



THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2006-07

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contents

Introduction	1
Why is Effective Scrutiny Important?	1
What is Overview and Scrutiny?	1
Where Are We Now?	2
The Way Forward	2
How People Can Become Involved in Scrutiny	3
Contact Details	3
Scrutiny Committee Work 2006/07	
Community Wellbeing and Safety	4
Corporate Resources	7
Economy and Environment	9
Lifelong Learning	12
Actions for 2007/08 – 2008/09	14

Introduction

This is a summary of the 2006/07 Annual Report of Scrutiny at the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The full Annual Report gives a fuller picture of the work and developments which have taken place in the field of Scrutiny in the Vale during the year.

Scrutiny in the Vale of Glamorgan is undertaken by the following four Committees :

- Scrutiny Committee (Community Wellbeing and Safety)
- Scrutiny Committee (Corporate Resources)
- Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment)
- Scrutiny Committee (Lifelong Learning)

Why Is Effective Scrutiny Important ?

Effective Scrutiny is important for several reasons :

- to ensure that important decisions and activities are tested robustly, but constructively
- in helping to ensure that the Council has effective governance arrangements
- as an important part of how the Council is judged by external regulators such as the Wales Audit Office
- Perhaps most importantly, meaningful Scrutiny of decisions, policies and services is essential to make sure that the Council is accountable to local people

What is Overview and Scrutiny ?

The Local Government Act 2000 requires local authorities like the Vale of Glamorgan Council to adopt Executive arrangements, which effectively results in decisions being taken on behalf of the Council on most major issues by a small number of elected members (the Executive or Cabinet). The Executive, acting collectively or individually, makes decisions in line with Council approved policy.

Members who are not in the Executive are charged with maintaining an overview of Council business and scrutinising areas of particular interest or concern. Their role is to hold the Executive to account and to assist in the development and review of Council policy.

Scrutiny Committees are an essential and integral part of Council decision-making arrangements and have been given wide-ranging powers of review and Scrutiny and the ability to make reports and recommendations on any matters relevant to the area and its inhabitants.

Where Are We Now ?

During the summer of 2006, a review to evaluate the effectiveness of Scrutiny arrangements was undertaken. The review was designed to examine how well Scrutiny had embedded itself within the decision-making process and to provide a snapshot of its effectiveness.

It was evident that the Council has made significant progress in developing the Scrutiny function since the last review in 2003. Notwithstanding this, the review identified some key issues and areas of development, which are to be addressed under a two year action plan, comprising 15 associated recommendations which are contained in the Annual Report.

All four committees were requested to endorse the suspension of Scrutiny Reviews that would normally be undertaken under the Forward Work Programme by the Council's Improvement and Development Team until April 2008 in order to support the actions for which the team members had a role in the Social Services Change Plan.

The Way Forward

We will continue to explore ways of generating increased interest among the public, press and its partners by demonstrating that Scrutiny can make a difference. The Wales Audit Office has commended the excellent quality of the Council's Scrutiny Handbook and its contents will remain under review and be adapted to meet changing demands as necessary. The Handbook provides a useful tool for participants in the Scrutiny process and is available on the Council's own website and that of the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Chairmen / Vice-Chairmen Group will continue to provide a "sounding board" for new initiatives within the field of Scrutiny and is key to the continuing development of effective practices and procedures.

The Scrutiny pages of the Council's website will continue to be enhanced by the provision of additional information. Copies of the Annual Report are

available from Democratic Services and the document is also available on the Council's website www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

How People Can Become Involved In Scrutiny

All Scrutiny meetings are generally held in public except where matters of an exempt or confidential nature are under consideration. Agendas for meetings are available at the Civic Offices and Council Offices and facilities i.e. libraries within the Vale of Glamorgan, 3 days prior to the meeting and from the summer of 2007 will be available electronically on the Council's website.

Scrutiny Committees can call a range of individuals to e.g. explain matters within their remit or discuss matters of local concern. They can be members of the public, representatives from local organisations and officers of the Authority.

Contact Details

For further information about this Executive Summary or any aspect of Scrutiny work in the Vale of Glamorgan Council please contact :

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A summary of the work of the four Scrutiny Committees during 2006/07 follows.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND SAFETY)

During 2006/2007, the Committee met 15 times, utilising a number of venues in the community. It is envisaged that this practice will continue as an ongoing initiative but to include themed agenda items, i.e. issues that are pertinent to the local area where the meeting takes place. The meeting in the Memorial Hall on 23rd October, 2006, held to discuss Social Services issues, resulted in an attendance of over 200 persons who were afforded the opportunity to speak and make representations both orally and in writing. The Committee considered that this was an excellent example / way forward for engaging the community in the Scrutiny process.

