will follow up any Working Group reports to Cabinet.

Comparison with previous years:

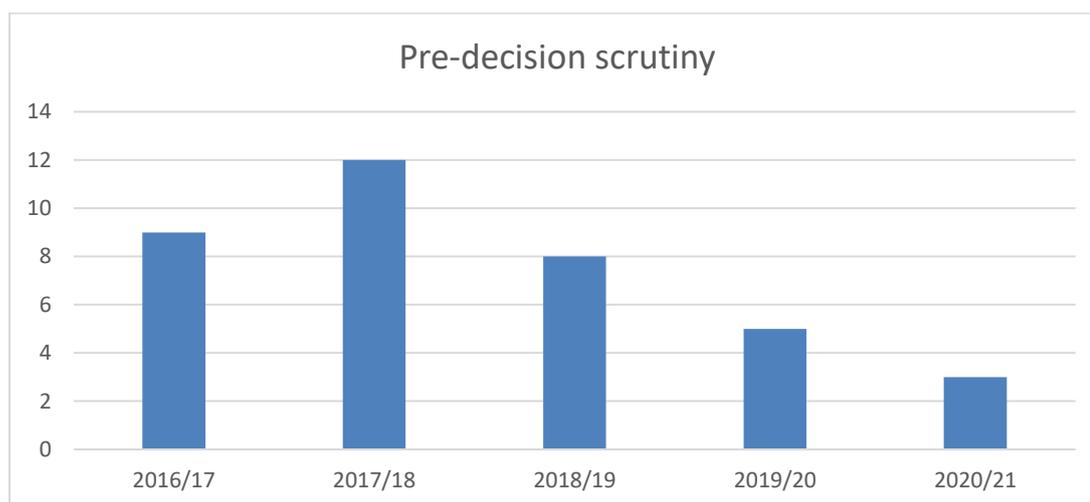


### 3.16 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre-decision scrutiny = 3

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 three 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
Proposed Lease to Mumbles Community Council under the Community Asset Transfer Policy	Delivery & Operations Investment, Regeneration & Tourism	21 Jan 2021	Committee
Annual Budget	Economy & Strategy (Leader)	18 Feb 2021	Service Improvement & Finance Panel (with contribution from other Panels)
Development of 71/72 The Kingsway & 69/70 The Kingsway – Business Case (FPR7)	Economy & Strategy (Leader)	20 May 2021	Service Improvement & Finance Panel

Comparison with previous years:



### 3.17 Number of Cabinet reports subject to Call-in = 0

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. There were no Cabinet decisions ‘called in’ over the past year.

### **3.18 Cabinet Members who attended at least one Scrutiny meeting – 100%**

Cabinet Members attend scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information to assist scrutiny and account for their work. Cabinet attendance at scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the 'holding to account' role of scrutiny is functioning well. It ensures that scrutiny provides regular challenge to decision-makers.

We have previously reported on the structured Cabinet Member Q & A Sessions organised by the Scrutiny Programme Committee, which enabled the Committee to explore the work of Cabinet Members, looking at priorities, actions, achievements and impact. There is now a more targeted approach calling in Cabinet Members as and when required to report on specific portfolio responsibilities and issues, with emphasis on Performance Panels to hold relevant Cabinet Members to account with clear opportunities for questioning. So we are now reporting on whether all Cabinet Members have been engaged with scrutiny, whether with the Committee, Panel or Working Group, over the last year. The range of issues discussed within the Committee alone involved six Cabinet Members.

