Agenda Item No: 6

Meeting of:	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 20 July 2026
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Urgent Decision Procedure Used (If yes, why)	N/A
Item Type	Part I
Report Title:	Audit Wales: Review of Scrutiny Arrangements
Portfolio Holder:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Strategic Leadership Team:	Director of Corporate Resources
Lead Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources

1.0 What is this report about?

1.1 The report presents the findings of Audit Wales' review of the Council's arrangements to ensure effective scrutiny (Appendix A). The review included a follow up on Council progress in addressing proposals for improvement issued in Audit Wales' 2018 report, 'Vale of Glamorgan: Overview and Scrutiny - Fit for the Future?

1.1 The Council's response to these findings is included as **Appendix B** and sets out proposed actions, responsible officers and timescales for implementation.

2.0 What are the Recommendations?

	Recommendations – What and How?	Reason for Recommendation – Why?
2.1	That Governance & Audit Committee consider the findings from Audit Wales' review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements (**Appendix A)** and the response to the review findings and Audit Wales' recommendations (**Appendix B**).	To provide for scrutiny of the findings of Audit Wales' review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements.
2.2	That, subject to recommendation one, the report be referred to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (**Appendix B**) to address the recommendations.	To ensure the Council responds appropriately and implements areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales.

3.0 What is the background to this report?

3.1 The review of the Council's arrangements to support effective scrutiny was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act). These duties enable the Auditor General to be satisfied (or not) that the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources and that the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.

3.2 The review also assessed the Council's progress in addressing the proposals for improvement in the Auditor General's report of 2018, 'Vale of Glamorgan Council: Overview and Scrutiny - Fit for the Future?

3.3 This review has been undertaken as part of the Council's Annual Audit Plan for 2025.

4.0 What issues are there to be considered?

4.1 **Appendix A** sets out the findings of Audit Wales' review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, including the progress made in taking forward the recommendations in the Vale of Glamorgan: Overview and Scrutiny - Fit for the Future report of 2018.

4.2 The review concluded overall that Overall, the Council has taken steps to strengthen its scrutiny arrangements. But the purpose and intended impact of scrutiny activity are not always clear, limiting its effectiveness. The review also identified the need to strengthen understanding of scrutiny roles and responsibilities and to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the revised arrangements. This conclusion was informed by the following review findings:

- Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out, but not always fully understood in practice.
- The Council provides scrutiny committee members with a broad range of support and training but arrangements to evaluate this are at an early stage.
- The Council has had some success in engaging the public in scrutiny activity.
- The intended impact of scrutiny activity is not always clear.
- The Council has recently changed its scrutiny arrangements but has not yet assessed their effectiveness.

4.3 Audit Wales recognised a number of positive developments, including strengthened support and training for members, increased opportunities for public participation in scrutiny activity and positive engagement with the Council's Reshaping Scrutiny programme.

4.4 One recommendation has been made in relation to this review:

- R1: The Council should ensure that the role and purpose of scrutiny is clearly understood by councillors and officers and is reflected in scrutiny practice. This should include:

- ensuring that there is a clear and shared understanding of the role of cabinet members in relation to scrutiny committees and scrutiny activity more generally;
- ensuring that the specific role and purpose of scrutiny activity are clearly set out for each scrutiny topic, including the intended outcomes; and
- ensuring that scrutiny committees' recommendations to Cabinet are clear on the action they would like the Cabinet to take.
- Ensuring that as the Council continues to develop its arrangements for evaluating scrutiny, these arrangements enable it to understand the impact of scrutiny activity.

4.5 The Council's response to this recommendation is set out in **Appendix B,** including planned actions and timescales.

5.0 How has evidence been used to inform the report, including the views of others?

5.1 This is a review undertaken by Audit Wales as part of the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Plan.

5.2 The audit questions and criteria used in the review were informed by Audit Wales' knowledge and experience and the Auditor General's Discussion paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny fit for the future published in 2019.

5.3 Evidence included a document review, observations of scrutiny committee meetings and interviews with key officers and the councillors.

6.0 What are the next steps if the recommendations are approved?

6.1 Subject to consideration by the Committee and Cabinet, the agreed management response will be incorporated into the Strategic Insight Board's Regulatory Tracker and monitored quarterly.

6.2 The proposed actions focus on strengthening understanding of scrutiny roles and responsibilities, clarifying the purpose and intended outcomes of scrutiny activity, improving the clarity of recommendations to Cabinet and supporting the evaluation of scrutiny effectiveness and impact.

6.3 Progress will continue to be reported to Governance & Audit Committee, with Cabinet providing overall oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.

