



SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP – 11TH OCTOBER 2018

SUBJECT: WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FIT FOR THE FUTURE? - CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Scrutiny Leadership Group of the outcome of the review undertaken by Wales Audit Office (WAO) outlined in its report 'Overview and Scrutiny Fit for the Future' (appendix 1). The WAO review has no statutory recommendations but makes proposals for improvement. Scrutiny Leadership Group is asked to consider the findings and recommend actions in order to respond to the report.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report outlines the recommendation contained in the Wales Audit Office report 'Overview and Scrutiny Fit for the Future' and includes a breakdown of the training and development available to Members during the Induction 2017. The report suggests the timescale for the next scrutiny self-evaluation and also proposes a workshop for Members and senior officers in order to develop an action plan.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The scrutiny function is a key part of the governance arrangements in Caerphilly County Borough Council. It is important therefore to ensure that Members understand and are supported to fulfil their scrutiny role, so that decisions that may impact on future generations are properly scrutinised. An effective scrutiny function can ensure that council policies are scrutinised against the following goals:

- *A prosperous Wales*
- *A resilient Wales*
- *A healthier Wales*
- *A more equal Wales*
- *A Wales of cohesive communities*
- *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*
- *A globally responsible Wales.*

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Wales Audit Office carried out a review of the scrutiny function across all 22 Welsh local authorities in order to establish how 'fit for the future' they are in responding to current challenges such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, scrutiny of Public Services Boards and continued pressure on public finances. The WAO also looked at the progress made in addressing the recommendations from their earlier national improvement study 'Scrutiny? Good Question' (May 2014).

4.2 The proposals for improvement to the scrutiny function are as follows:

P1 - Improving the provision of training and development opportunities for members to help:

- a. improve their understanding of their role in overview and scrutiny;
- b. develop their skills to be able to scrutinise effectively; and
- c. improve their understanding and consideration of the Well-being of Future Generations Act when undertaking scrutiny activity by providing further training.

P2 - Clarifying the role of Cabinet Members within the overview and scrutiny process to ensure that arrangements support transparency and accountability.

P3 - Setting clear priorities and actions for improvement for the scrutiny function taking into account current and future challenges.

Training and Development

4.3 Wales Audit Office stated that:

- The Council values its overview and scrutiny function but for it to improve and meet future challenges, members need more focussed training, development and support to better understand and undertake their scrutiny roles effectively. The overview and scrutiny function is hindered by limited member understanding of their role and a lack of timely and specific training and development opportunities to support them to be more effective.
- Scrutiny Chairs manage meetings well but improved planning would help scrutiny activity be more focussed.
- Despite regularly reviewing its overview and scrutiny function, the Council has not identified clear actions to improve its impact, and most members lack an understanding of future challenges for the overview and scrutiny function.

Background

4.4 Following the local government elections in 2017, Members were offered the following information, training and seminars:

4.4.1 **Overview of Council** - A presentation in the Council Chamber by the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors to give an overview of the organisation and some of the key services offered by the local authority. Members also had an opportunity to meet senior officers and other Councillors at a 'Market Place' event at Penallta House.

4.4.2 **Introduction to Scrutiny Committees Training** – this was offered as part of the Induction in 2017 and was held before first meeting of the scrutiny committee held after the Annual General Meeting. This training has covered the following:

- Role and purpose of scrutiny.
- Committee terms of reference.
- The Characteristics of Good Scrutiny and Attributes of Good Scrutiny.
- How Scrutiny works at Caerphilly.
- Forward work programmes which include expert witnesses and prioritisation.
- Dedicated performance management meeting.
- Pre-meetings.

4.4.3 The training also directed Members to the Members Portal and the protocols developed on forward work programmes, expert witnesses, cabinet member statements, requesting reports and task and finish groups. Members had the opportunity to ask questions and make

requests for further information.

- 4.4.4 All scrutiny committee members were invited to the scrutiny training with specific encouragement to newly elected members, who were able to attend more than one session to allow them to gain an understanding of the varying responsibilities of each committee. Attendance at these sessions was as follows:

Scrutiny Committee	Overall Attendance	Of Which Newly Elected Members
Education for Life Scrutiny Committee	11	8
Health Social Care & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee	10	5
Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee	11	5
Partnerships Scrutiny Committee	5	0
Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee	5	4

- 4.4.5 **Forward Work Programme Workshops** - Each scrutiny committee member was invited to participate in a workshop to plan the scrutiny committee work programme for the year ahead. Directors and Heads of Service provided information on the key issues and Members had the opportunity to consider and decide what would be added to the forward work programme, alongside issues identified by the committee. The committee were also able to consider any expert witnesses they may have wished to invite.
- 4.4.6 The Induction programme also included a seminar on Decisions for Future Generations in and was attended by 19 Members. Since the WAO review was carried out each scrutiny committee has received refresher training on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act during the annual scrutiny training held in May/June 2018.

Training Programme 2018 -2020

- 4.5 Democratic Services Committee endorsed the Member Training Programme for 2018-2020, at the meeting held on 23rd July 2018. This programme has been developed from the Member Development Survey and includes training on Chairing Skills, Advanced Chairing Skills, Questioning and Listening Skills, Effective Pre-meetings, communication, influencing & negotiating skills, public speaking, performance & improvement, strategic thinking & regional working as well as e-learning module on Decisions for Future Generations.

Self-Evaluation

- 4.6 Scrutiny Leadership Group has been responsible for the oversight of the Scrutiny provision and during 2016/2017 took part in peer evaluation with Newport and Monmouthshire Councils alongside a self-evaluation questionnaire. The outcome was reported to SLG on 26th January 2017 and Members asked that the questionnaire be re-sent to Councillors in order to encourage more responses, this was subsequently done and then reported to SLG on 27th July 2017. SLG asked that the outcome be reported to Full Council (October 2017) and that the survey be repeated twice per council term.
- 4.7 The self-evaluation questionnaire is due to be sent during autumn 2018 (appendix 2) and it is suggested that this is launched alongside a workshop with invitations to both Members and senior officers in order to address the findings in the WAO report. The proposal is to ask workshop members questions in respect of the WAO findings P1, P2 and P3 and use the information to develop an action plan. The outcome of the workshop and the questionnaire can then be reported to Scrutiny Leadership Group alongside the action plan to outline any further improvements to the scrutiny function.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act in that supporting Members to carry out their scrutiny function will ensure that they understand their role in challenging proposals and decisions in the context of the wellbeing of future generations.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the Council's full Equalities Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications contained in this report.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no personnel implications contained in this report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 There are no consultations that have not been included in the report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Scrutiny Leadership Group is asked to consider the Wales Audit office report attached at appendix 1.
- 10.2 Scrutiny Leadership Group is asked to agree the proposals in respect of the 2018 self-evaluation and workshop.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To ensure that the findings of Wales Audit Office are considered and set out proposals to identify further improvements as necessary.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.
- 12.2 Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

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Background Papers:

Democratic Services Committee 17th November 2016 Agenda item 5.

Scrutiny Leadership Group 27th July 2017 Agenda item 5.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Wales Audit Office – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future? – Caerphilly County Borough Council.

Appendix 2 Scrutiny Self-Evaluation Questionnaire 2018