



## SCRUTINY LEADERSHIP GROUP – 25TH SEPTEMBER 2014

**SUBJECT: GWENT SCRUTINY CHALLENGE: ACTION PLAN**

**REPORT BY: SCRUTINY RESEARCH OFFICER**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform Scrutiny Leadership Group of proposals to continue the joint scrutiny improvement work being undertaken in partnership with the other 'Gwent' authorities and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Following the 'Gwent Scrutiny Challenge' event held on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014, this report contains proposals for the 'Legacy Action Plan'.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The operation of scrutiny is required by the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent Assembly legislation.

### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 The Gwent Scrutiny Challenge programme is being funded by the Welsh Government's Scrutiny Development Fund and builds on the Wales Audit Office's national study 'Good Scrutiny: Good Question?'. The Gwent Scrutiny Challenge conference allowed the Council's key regulatory bodies (WAO, CSSIW and Estyn) to set out their expectations for the scrutiny function as well as a presentation by Peter Watkin Jones about the key lessons learnt from the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust Public Enquiry.
- 4.2 As part of the WAO's national scrutiny study, each local authority developed a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan. The next step in the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge is to review the Action Plans and undertake a series of Member Observation Groups to identify areas of good practice and shared areas for further improvement. The Centre for Public Scrutiny have kindly agreed to assist Councils in this process and will provide invaluable expert advice and support in improving the impact of scrutiny committees. The specific proposals for the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge programme are outlined below:

#### **Review of Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan**

- 4.3 The WAO National Scrutiny Study resulted in each local authority producing a Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan, which took into account issues identified during peer review observations and a self-evaluation analyses. The CfPS have agreed to carry out a desktop review of the actions taken by each partner authority to implement their Scrutiny Improvement Action Plans. This will provide an independent review of the actions taken to support scrutiny

improvement as well as identifying where additional support and development is still required.

## **Member Observation Groups**

- 4.4 The CfPS desktop review will be supplemented with Members' Observation Groups. Each Observation Group will be made up of 2 Councillors per partner authority. Councils may nominate up to 4 Members to take part in the Members Observation Groups. This will provide the flexibility and capacity needed for observations to be undertaken concurrently by more than one group. The CfPS will support this exercise by facilitating workshops to ensure Members approach each committee observation session consistently.
- 4.5 The Members Observation Groups will observe 2 meetings per council. Feedback will be provided based on the 5 key themes contained in the WAO's Good Scrutiny: Good Question? report. The themes are paraphrased as below:
- Measureable impact of scrutiny discussions.
  - Meeting management arrangements – Members have prepared for meetings, effective chairing and clear roles and responsibilities.
  - Quality and variety of information/evidence received during scrutiny committee meetings.
  - Scrutiny work programmes aligned with improvement processes and external audit and regulatory inspection reports.
  - Effective engagement with the public and partners.
- 4.6 The findings of the Members Observation Group observation sessions will be used by the CfPS to identify common areas for further improvement.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's EqIA process does not need to be applied.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications not contained in the report.
- 6.2 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (Wales) is directly funded by Welsh Government to support the development of Scrutiny in Wales, therefore there is no cost implication for local authorities that receive their services.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications not contained in the report.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no consultation responses not contained in the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That Members note the joint scrutiny improvement work being undertaken in partnership with the other 'Gwent' authorities and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).
- 9.2 Members are asked to consider volunteering to sit on the Member Observation Groups.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To continue the joint improvement work contained in the Gwent Scrutiny Challenge programme.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000

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