The Committee continued to encourage the attendance of the relevant Cabinet Members at meetings to facilitate questioning on the portfolio service areas. Cabinet Members responded to this by attending on a regular basis.

Throughout the year the Committee's work programme continued to be reviewed and updated in light of emerging issues, for example delays in undertaking programmed reviews and the overspend in the Social Services budget.

The Committee also took part in two workshops in order to gain further knowledge and encourage debate on various topics, such as the Older People's Forum, the Care and Repair Service, the Catering Service and Barnardo's.

Members of the Committee were also afforded the opportunity in January 2007 to visit the CCTV Unit at the Civic Offices and gain a working knowledge of the issues at hand.

In undertaking monitoring of services Members noted particular concerns in respect of the overall spend on Social Services and the costs of out of county placements. Residential Care provision was also considered by the Committee, and, as in-house provision had always been a matter the Committee was conscious of, the Committee welcomed negotiations taking place with a children's care home provider in a joint initiative with the Council.

A report on Pressures on Services and Budgets for People with Learning Disabilities was referred to the Scrutiny Committee by Cabinet in order to keep the Scrutiny Committee informed of the pressures on services and budgets for people with learning disabilities. The Committee called for a report on the future savings initiatives that could be made within the service area.

A Joint Review of Social Services in the Vale of Glamorgan was carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate in Wales and the Wales Audit Office between January 2006 andThe findings of the Joint Review will continue to be considered by the Committee with the Social Services Change Plan.

A Social Services Budget Action Plan was considered by the Committee, with one of the meetings (held at the Memorial Hall in Barry) attended by over 200 people. The Action Plan had been referred to the Committee from Cabinet on 20th September, 2006 in order for the Scrutiny Committee to consider the current budget issues within Social Services and the proposed Action Plan. The background to the report was that the Director of Community Services had been charged with developing an Action Plan to identify how spending across Social Services could be reduced in order to deliver a balanced budget.

The meeting enabled representatives of voluntary organisations, the Local Health Board, NHS and members of the public to attend to express their views on the proposals contained in the Action Plan. Due to the large number of attendees and the evidence presented the meeting took place over two days. A number of specific recommendations were made to Cabinet regarding the addressing of the issues.

The Full Council considered the above recommendations at its meeting in December 2006 and requested that the Chief Executive prepare a revised Action Plan for consideration. This culminated in a Change Plan for Social Services being drawn up.

➤ **Scrutiny Reviews**

The Committee agreed to undertake two Reviews, Homelessness and Domestic Abuse.

(i) Homelessness Review

The review encouraged Scrutiny Members to lead the process and participate in workshops, conduct interviews and attend site visits.

A large number of detailed recommendations were made to Cabinet in the light of the review, many of which were accepted, including

- the designation of the Executive Member with the Housing portfolio as the Champion for homelessness issues within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- the further linking of homelessness issues to the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan.

(ii) Domestic Abuse Review

As a result of the review a number of recommendations were made in relation to how the Council could address various shortcomings and move forward in order to contribute to tackling and preventing domestic abuse in the Vale. Virtually all of these recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet, including the designation of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety as the Champion for tackling and preventing domestic abuse.

Various other matters were discussed by the Committee throughout the year and led to recommendations being made to Cabinet and / or to other Scrutiny Committees. These included issues raised or called-in by Members themselves as well as references to / from Cabinet and the other Scrutiny Committees. Further details can be found in the Annual Report itself.

The reappointment of the Housing Sub-Committee was agreed during the year together with a further enhancement to its terms of reference that “when necessary to progress matters the Housing Sub-Committee be allowed to directly report to the Cabinet / Council after consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee. The Sub-Committee met five times during the period and reported its findings / observations to the Scrutiny Committee.

The impact of the significant overspend on Social Care Services has had a major effect on all services within the Authority and as a result, there is an urgent need to undertake the work outlined in the Change Plan which the Scrutiny Committee will be commencing at its meeting on 21st May, 2007.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CORPORATE RESOURCES)

The Scrutiny Committee identified the following issues for inclusion in their work programme :

- Corporate Projects Review
- Job Evaluation
- Looked After Children

In addition the Committee appointed a Task and Finish Group to consider use by the Council of Consultants.

The Committee undertook an analysis of the use and associated costs of consultants who were commissioned to undertake work on behalf of the Council during the financial year 2004/2005. A report on this subject was considered in March 2006. The Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group with a view to undertaking a more detailed assessment of the use of consultants. The work of the Group will continue during the forthcoming Municipal Year with its findings to be reported to this Scrutiny Committee in the latter part of the year.

The Committee gave detailed consideration to the various service areas' budgetary proposals, which fell within the Committee's remit and also to the recommendations of the three other Scrutiny Committees in relation to the initial budgetary. A number of recommendations to Cabinet followed.

