



VALE of GLAMORGAN COUNCIL
SCRUTINY
Annual Report
2015-2016

○ What is SCRUTINY?

Scrutiny is vital to the work of the Vale of Glamorgan Council and its partners. It offers reassurance to local people, helps to develop policy, improves the performance of the Council and holds the Executive to account for its decisions. Scrutiny acts as a “critical friend”, standing back from the day to day decision-making to look at and review outcomes for local residents.

“Scrutiny is vital to the work of the Vale”

Most of the decisions in the Council are taken by a small group of Councillors known as the Cabinet (also referred to

as the Executive). Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet are known as Non-Executive Members. It is these Non-Executive Members that have the opportunity to sit on a Scrutiny Committee.



Scrutiny Committees can make recommendations and scrutinise the policies, decisions and performance of the Cabinet. The Cabinet, in turn, consults with Scrutiny Committees on issues, and responds to, Scrutiny Committee recommendations.

○ How do we do SCRUTINY in the VALE of GLAMORGAN?

In 2015-16, the Council had five Scrutiny Committees:

- Corporate Resources
- Economy and Environment
- Housing and Public Protection
- Lifelong Learning
- Social Care and Health

Each Committee had a specific remit and area of focus, for which, an annual forward work programme was produced (and updated quarterly) to show the matters to be considered over the forthcoming 12 monthly period.

○ FOCUS

The Committees’ Forward Work programmes focus on how the Council will achieve its key priorities and objectives, as outlined within the Council’s Corporate Plan. Individually and collectively each Scrutiny Committees approaches its work in the following ways:

- Striving to improve services to achieve better outcomes for residents
- Hearing public concerns and voices
- Adding value to the way decisions are reached
- Acting positively as a ‘critical friend’
- Learning from others

○ SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Corporate Resources)



Chair's Quote:

“The Committee has had a challenging year reviewing the progress on the Council’s Corporate Plan and in assessing key areas, including Council expenditure, policies and improvement objectives. The Committee has an important role in monitoring overall Council performance, the impact of legislative changes such as Welfare Reform and in considering areas around workforce planning and levels of staffing.”

Key Areas we have looked at.....what we have achieved

● Budget Review and Financial Planning

Monitored the Council’s budget and spending plans throughout the year, focusing on key areas of pressures and supported the process for setting the Council’s budget for 2016/17. We have played a key part in monitoring the Council’s investment strategy and we have kept a watchful eye on the Housing Revenue Account.

● Sustainable Development

Reviewed the range of activities being undertaken to promote sustainability and highlighted the current projects installed or awaiting installation, which are predicted to save the Council £237,000 per year in fuel costs and reduce emissions by 1,500 tonnes per annum. The Committee acknowledged the work that was being undertaken and will continue to monitor progress in this area.

● Welfare Reform

The Committee was able to monitor progress of the work undertaken by the Council in regard to the implementation of the UK Government’s Welfare Reform Agenda. The impact of the Welfare Reform changes are continuing to be monitored, particularly in relation to the number of people who have seen a reduction in their Housing Benefit and in the uptake of people applying for Universal Credit.

● Annual Turnover and Sickness Absence Reports

The Committee received a detailed insight into employee turnover rates within the Council and considered further analysis of the reasons why people chose to leave employment with the Council. The findings of this were reported to Cabinet, who will utilise the information for workforce planning purposes.

We have also closely monitored the level of sickness absence in the Council, and we have sought to look at in more detail at high levels of sickness absences attributed to stress, along with the support and assistance that the Council provides to its staff.

● Reshaping Services Strategy

In the light of budget reductions, the Council has embarked on a strategy to look at the way that services are delivered. As part of the first phase of service-based reviews, work is underway in a number of areas.

These include the Shared Regulatory Service with Bridgend and Cardiff Councils and also in relation to the way in which library, catering and Additional Learning Needs services operate.

A Wales Audit Office Report review of the Council’s Strategy provided reassurance to the Committee that the Reshaping Services Strategy conformed to good practice and demonstrated that it was following the right process to achieve transformation.



○ SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Economy and Environment)



Chair's Quote:

"As always it was another busy year for the Scrutiny Committee (Economy and Environment). Our work included three "call-ins" having also been received from individual Councillors and which were debated and considered during the year in relation to the marketing of Nell's Point, Rhose Point public open space byelaws and New Supplementary Guidance for Affordable Housing. The Committee's focus remained on making positive contributions to the Council's Cabinet in respect of their decisions and in raising issues that affect the environment of the Vale of Glamorgan".

Key Areas we have looked at.....what we have achieved

● Traffic Management Task and Finish Review and Active Travel

Twenty eight improvement actions had been recommended by the Committee to ensure that progress was being made and maintained as a result of the Review, with twenty six of the actions having either been completed or partly progressed. Of the two actions not yet started there is a commitment by the Cabinet to consider these in the forthcoming year. The Committee, as part of a consultation process, also considered in detail Draft Active Travel maps and the criteria used for routes to be regarded as active travel routes, together with the Council's duty in meeting Welsh Government legislation.

● Leisure Services

The Committee continued its monitoring role of the Legacy Leisure contract (previously known as Parkwood) for four Vale Leisure Centres and, in doing so, a number of Members undertook site visits to the Leisure Centres and reported their findings to the Committee. In particular, Members' were of the view that the wet changing areas were a priority for Barry, Penarth and Llantwit Major and if investment was to be realised they should be upgraded in that order.

● Barry Island Beach Huts

The Committee reviewed a range of options and made suggestions to the Council's Cabinet in respect of the policy for the use of beach huts. The charges imposed, it is hoped, will have a positive impact on the use of the beach huts and at the end of the 2016 summer season a follow up report is to be submitted to the Committee for its consideration.