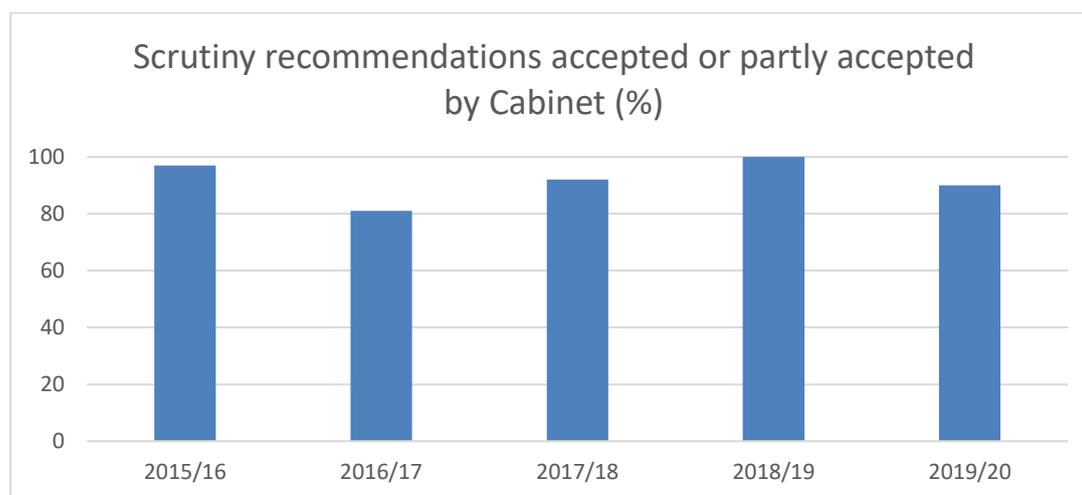
Although there are 10 Cabinet Portfolios, during 2020/21 there were 11 councillors in cabinet positions. The Supporting Communities portfolio operating under a job share system between two councillors sharing the responsibilities. Our target is always 100%.

## D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

### 3.19 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = n/a

The rate that Cabinet accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. We cannot report on this for 2020/21 as there were no outstanding scrutiny reports to Cabinet requiring a formal response.

Previous years:



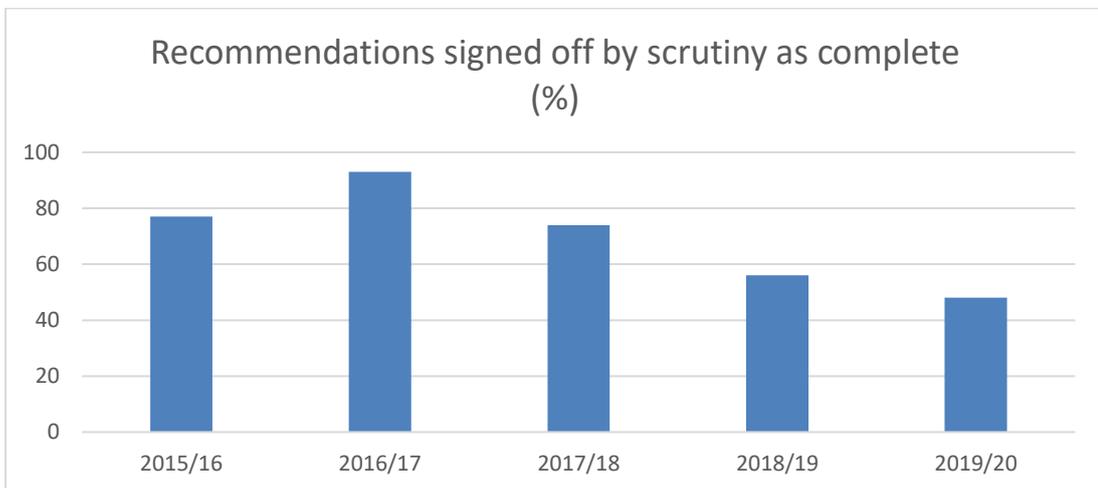
### 3.20 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = n/a

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 agreed 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 would represent the percentage of recommendations accepted by scrutiny as being completed for the year.

The Equalities Inquiry, which made 18 recommendations, was formally responded to by Cabinet in November 2019 and was followed up by the Panel in January 2021. Although some notable progress was reported, such as the creation of the new Strategic Equality and Future Generations Board, which will take forward actions and recommendations within the Council's Strategic

Equality Plan and the Scrutiny Inquiry, and associated support to drive improvement, the pandemic had impacted on the Council's ability to focus on this work. The Panel agreed that there has been positive progress with the recommendations and work done so far should provide a good foundation for moving forward in the medium and longer term. The Panel agreed to meet again in November 2021 to look in more detail at the progress made and impact of the inquiry, when a full assessment of the implementation of scrutiny recommendations and agreed Cabinet action plan will be made, before formal monitoring is concluded. It should be noted that in many cases implementation of scrutiny recommendations continues beyond the process of formal monitoring.