Six call-ins by Members of Cabinet decisions were considered by the Committee as follow (further details are contained in the Annual Report) :

- Penarth Headland Link
- Provincial House Office Accommodation
- School Investment Strategy
- Changes to Finance and H/R Function
- Appointments to Outside Bodies
- Timetable of Meetings 2007/08

With regard to the Penarth Headland Link scheme, at an extraordinary meeting held on 22nd August, the Committee made a number of detailed recommendations to Cabinet including, reference to :

- the need to recognize the enormous potential of the scheme in terms of the economy of Penarth and the wider Vale of Glamorgan, including business opportunities, jobs, sustainability, "green tourism" and the chance to exploit the benefits of a connection to Cardiff Bay;

- the potential financial implications of not proceeding with the scheme;
- car parking issues;
- the need for officers to examine all potential avenues for limiting / managing costs.

The work of the Committee also included consideration of specific items requested by Members and, given the Committee's corporate remit, a range of matters referred to / from Cabinet and / or the Council's other Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee on 24th April, 2007 when considering its draft Annual Report agreed that, notwithstanding the reduced resources available in terms of formal review work in 2007/08, the following matter should receive consideration in some form :

- Efficiency Savings
- Ward Member Consultation
- Job Evaluation
- Local Service Boards
- Making the Connections

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT)

The Committee's scope of responsibility covers the following service areas:

- Economic Development,
- Leisure and Tourism Services and Countryside and Environmental Projects,
- Visible Services (Waste Management and Cleansing, Highway Maintenance, Engineering Design and Procurement, Parks and Ground Maintenance),
- Public Works and Highways,
- Planning and Transportation, and
- Building and Visible Services.

During 2006/2007, this Committee appointed the following Task and Finish Groups :

- Traffic
- Town Centre
- Recycling and Waste Management
- Rhoose Point.

11 scheduled meetings and four extraordinary meetings were held. Three site visits were also held.

As stated above, this Committee established four Task and Finish Groups in 2006/2007. A significant amount of work was undertaken as summarised below :

Traffic

The Group made several recommendations relating to disabled parking bay provision / eligibility, which were supported by the main Committee and Cabinet.

Town Centre

The Group was established to assist in the development of a holistic approach to the regeneration of Holton Road. The deliberations of the Group resulted in the making of a large number of recommendations relating to areas such as :

- marketing techniques of vacant of retail outlets in the Barry Town Centre
- business rates
- financial assistance to retailers
- car parking charges
- use of accommodation above retail outlets
- tourism literature

- future development of the town centre.

It is anticipated that the Committee will receive the Final Report of the Task and Finish Group early in the 2007/08 municipal year.

Recycling and Waste Management

The focus of the review was :

- recycling and composting targets
- waste minimisation
- education and awareness raising (including schools).

The Vale of Glamorgan Council embarked upon a partnership arrangement with Cardiff, Newport and Monmouthshire in respect of future waste management procurement options. Given the circumstances, the work of the Group has been deferred.

Since that time, visits to public and private partnerships at four locations in England had been undertaken. At a meeting held on 5th April, Members from Cardiff, Newport, Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan discussed the information gathered on the various visits. The Assistant Director for Waste from the South East Centre of Excellence attended the meeting to talk about partnership working in waste management. In addition, an update was received on how work was progressing across the four Authorities with regard to joint working on waste management.

A number of key issues were identified and discussed which will inform a report of the joint scrutiny exercise to be finalised at a further plenary session in May 2007. Following this further plenary session, the report is to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in June 2007.

Rhose Point and the impact thereon of development North of the Railway Line, Rhose

Given the complexities of the issues, the need to develop a tightly focused scope was accepted. At the same time, attention was drawn to the Council's limited resources in terms of undertaking a comprehensive review during 2007/08, the technical advice likely to be required and the lack of funding to facilitate the commissioning of external experts. The Group is due meet further to agree its approach.

During the year, contributors to the work of the Committee included :

- the Commercial Manager, Cardiff International Airport
- residents of St. Donats to discussions on safe routes to schools;
- contributions from 22 persons, including the local AM and MP, local residents, and representatives from various organisations including the Penarth Society and the Penarth Marina Residents Association at the meeting held in the Paget Rooms on Penarth Headland Link;

- representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government and Associated British Ports to an item relating to the Waterfront development;
- the Treasurer, Sully Centurions Cricket Club, who spoke on matters pertaining to the Glebefields, Sully.

