



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE– 17TH MARCH 2015

SUBJECT: SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENTS

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES & SECTION 151 OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline a work programme to identify improvement to the operation of scrutiny following the findings of the Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', dated January 2015.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report identifies the issues for improvement contained the WAO report, a suggested project group to oversee the improvement programme, how those issues can be explored, members and officers who will contribute to this review and the timeline of key milestones.

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 Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', dated January 2015 has identified further improvements scrutiny. The report recognised the work carried out under the scrutiny improvement action plan and the structural arrangements put in place. However, the report identifies that the next stage is to develop the effectiveness of scrutiny and clarify its role.

- 4.2 The WAO's main findings can be summarised as:

- The Chairs and Vice Chairs of scrutiny committees have mixed views on the benefits of pre-meetings.
- Effectiveness of scrutiny's challenge role is limited.
- The role of scrutiny is confused.
- Meetings are long and agendas lack focus.
- 'For Information' agenda items could be handled more for efficiently outside of the formal scrutiny process.
- The Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference are very wide which restricts the time available to discuss subjects in depth.
- Agenda items need to be prioritised and focused on the Council's priorities.
- Information provided to scrutiny is good, however, Chairs and Vice Chairs would like more use of qualitative, historical and comparative information.

- Task and Finish Groups should be used more frequently to review specific issues in more depth.
- Members want to continue to improve their scrutiny role.

Responsibility and Oversight

- 4.3 The Improving Governance Project Board (IGPB) have overall responsibility for overseeing the improvements to scrutiny recommended by the Wales Audit Office report 'Follow-up of the Special Inspection and Reports in the Public Interest', which is chaired by the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer. The Chief Executive and CMT have also asked to be kept informed of progress.

Project Group

- 4.4 In order to identify how improvements can be made it is proposed to set up a project group to oversee the improvement programme, they will report on the projects progress to the IGPB. The suggested members of the project group are:

- Gail Williams Interim Monitoring Officer & Head of Legal Services
- Angharad Price Interim Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer
- Councillor Hefin David Chair Scrutiny Leadership Group
- Councillor Colin Mann Chair Democratic Services Committee
- Councillor Christine Forehead, Cabinet Member HR, Governance and Business

- 4.5 Democratic Services Committee is responsible for keeping under review the resources available for Democratic Services. Therefore, it is proposed that the Chair of Democratic Services Committee will Chair the project group, and the Vice Chair of Democratic Services, Councillor D. Tudor Davies to act as substitute. Scrutiny Leadership Group provide oversight for scrutiny, therefore, it is proposed that the Chair, Councillor H. David is a member of the project group and the Vice Chair, Councillor S Morgan to act as substitute.

- 4.6 It is proposed that a project team consisting of Jonathan Jones, Democratic Services Manager and Catherine Forbes-Thompson, Scrutiny Research Officer supports the Project Group.

Improvement Programme Workshops

- 4.7 The aim of the improvement programme is to identify possible changes that may require recommendations to Council. In order to ensure that all interested parties are involved it is proposed to hold four workshops over a two-week period. Each workshop will consist of approximately 20 people made up of Members and Officers. The workshops will allow all the scrutiny issues identified in the WAO report to be debated within the context of what can be reasonably achieved in terms of capacity and resources. In order to ensure all Members and Officers are represented it is suggested that the following groups are invited to take part:

- Scrutiny Leadership Group and Democratic Services Committee Members = 23
- CMT, Heads of Services = 22
- Co-opted Members of Scrutiny Committees = 8
- Third Tier Officers (4 per directorate) = 16
- Backbench Members (4 per scrutiny committee) = 16
- Leader and Deputy Leaders = 3

- 4.8 There will be four workshop dates and each workshop will include, 1 Cabinet Member, 1 CMT representative and 1 Scrutiny Chair, the remainder to be mixed proportionately. Prior to the start of the workshops a briefing note will be circulated to all participants outlining the main findings of the WAO report (see 4.2 above) and also give an overview of the main issues facing scrutiny. These include Welsh Government proposals included in the White Paper Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People.

4.9 The purpose of the workshop will be to discuss the WAO findings and to find a 'long list' of options to action those findings. At each workshop the attendees will be split into groups, and each group will debate the issues identified by WAO (see 4.2 above). The groups will be asked to consider the following questions with the assumption that there is likely to be reduced officer time available.

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How can we do it?
- What are the benefits/constraints?

4.10 The project group will consider and agree the outcomes of the workshops and will carry out consultation with all Members and Senior Officers. Following the consultation the project group will then report to the IGPB who will make recommendations in a report to Scrutiny Leadership Group and Democratic Services Committee who in turn recommend to Cabinet and then Council for a decision.

Timetable

4.11 The deadline agreed by Council for the findings of the WAO report was agreed for October 2015. In order to ensure that sufficient time is allowed it is proposed that the following timeline is agreed at the outset.

Action	Responsibility	Deadline
Agree Project Plan	SLG Members, Democratic Services Committee & CMT	20 March 2015
Plan Workshop Programme	Project Group	31 March 2015
Arrange 4 Workshops	Project Team	30 April 2015
Agree Workshop Outcomes	Project Group	8 May 2015
Consultation with Members and Officers involved	Project Group	22 May 2015
Develop Recommendations	Project Group	29 May 2015
Agree Report with recommendations	IGPB	12 June 2015
Report to CMT 18 June 2015	IGPB	15 June 2015
Report to Democratic Services Committee 1 July 2015 (Special) – SLG to be invited	Project Group	22 June 2015
Covering report to include comments from SLG and Democratic Services Committee	Democratic Services	3 July 2015
Report to Cabinet 15 July 2015	IGPB	6 July 2015
Report to Council 21 July 2015	IGPB	6 July 2015

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.

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 Democratic Services Committee agree the project plan.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 In order to respond to the recommendations in the follow up of the special inspection and reports in the public interest.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000

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