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, and other scrutiny activities, 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 produces a summary of the headlines from the work of scrutiny for Council and the public, which focuses 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:

- **Continuing to play a role in Regional Scrutiny** (*reference to Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee and Education Through Regional Working Scrutiny Councillor Group*)
- **Continuing to monitor issues of public concern** (*reference to Child & Family Services Performance Panel*)
- **Picking up on public concerns about the Council's Active Travel plans and consultation processes** (*reference to Scrutiny Programme Committee*)
- **Investigating the impact of the pandemic on health & wellbeing of staff** (*reference to Workforce Working Group*)
- **Ensuring the Council's budget and corporate arrangements are effective and efficient** (*reference to Service Improvement & Finance Performance Panel*)
- **Considering work done to increase digital inclusion in Swansea** (*reference to Digital Inclusion Working Group*)
- **Adapting the work of scrutiny** (*Committee and Performance Panels*)
- **Questioning Cabinet Members** (*through the Committee, Panels, and Working Groups*)
- **Following up on scrutiny of Equalities** (*Equalities Inquiry Panel*)

## **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 usually held within the Scrutiny Programme Committee and Scrutiny Performance Panels towards the end of each municipal year.

5.1.2 The Scrutiny Programme Committee carried out an Annual Work Programme Review in May 2021, reflecting on the past year, the work of the Committee and work programme, to identify any improvement and development issues. As well as reviewing previously agreed improvement objectives, councillors were encouraged to identify areas of improvement in relation to the work programme and scrutiny practice, so that it is even more effective. No specific new improvement issues were identified for 2021/22.

5.1.3 Looking back, as a result of discussion and feedback at the beginning of 2020/21, we have seen:

- A more flexible Committee work plan, focussing on the most pressing issues and addressing any gaps in the scrutiny work programme.
- Better co-ordination between the Committee and work of Performance Panels.
- Changes to the work programme, which have strengthened the ability of all Performance Panels to manage their workload and make more impact.
- Scrutiny being flexible during the pandemic, ensuring that activity was proportionate and focused on the major issues, e.g. adjusting meeting schedules and frequency. This included the two 'Social Services' Panels temporarily holding joint meetings instead, focusing purely on the COVID-19 situation and impact, to reduce burden on a department under significant pressure during the second wave.

## 5.2 Scrutiny Improvement Objectives

5.2.1 A number of scrutiny improvement objectives and action plan were agreed by the Committee in January 2019. This included actions to address the three proposals for improvement made by the Wales Audit Office following its review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements in 2018. This was a co-ordinated and comprehensive single improvement plan for scrutiny, for the issues that matter most.

### **WAO Proposals for Improvement**

- 1) The Council should consider the skills and training that scrutiny members may need to better prepare them for current and future challenges, and develop and deliver an appropriate training and development programme, including providing additional training on the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.
- 2) The Council should strengthen its evaluation of the impact and outcomes of its scrutiny activity.
- 3) The Council should further clarify the distinction between scrutiny and Policy Development Committee activity in relation to policy development.

### **Councillor Improvement Issues**

- 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 The Committee has regularly reviewed and considered progress against the action plan, last in May 2021. The review of the current improvement plan showed only a small number of outstanding actions:

- Development and delivery of a scrutiny training and development programme (as suggested by Wales Audit Office) – this will be arranged post-May 2022 for the new Council. It is anticipated this would include areas such as: the Scrutiny Process, Chairing Skills; Questioning Skills, Public Participation, as well as improving understanding around the Well-being of Future Generations Act and how scrutiny can support its impact on local services, policies and decision-making. Any planned programme

will be refined subject to further feedback / indications from scrutiny councillors.

- Developing a method of direct post-meeting evaluation from those attending scrutiny meetings (Cabinet Members, officers, external persons etc.) that will help strengthen our evaluation of the impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity – this would be developed during 2021/22.
- Developing a specific Facebook page for scrutiny that should improve visibility of the work of scrutiny and sharing of stories, and active public engagement – this would be progressed during 2021/22.

5.2.3 The Committee was content with progress against scrutiny improvement objectives and thought would be given to other improvement objectives for the future and/or new actions that will help deliver already identified objectives.

## 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.

### **Connect with Scrutiny:**

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# Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – 2020/2021

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

## Continuing to play a role in Regional Scrutiny

Decisions taken at a regional level have important implications for local citizens in Swansea and therefore scrutiny is vital to ensure any new decisions made through regional bodies and public service collaborations are held to account.