7.0 How does this report support Vale 2030 and Reshaping?

7.1 The report supports the delivery of Vale 2030 by strengthening governance, accountability, evidence based decision-making and continuous improvement. Effective scrutiny helps ensure that Council services and resources are aligned to the delivery of the Council's Wellbeing Objectives in Vale 2030.

7.2 Responding to the Audit Wales recommendation will further strengthen arrangements for scrutiny and help the Council demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of its scrutiny activity

8.0 <u>How does this demonstrate the Five Ways of Working?</u>

8.1 The Audit Wales review highlights the important role that effective scrutiny plays in supporting good governance, accountability and continuous improvement. The Council has already taken steps to strengthen its scrutiny arrangements through the Reshaping Scrutiny programme and has introduced changes to committee structures, member development, public engagement, and evaluation arrangements.

8.2 The proposed actions in response to the Audit Wales recommendation reflect the five ways of working by:

- Long-term: strengthening scrutiny arrangements to ensure they remain effective, sustainable and able to support decision-making over the longer term.
- Prevention: improving understanding of scrutiny roles and intended outcomes to help identify issues early and support continuous improvement.
- Integration: ensuring scrutiny activity contributes to the delivery of the Council's Well-being Objectives in Vale 2030 and wider corporate priorities.
- Collaboration: supporting closer working between councillors, officers, Cabinet Members and external stakeholders as part of effective scrutiny arrangements.
- Involvement: building on existing arrangements that encourage residents and stakeholders to participate in scrutiny and influence topics for review.

<u>Resources</u>

9.0 Finance

9.1 There is an annual audit fee aligned with the Vale of Glamorgan Annual Audit Work Programme.

9.2 There are no additional budgetary implications arising directly from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments of the Council which could in turn put funding opportunities at risk.

10.0 Workforce

10.1 There are no additional workforce implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 <u>Legal and Equalities</u>

11.1 **Does an Equalities Impact Assessment need to be completed? If not, why?**

11.2 This report forms part of the Council's Annual Audit Plan. An equalities impact assessment is not applicable. Any proposed changes arising from the findings of the review will have equalities impact assessments undertaken in line with council guidance.

11.3 There are no implications directly arising from this report, although failure to respond to our regulatory recommendations could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments and could result in a special inspection by the Auditor General for Wales if deemed that the Council is not meeting the performance requirements.

12.0 Key Contacts

12.1 **Who are the primary officers to contact with any comments and/or queries on the report?**

Lead Officer: Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources TBowring@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk 01446 709247	Democratic Services Officer: Gareth Davies, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer gjdavies@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk 01446 709249

Appendix

Appendix A – Audit Wales Scrutiny Arrangements Review June 2026

Appendix B – Audit Wales Scrutiny Arrangements Review: Management Response Action Plan

Background Documents

Annual Audit Plan 2025

Scrutiny Arrangements

Vale of Glamorgan Council

June 2026

If you need any help with this document

If you would like more information, or you need any of our publications in an alternative format or language, please:

- call us on 029 2032 0500
- email us at info@audit.wales

You can use English or Welsh when you get in touch with us – we will respond to you in the language you use.

Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

Audit Wales follows the international performance audit standards issued by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

Contents

Audit snapshot

What we looked at

1 We looked at whether the Council has arrangements in place to support effective scrutiny. We also considered the progress the Council has made to address the proposals for improvement in our 2018 report, 'Vale of Glamorgan Council – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future?'.

Why this is important

2 Effective scrutiny is a key part of the Council's governance arrangements. Scrutiny can provide a check and balance to decision makers, ensuring decision making is transparent, and helping to improve Council services.

3 Scrutiny can also have an important role to play in contributing to policy development, monitoring performance and helping to ensure the voice of the public is heard.

What we have found

4 Overall, we found that the Council has taken steps to strengthen its scrutiny arrangements. But the purpose and intended impact of scrutiny activity are not always clear, limiting its effectiveness.

What we recommend

5 We made one recommendation to the Council which focuses on ensuring that the role and purpose of scrutiny are clearly understood and reflected in scrutiny practice, and that the effectiveness of its scrutiny arrangements is regularly evaluated.

Key facts

The Council underwent a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) in November 2024. The assessment recommended that the Council should: ‘enhance the effectiveness of its scrutiny arrangements, specifically committee meetings, by assessing current practices to identify opportunities for improvement to make them more effective’.

The Council formally set out its response to the PPA recommendation in February 2025 and implemented its Reshaping Scrutiny proposals in April 2025, following a series of consultation activities with councillors.

The Council’s Reshaping Scrutiny programme resulted in changes to the number, membership and terms of reference of its scrutiny committees, and a renewed focus on task and finish group work alongside changes to ways of working. Scrutiny committees no longer receive reports for noting. The changes also led to a refreshed approach to member training, information sharing and methods of evaluating scrutiny.