The Committee referred various matters to bodies other than the Cabinet, illustrating its aim of engaging as fully as possible with such groups

Six call-ins by Members of Cabinet decisions were considered by the Committee as follow (further details are contained in the Annual Report) :

- Start-up Grants for Small Businesses
- Entrepreneurship Centre
- Land to the North of the Railway Line, Rhooose: Draft Development Brief
- Reappointment of Cabinet Advisory Committees
- 27th July, 2006 – Barry Steam Railway Project
- 15th August, 2006 – Penarth Headland Link

The meeting held at the Paget Rooms, Penarth to discuss the Penarth Headland Link attracted an audience of approximately 360, including the local A.M. and M.P., representatives from various local organisations and the general public. More than 20 individuals addressed the Committee and approximately 10 written submissions were received following the meeting. (contact details should further information be required). It is considered that the large audience represented for the first time the widespread public interest that can be engendered by a meaningful use of the Scrutiny process. A variety of recommendations were to Cabinet for consideration with a number of related issues still ongoing.

11 requests from Members for consideration of items were made and details of the issues concerned can be found in the Annual Report.

The Committee received six references from the Cabinet during the year as well as items from the Planning and other Committees.

The Committee agreed that certain the Task and Finish Groups established in 2006/07 should be reappointed, and is also to give consideration to the optimum method of dealing with an additional item included in the Work Programme, viz. Sustainable Integrated Public Transport.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (LIFELONG LEARNING)

The Committee's scope of responsibility covers the following service areas:

- Schools (Pupil Support, School Improvement and School Support);
- Post 16 Education and Training;
- Libraries;
- Community Education and Youth Service.

During 2006/07, 13 meetings were held, of which 10 were held at outside venues, mainly schools throughout the area. It is intended that this practice will continue.

The Committee was involved in the preparation of a review of nursery roles across the Vale of Glamorgan to establish the level of service provision and placement take-up across the Council.

Further consideration is to be given to early years provision in areas of deprivation and in the context of Welsh medium nursery education.

Continued monitoring of service performance on a quarterly basis also allowed the Committee the opportunity to agree service performance targets and receive explanations for those service targets not achieved.

The Committee continued to take a direct interest in the School Investment Strategy and held a meeting which concentrated solely on matters relating to the Strategy.

A further report was received in April 2007 which advised of Cabinet's deliberations of an analysis of the potential capital receipts and cash flow implications of the School Investment Strategy and which recommended proposals for progressing the Strategy. The decisions of Cabinet were endorsed.

The Committee considered the Council's response to the Community Focused Schools Initiative and endorsed a decision of Cabinet regarding the development of Community Focused Schools.

An extensive review of school budgets was undertaken with the assistance of a number of members of the Schools' Budget Forum.

The Committee was updated on the impact and outcomes of the Vale Learning Network's Learning Challenge Fund Projects.

During the year, contributors to the Scrutiny process included :

- representatives of MACE Consultants together with the Headteachers of Cowbridge Comprehensive School, Llantwit Major School and St. Cyres

Comprehensive School to facilitate consideration of the School Investment Strategy;

- various contributors to the Review to evaluate the levels of Nursery Provision in the Vale of Glamorgan;
- members of the School Budget Forum who contributed towards the Scrutiny Review of the Education Budget.

Actions for 2007/08 –2008/09

- R1 Organise a Scrutiny event for non-executive members to explore and further develop the effectiveness of Scrutiny.
- R2 Develop a pre-work programme evaluation and checklist when scoping reviews to assess the suitability of potential work programme items paying particular regard to the Council's risk register, corporate priorities and Cabinet forward work programme.
- R3 Review the Scrutiny Handbook to ensure roles and responsibilities are clear and transparent.
- R4 When managing committee business, that Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen consider inviting Executive Members.
- R5 Develop and implement a post-review analysis to evaluate review outcomes against review objectives.
- R6 Further develop website content to enable the public to engage with the Scrutiny process.
- R7 Produce an executive public summary of the Scrutiny Annual Report that is accessible to the public.
- R8 Investigate the feasibility of further developing task and finish groups for appropriate Scrutiny work programme items.
- R9 Organise a workshop enabling members to discuss and review any changes required to the process for developing Corporate Plan priorities.
- R10 Explore the feasibility of reducing the size of committee membership.
- R11 Investigate the feasibility of member development of specialist functions within Scrutiny, enabling members to increase their expertise in certain Scrutiny areas.
- R12 Develop a proposal to facilitate in increasing public participation in the Scrutiny process and meetings.
- R13 Revise the format of Scrutiny meetings by restructuring the content of meetings and the development of themed agendas.
- R14 Annually produce a summary of consultation activities from the previous year to feed in consultation outcomes to assist in the development of a yearly work programme.
- R15 Implement a series of triangulation meetings on a quarterly basis for each Scrutiny Committee involving relevant Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, officers and Executive members to discuss work programme items and any matters of concern.