### Swansea Bay City Deal

*(Lead: Councillors Jan Curtice, Phil Downing, & Jeff Jones)*

The Swansea Bay City Region covers the four local authority areas of Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire and Swansea. The Swansea Bay City Deal sets out an integrated, transformational approach to delivering the scale and nature of investment needed to support plans for growth in the Region.

The Swansea Bay City Region Joint Committee (SBCRJC) has been established to deliver the Swansea Bay City Deal.

Three members from each of the four local authorities form the Swansea Bay City Region Joint Scrutiny Committee which is in place to hold to account all decisions made by the SBCRJC, and monitor of the City Deal Programme

This Joint Scrutiny Committee meets every two months. At its last meeting held on 2 February 2021 the committee received verbal updates from Swansea University’s Pro-Vice Chancellor for Planning and Resources, Professor Steve Wilks on the Life Science & Well-being Campuses and from officers on the Swansea Bay City Deal Funding.

Members expressed disappointment that no written documentation had been received to accompany the Pentre Awel Project update which was also on the agenda for this meeting. Members deferred this item to a future meeting with a written update to accompany it.

The Chair of the Committee addressed overall concern about the lack of written updates being provided to the committee and stated that the Committee’s expectations going forward are that written information must accompany all agenda items so that the Committee can fully carry out its scrutiny function appropriately.

#### **Update on the Life Science & Well-being Campuses:**

The committee heard about this project which has a City Deal value of £15m, is projected to create 1100 jobs and add £150m to the GVA by 2031 and it encompasses two phases. Phase one is concerned with improving treatments and recovery so that people are able to return to their home environments at a much faster pace.

Phase 1 is fundamentally the City Deal funding which will provide support to invest at the Morriston Hospital site: refurbishment of the management centre, essentially linking clinical innovation and unlocking access to the Morriston Hospital site and the Sketty Lane site: this will include the development of a Sports Science & Well-being Technology Centre, the University is currently looking to identify potential partners to work in collaboration. Phase 1 will essentially unlock phase two.

Members queried the effect of COVID-19 on the University's financial position and heard from Professor Wilks that the University are in a '*fair and strong*' position from a financial perspective. He added that the University are still fully committed and are able to deliver the projects they have committed to and there has been no change or impact on the University's commitment to the deal, in light of the pandemic.

Members queried the current relevance of the nine projects within the City Deal and members specifically referred to the Digital Infrastructure project and if there would be a requirement for future funding requirements to amplify the project. Members queried if the project would still be relevant considering the digital age currently moving at a rapid pace due to the pressures posed by the pandemic. Professor Wilks was confident the project would respond and meet its relevant aims.

The Committee asked that a written update on the University's involvement with City Deal projects be provided.

## Education Through Regional Working (ERW)

*(Lead: Councillors Lyndon Jones & Peter Black)*

ERW has been one of Wales' four consortia who work with schools to raise standards and provide a range of support, which includes professional development and intervention programmes. Swansea Council has been one of the six local authorities who signed up to this regional improvement service. Swansea was the host authority for the joint ERW Scrutiny Group meeting in March which then included Scrutiny Councillors from the five local authorities Swansea, Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The aim of this Joint Scrutiny Group has been to help ensure the best educational outcomes for children in the ERW region by supporting effective scrutiny to:

- Support consistent scrutiny across each council
- 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

Swansea had given notice to leave this consortium arrangement on 31 March 2020 by 1 April 2021, but the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel heard that a report has gone to Cabinet asking it to defer removal of Swansea from ERW to allow more time for the region to set up the arrangements for a new regional body that will commence from 1 September 2021. Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Powys and Pembrokeshire Councils have agreed to remain within the interim partnership until 31 August 2021. Discussions are continuing into which Councils will be included in the new arrangements post September 2021.

The Scrutiny Councillor Group asked what the governance arrangements of the new partnership will be and how scrutiny will fit into this new model, what its key objectives will be and how will success be measured. The Group was informed that new arrangements will be taken to each local authority's Cabinet for agreement and that these plans and the governance model will also be shared with scrutiny locally.

## Continuing to monitor issues of public concern

Since the start of the pandemic there have been reports in the media and growing public concern over increases in domestic abuse cases across the UK, Wales included.