Task and Finish groups are set up for scrutiny committee members to focus on specific areas of interest in more detail outside of formal committees. This provides opportunities for councillors to engage with a broader range of stakeholders.

Our findings

Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out, but not always fully understood in practice

8 Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out in the Councils constitution and policies. However, in practice, councillors and officers do not always demonstrate that they are clear about scrutiny's role.

9 For example, Cabinet Members do not always present their reports to scrutiny committees, and committee questions tend to be directed towards officers. It is not therefore clear how scrutiny members are holding Cabinet Members to account. Agenda conferences are held in preparation for committee meetings. These provide an opportunity for the Chair, Vice Chair and officers to discuss the purpose of the reports, although these are not held for all committees. However, reports presented to scrutiny committees do not always explain what the committee's role is and what they are expected to do with the information in front of them. Scrutiny committees' recommendations to Cabinet are also not always clear about what they are asking Cabinet to do or do differently.

10 Clearly setting out roles and responsibilities can help ensure that scrutiny focuses on the right topics, asks the right questions and makes robust recommendations. However, the above examples suggest that, in practice, scrutiny members and the wider organisation are not always clear about what scrutiny's role is, particularly in relation to specific reports. This increases the risk that scrutiny activity does not always have impact.

The Council provides scrutiny committee members with a broad range of support and training but arrangements to evaluate this are at an early stage

11 Democratic Services and Scrutiny Support Officers provide a broad range of support to scrutiny chairs, vice chairs and committees. This includes:

- supporting scrutiny committee members through briefings and other training provision;
- advice and support for chairs during and outside of committee meetings;
- working with scrutiny committee members to develop scrutiny committee forward work programmes; and
- providing research to support task and finish group inquiries.

12 The Council provides councillors with training and development opportunities and member briefings on a range of topics. Whilst the training programme for councillors is not specific to scrutiny, several councillors told us that they found the information to be useful in their scrutiny roles as it increased their knowledge on a range of subjects.

13 The Council's induction programme for new councillors included information specifically about the scrutiny process. Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs have also received training on their roles. Councillors told us that they had found that training useful.

14 The Council has some arrangements in place to collect information about the effectiveness of the training and support it offers councillors. It has developed these arrangements further as part of its Reshaping Scrutiny work. However, since the changes associated with the Reshaping Scrutiny programme, the Council has not yet formally evaluated the effectiveness of its training provision for councillors. Our observations about roles and responsibilities suggest that there are opportunities to clarify the role and intended impact of scrutiny activity.

The Council has had some success in engaging the public in scrutiny activity

15 The Council is taking steps to increase public awareness of and participation in scrutiny activities. For example, its webpages set out how the public can get involved in the scrutiny process, including speaking at scrutiny committee meetings. These arrangements are promoted through the Council's social media channels. There are recent examples where members of the public have spoken at committee meetings.

16 The Council has also developed an online form so that anyone who lives or works in the Council area can suggest potential topics for scrutiny committees to discuss. The Council has received around 30 suggestions for scrutiny topics through this method.

17 Some scrutiny committees also have non-statutory co-opted members to represent the views of specific groups, such as young people. Several scrutiny task and finish groups have also sought the views of the public. Councillors felt this had been a good way to engage people in constructive discussions.

18 By having arrangements in place to encourage public participation in scrutiny, it is more likely that scrutiny will consider a wide range of views when choosing topics for scrutiny and/or arriving at findings and recommendations. This in turn can help to improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny function and therefore the Council's decision-making.

The intended impact of scrutiny activity is not always clear

19 The Council does not always clearly articulate the intended purpose and impact of specific scrutiny activity. For example, reports to committees do not always set out what the purpose of scrutiny considering an item is. Our observations of committee meetings suggest that, in some instances, committee members may not be clear about why specific items are being considered.

20 Scrutiny members are involved in selecting items for their work programmes. Discussions we observed at committee meetings demonstrate that committee members recognise the need to consider scope, resources, timescales and methodology when selecting topics.

21 If it is not clear why topics are chosen it is difficult to understand the intended outcome of scrutiny activity, which increases the risk of it being ineffective.

The Council has recently changed its scrutiny arrangements, but has not yet assessed their effectiveness

22 The Council has taken action to improve its scrutiny arrangements. For example:

- it developed its 'Reshaping Scrutiny' proposals following a comprehensive evaluation of its scrutiny arrangements;
- it replaced its Annual Scrutiny Impact Survey with an Annual Member Survey, which still asks councillors about their experiences of scrutiny but now also covers broader issues such as training and support;
- it has changed the template for its annual scrutiny report for 2025-26.