*(Lead: Councillor Paxton Hood-Williams)*

The Child & Family Services Scrutiny Panel focussed on the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) report: Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV).

The Panel heard from senior officers that at the start of the pandemic there was a discrepancy found between the media reporting of increases in domestic abuse cases and the reporting on the ground. The Service found a decrease in the number of referrals reported to the police and in referrals to the specialist sector. Officers explained that this suggested people were either not able to reach out and access support or felt that they could not for whatever reason.

The Panel heard that the Service focussed on a multi-media communications campaign and also took into account the effects of digital poverty. Funding was secured to distribute tablets, mobile phones and WI-FI dongles to ensure families affected by domestic abuse had the means to seek help.

The Panel expressed their gratitude to officers and staff across the Authority for their hard work in continuing to tackle VAWDASV during these difficult times.

The Panel heard that the Council has made good progress and met all five generic recommendations that came out the WAO report. The Panel was pleased to hear that Swansea's work around the Domestic Abuse Hub had a mention in the WAO report and was found to be an innovative way of working.

The Panel noted from the report, a funding gap for prevention work and queried if there is currently enough funding for the work that needs to be done. Officers explained that there has been additional funding but there is still a gap. The Panel noted that this funding is positive, however, it comes at a risk as the work is funded by grants that are uncertain going forward. Officers explained that this issue is often discussed with Welsh Government as it needs to be mainstreamed.

The Panel is eager to assist regarding mainstreaming of funding and have asked officers to provide further information on how this could be achieved.

The Panel has also asked if training can be put in place for all councillors, as school governors, to raise awareness.

## Active Travel

*(Lead: Councillor Peter Black)*

Following a public request for scrutiny, with concerns about the implementation of Active Travel schemes and questions about the extent of public consultation carried out, the Scrutiny Programme Committee discussed this matter with the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management, along with input from lead officers. The scrutiny session helped to shed light on and understand what consultation processes the Council utilises and why; and the Committee considered whether, in light of experience, that could be improved, and any wider learning points for the future.

As a result of this scrutiny the Cabinet Member has given his commitment to maintaining a public dialogue on all future Active Travel schemes, including local residents and community groups, as well as local councillors. He is making improvements to the information publically reported to Cabinet, including maps of routes proposed to be constructed in 2021/22. This will be supported by communications to raise awareness and provide opportunities for engagement on schemes under development.

## Investigating the impact of the pandemic on health & wellbeing of staff

The Covid-19 pandemic has had great impacts on how we all work and live. The Workforce Scrutiny Working Group looked at the impact of the pandemic on the health & wellbeing of staff; how the Council is supporting this; issues around home working; staff sickness; staff turnover; use of agency staff and pressures.

*(Lead: Councillor Cyril Anderson)*

The Working Group (WG) received an update on the position the Authority was in before the pandemic regarding agile working and heard that overall it was 'good'.

The WG noted that the Health and Safety Team were able to put in place a large amount of support for the wellbeing of the workforce.

Staff stress and anxiety was discussed and the WG queried whether the Authority employs psychologists in the Wellbeing Team and if more could be employed. Officers confirmed 'Talking Therapists' are employed and that front line staff have found this service invaluable. The WG has requested clarification from Cabinet Members on the qualification of these 'Talking Therapists', if they are employed by the Authority and what their role is.

The WG has since heard back that they are BACP (British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy) accredited and qualified in Counselling and Stress management and there are also two EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation & Reprocessing) specialists to treat PTSD (Posttraumatic stress disorder).

Regarding mental health help the WG requested clarification of the correct procedure for staff to follow, the services they can access for help and what happens after the initial contact has been made.

Response from Cabinet Members explained that Staff can self-refer or through a manager. They are triaged based on risk and then contacted by a counsellor. During Covid, front line staff have been prioritised for contact within 24hours. There is also support for managers and a range of on-line resources available to staff over the intranet. The WG was also informed that significant feedback from staff has been received and many have stated that they would not have remained in work without the support – over 90% of staff under the care of the service remain in work and do not go off sick.

The WG queried Trade Union (TU) engagement and insight and heard that meetings with Unions were held weekly during the height of the pandemic and are now held two-weekly. Issues raised were addressed at these meetings. The WG were pleased with this extensive engagement with the TUs and expressed that they wish to see this continue in the future. The WG was reassured in the response received from Cabinet Members that *'Trade Union engagement continues on a fortnightly basis to discuss emerging HR and health and safety points.'*

The WG expressed the wish to meet again in six months once the results of the second staff survey have been analysed and when there is a better understanding of what the future holds for the Authority and its workforce.

## Ensuring the Council's budget and corporate arrangements are effective and efficient

*(Lead: Councillor Chris Holley)*

The Service Improvement & Finance Panel discussed the Quarter 3 (Q3) Budget Monitoring report 2020-21, the Mid-Year Budget Statement 2020-21 and the Treasury Management Strategy Statement. The Panel heard that Capital financial requirements will go up by hundreds of millions of pounds, measured as a percentage of the revenue budget. Officers explained that in every scenario, they see budgets going up, although subject to complex interplays.

The Panel queried the general fund capital expenditure; why there is a huge difference in the original estimate / outturn. Officers explained that this is due to a direct consequence of building the Arena, fuelled by the field hospital expenditure. The Chief Finance Officer commented that this demonstrates the sheer amount of capital spend that is underway.

The Panel has since written to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance & Strategy and asked for detailed information about the expected increase in repayments relating to the general fund capital expenditure due to the increase in the borrowing requirements.

## Considering work done to increase digital inclusion in Swansea

The Digital Inclusion Scrutiny Working group looked at the work done by the Authority to increase digital inclusion before and during the pandemic, the work already planned for 2021/22 and what the Authority has planned for the future, post COVID-19.

*(Lead: Councillor Lesley Walton)*

The Working Group (WG) discussed the Council's Digital Inclusion Strategy/Framework. The WG felt that it is important to look at how people are accessing council services now as opposed to pre-pandemic as they recognise the landscape has changed rapidly since the start of the COVID19 Pandemic.

The WG felt that since many more people are now online in some form, the strategy should be more focussed on equality and the title of digital 'equality' framework should be used rather than the term digital 'inclusion' as this would better reflect the strategy moving forward.

The WG agreed that the Digital Inclusion Strategic Framework (DISF) needs to be reviewed in light of new data emerging post pandemic and to reflect the natural demographic shift over the coming years. The WG was informed that a draft DISF had been developed pre Covid and will now be reviewed. The WG has requested to be contacted at the appropriate time to contribute to this piece of work.

The WG heard that a variety of methods of communication are used to reach Swansea residents, whether digitally included or excluded. The WG was particularly pleased to hear about the 'Chatbot' that went live during the pandemic to assist people when looking for information and signposting in relation to domestic violence. The WG felt this was a good example of how we can use our website to assist those who are most in need.

The WG heard that a new and improved council wide website is being developed. Proposed improvements include: good practice in accessibility and the use of plain English and Welsh language. The Web Manager is working with the Access to Services officer so views from different equality groups are sought. The new website is due to be delivered in the late summer, the WG have requested to be contacted at an appropriate time to provide feedback and thoughts on the new website's design.

The WG congratulated officers for the good work done so far and especially throughout the difficult times during the pandemic. Overall the WG agreed that the Council is on the right track with its Digital Inclusion Strategy and do recognise that the Council is keen to make the right improvements moving forward.

The WG expressed wishes to revisit this issue on an annual basis given its importance and the work that is continuing to be done by the Authority to improve in this area.



## Chair's Round up

This is my roundup of the work of scrutiny for 2020/21, as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

### Chairing Scrutiny

I was delighted to be elected Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee in June 2020 to lead the work of scrutiny in Swansea. Thanks, however, must go to the outgoing chair, Cllr. Mary Jones, who provided leadership since 2014 and achieved so much, overseeing numerous improvements to scrutiny process and practice here, with arrangements receiving regular praise from auditors and inspectors, helping to make Swansea Scrutiny well regarded by others.