23 Councillors and officers, we spoke to were generally enthusiastic about the recent changes to the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

24 The Council monitors its progress against the PPA recommendations, including the recommendation relevant to scrutiny, as part of its performance management arrangements. These include consideration of performance reports at Joint Performance scrutiny sessions and tracking of recommendations from external review bodies by Governance and Audit Committee.

25 The Council plans to introduce ongoing evaluation of its committees, including its scrutiny committees. It intends to do this through supporting councillors to reflect on the effectiveness of specific committee meetings and by introducing annual self-assessments for all committees. It also plans to introduce reflection on process and lessons learned as a standard item for meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group. As these arrangements are at an early stage, the Council cannot yet demonstrate whether they are effective. Being clear on the purpose of scrutiny items and the outcomes that scrutiny committees are seeking to achieve will also be important to help inform any evaluation of their effectiveness.

Recommendations

R1 The Council should ensure that the role and purpose of scrutiny is clearly understood by councillors and officers and is reflected in scrutiny practice. This should include:

- ensuring that there is a clear and shared understanding of the role of cabinet members in relation to scrutiny committees and scrutiny activity more generally;
- ensuring that the specific role and purpose of scrutiny activity are clearly set out for each scrutiny topic, including the intended outcomes; and
- ensuring that scrutiny committees' recommendations to Cabinet are clear on the action they would like the Cabinet to take.
- ensuring that as the Council continues to develop its arrangements for evaluating scrutiny, these arrangements enable it to understand the impact of scrutiny activity.

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

The audit reviewed the Council's arrangements to support its scrutiny function. It also looked at the Council's progress in addressing the proposals for improvement and recommendations set out in our 2018 report.

The audit did not cover other review functions of the Council, such as those undertaken by the Governance and Audit Committee.

We undertook the audit during March and April 2025.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

The audit sought to answer the following questions:

- Has the Council clearly set out the roles and responsibilities for those involved in its overview and scrutiny arrangements?
- Does the Council have arrangements to support its scrutiny committee members and officers?
- Does the scrutiny function prioritise and plan its activities to achieve the intended impact?
- Does the Council have arrangements to facilitate the involvement of the public in its scrutiny arrangements?
- Are the Council's scrutiny arrangements working effectively to enable scrutiny to fulfil their role and achieve their intended impact?
- Does the Council have arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of scrutiny?

Criteria

To help us assess the effectiveness of the Council’s arrangements we have developed criteria based on the Auditor General’s ‘Discussion Paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny ‘Fit for the Future’ and the checklist of Six steps to help make scrutiny fit for the future as reference documents.

Methods

The audit used the following methods:

- document review, for example, of committee papers, guidance for councillors, and training materials;
- observations of a sample of scrutiny committee meetings; and
- interviews with key officers and councillors.

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Management response form

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Audit Wales use only	
Audited body	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Audit name	Scrutiny Arrangements
Issue date	18.06.26

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
R1	The Council should ensure that the role and purpose of scrutiny is clearly understood by councillors and officers and is reflected in scrutiny practice. This should include: • ensuring that there is a clear and shared understanding of the role of cabinet members	Undertake collaborate workshops to co-produce a revised Cabinet and Scrutiny protocol. Update the Council's Constitution to reflect any changes in ways of working between Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.	November 2026 December 2026 November 2026	Head of Democratic Services Monitoring Officer	We are satisfied the Council has properly considered our audit findings and recommendation. The response is sufficiently specific to give

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
	in relation to scrutiny committees and scrutiny activity more generally; • ensuring that the specific role and purpose of scrutiny activity are clearly set out for each scrutiny topic, including the intended outcomes; and • ensuring that scrutiny committees' recommendations to Cabinet are clear on the action they would like the Cabinet to take. • Ensuring that as the Council continues to develop its arrangements for	Develop bespoke training for existing Scrutiny Members surrounding role, purpose and recommendations. Review existing Scrutiny procedural documentation, including Committee reports, agendas and forward work programmes to consider how to explicitly identify role and purpose of Scrutiny for stakeholders. Work with Scrutiny Members on an on-going basis to embed changes within existing Scrutiny arrangements. Incorporate training materials and wider changes into 2027 Member Induction Programme for new and returning Councillors.	December 2026 May 2027 December 2027	Head of Democratic Services Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer Head of Democratic Services Head of Democratic Services	assurance the Council will act on the recommendation. Timescales are acceptable and responsibilities have been allocated appropriately.

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
	evaluating scrutiny, these arrangements enable it to understand the impact of scrutiny activity.	Delivery of ongoing evaluation arrangements in line with the Council's described approach as outlined within its monitoring framework.	May 2027	Head of Democratic Services	