### Work planning

With the delayed start to the 2020/21 council year we decided to plan for the next 18 months, taking things up to May 2022. For the first time we held a remote Work Planning Conference, which took place in October, and it worked very well enabling more scrutiny councillors to participate than we have seen previously. Taking into account work already committed and feedback from the Conference, a work programme was agreed by the Committee. Always looking to improve the way we do things, we agreed to make some key changes:

- The Committee work plan moving away from routine monthly Cabinet Member Q & A sessions to a more targeted approach, creating space to examine specific issues of concern, and any gaps in the overall programme, for focussed discussion at Committee meetings.
- Incorporating scrutiny of the Public Services Board into the work of the Committee, removing the need for a standalone Performance Panel to carry out this work.
- Ensuring the Committee incorporates into its work plan specific follow up on any recommendations made to cabinet members by Scrutiny Working Groups.
- Changing the frequency of the Adult Services & Child & Family Services Performance Panels, aligning them both to a 6-weekly cycle, reflecting their equal importance.
- Increasing the frequency of the Natural Environment Performance Panel from quarterly to every two months, reflecting the growing seriousness of issues around biodiversity and climate change and their importance.

Aside from the work of the Committee and six Performance Panels, which meet on an ongoing basis, we included space in the Programme to look at Procurement, and Anti-Social Behaviour for in-depth inquiry, and Workforce, Digital Inclusion, Bus Services and Health City as one-off Working Groups.

### Adapting the work of Scrutiny

Since the end of March 2020 meetings have been conducted on-line via Microsoft Teams. We were happy to learn we were the first Council in Wales to hold a remote scrutiny meeting!

The pandemic has of course caused some disruption to the delivery of the work programme, and work of scrutiny. Our activity has had to be flexible and responsive to organisational pressures as the Council has needed to focus its efforts on tackling the pandemic and dealing with the impact locally. We have, however, ensured focus on monitoring and challenging Council action in relation to the COVID-19 response and recovery. Within the Committee, there was continued discussion with the Leader of the Council and members of the Corporate Management Team on the local impact of the pandemic, dealing with the immediate issues / challenges, as well as short, medium and long term planning.

All Performance Panels have drilled down on the service specific experience and issues. The two Social Services Panel met jointly for a period to reduce the burden on work on the department. The work of other Panels had to adjust and re-focus accordingly, with meeting frequency also affected.

### **Questioning Cabinet Members**

Although moving away from routine Q & A sessions at Committee, Cabinet Members have been held to account on an ongoing basis through meetings of the Committee, our six Performance Panels, and Working Groups, whether to discuss specific topics of concern, a range of service / policy issues, or whole service improvement. Acting as a 'critical friend', we have questioned and challenged them on their priorities, actions, achievements and impact. The Committee has continued to call in the Leader of the Council for questioning and at a meeting in January 2021, he was asked about COVID-19 Response & Recovery, Brexit implications and response, the Council Budget, Partnership / Regional Working, and City Centre Regeneration. We invite the public and all scrutiny councillors to contribute ideas to ensure the Committee asks the right questions. We have published a summary of each scrutiny session and views of scrutiny in a letter to relevant Cabinet Members, ensuring an ongoing conversation between scrutiny and the executive to advise and exert influence.

### **Following up on scrutiny of Equalities**

The Equalities Inquiry Panel followed up on progress with implementation of scrutiny recommendations and impact of the inquiry that was published in 2019. The Panel had come up with ways in which the Council could embed requirements under the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Duty for Wales). Although some good progress was acknowledged by the Panel, it was felt necessary to arrange a further follow up meeting, which will take place around November 2021, and will allow the Panel to better consider and assess progress made and the impact of the inquiry, before formal monitoring is concluded.

### **Leading scrutiny activities**

Thanks to all those councillors who have played a part in carrying out scrutiny, and particularly to those who have taken a lead over the past year:

Adult Services Performance Panel (Cllr Sue Jones); Child & Family Services Performance Panel (Cllr. Paxton Hood-Williams); Development & Regeneration Performance Panel (Cllr. Jeff Jones); Education Performance Panel & Equalities Inquiry Panel (Cllr. Lyndon Jones); Natural Environment Performance Panel (Cllr. Peter Jones); Service Improvement & Finance Performance Panel (Cllr. Chris Holley); Digital Inclusion Working Group (Cllr. Lesley Walton); and the Workforce Working Group (Cllr. Cyril Anderson)

### **Annual Report published**

We presented our Annual Report for 2019/20 to Council in March 2021. It reflected on the range of different activities carried out by scrutiny councillors during that 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. With the impact of the pandemic, last year and this year have been anything but business as usual but we have continued to work hard in both supporting and challenging the organisation, contributing to better services, policies, decisions, and a better Swansea.

*Councillor Peter Black*