● Computer Controller Spot Weed Technology – Request for Consideration

The Committee received and considered evidence from experts in the field, which supported the viewpoint that the reliance upon chemical methods of weed control was unsustainable. Aware that it would be impossible to ban all aspects of chemical usage, the view was that a targeted approach was required. Evidence was also provided at the meeting via video link with a representative from APSE (the Association of Public Service Excellence) from his office in Manchester. The Committee concluded that the work that the Council was currently undertaking in relation to the control of weeds and its limited use of glyphosate was acceptable. However, it recommended that further opportunities to raise the profile be undertaken in order that the Council could be assured that all departments and the public were receiving the same message.

Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan:

Report of Consultation and Submission for Independent Examination

A substantial debate took place on the Plan in June 2015, with Members of the public being afforded an opportunity by the Committee to speak on the matter prior to its submission to Full Council and Welsh Government. The Committee received a detailed account of the work undertaken and main issues raised, including whether focused changes were considered necessary in order to ensure that the Local Development Plan was “sound”.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Housing and Public Protection)



Chair's Quote:

“The Scrutiny Committee has a wide portfolio and during 2015/16 continued to examine Council strategies aimed at making the Vale a safer place to live. We have looked at how well the Council is meeting its objectives in ensuring that everyone has a home they can afford and that meets their needs, that service users are highly satisfied and that all residents in the Vale live and work in safe and secure communities.”

Key Areas we have looked at.....what we have achieved

Youth Offending Service Performance and Youth Justice Plan

Reviewed performance and saw positive outcomes for individuals accessing support for substance misuse difficulties. Also, we have been made aware of the risks and challenges from reduced funding and have forwarded our concerns onto the Ministry of Justice.

Sanctuary Scheme – Support to Victims of Domestic Violence

Supported and assessed the partnership approach aimed at strengthening home security for domestic violence victims through the installation of additional safety features. Our update detailed a reduction in repeat victimisation and also an increase in victim self-confidence and sense of safety.

Housing and Building Services Service Plan 2015-19

The Committee took a detailed look at the Service Plan for Housing and Building Services, received an evaluation of the Service's achievements and challenges and monitored the successful implementation of the Council House Improvement Programme, along with the delivery of over 150 additional affordable housing units.

Scrutiny reviewed and commented on the Building Services Change plan leading to the delivery of improved maintenance and repair services to the tenants in the Vale. Members provided regular challenge and comment in relation to the restructure of the Housing and Building Service, resulting in significant improvements to the housing landlord service.

The Committee also received numerous reports and presentations as a result of the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2015 and supported the adoption of a new Housing Solutions approach to homeless people resident in the Vale. A new Housing Solutions team was established to deliver to the statutory duties flowing from the legislation.

○ SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Lifelong Learning)



Chair's Quote:

"The focus of this Committee continues in the main to centre around the raising of performance in schools and to monitor the work of the Central South Consortium; the Consortium being the school improvement service which operates on behalf of five Local Authorities in South Wales, namely Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. The Committee is keen to improve education for all pupils throughout the Vale and strives to strengthen its relations with young people to ensure that young people have a voice in the scrutiny of education. To this end, the Committee has been instrumental in the appointment of two Youth Forum members as observer Members who sit on the Scrutiny Committee".

Key Areas we have looked at.....what we have achieved

● Improving Educational Attainment in the Vale

First established in April 2013, the Scrutiny Committee, through the use of individual School Progress Panels, has continued with its programme of monitoring under-performing schools in the Vale, with Panel visits taking place at the following schools: St. Cyres, Llantwit Major, Barry Comprehensive, Bryn Hafren, St. Richard Gwyn Comprehensive and the former Eagleswell Primary School - in order to assess school plans and to identify any barriers holding up progress. The Committee will continue to work with schools and Governing Bodies in order to ensure performance is maintained and, with this in mind, will also be considering in late 2016 the Governor Training Programme to assess its relevance, appropriateness and suitability to the role of Governors.

● Transforming Secondary Education in the Barry Area

The Committee considered the Cabinet proposals regarding the provision of education in Barry and held an evidence-gathering meeting, affording key stakeholders the opportunity to present their concerns and issues to the Scrutiny Committee. At a very recent meeting, the Scrutiny Committee also welcomed the proposal to expand Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg as a standalone site. Further discussions / consultation on future proposals for Barry and Bryn Hafren Schools will continue in the Autumn of 2016, with stakeholders being afforded an opportunity if they so wish to address the Committee.

● Value for Money

The Committee continues to monitor the financial position of the service and has raised concerns on a number of occasions in relation to Ysgol y Deri, where the service has resulted in less recoupment of income for the Council. Aware that this aspect is a cost pressure area for the Department and that it is being picked up as an ongoing issue under the Council's Reshaping Services Programme, the Committee awaits the presentation for its consideration of the results of that review.

○ SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Social Care and Health)



Chair's Quote:

"In the difficult climate of reducing resources and ever increasing demand, the Committee has continued to focus on ensuring that the people of the Vale have been able to access services in a timely manner. It has been another very busy year and we have provided robust scrutiny and questioning of both Adult and Children's Services. We have also had the opportunity to call before us NHS professionals in order to investigate several issues of public concern."

Key Areas we have looked at.....what we have achieved

● Assistive Technology and Dementia Care

Monitored and questioned progress in regard to the implementation of the 'Council's Action Plan', which is focussed on improving independent living for people with Dementia, and recommended areas for improvement.

● Commissioning Domiciliary Care Services from the Independent Sector

Considered the Council's arrangements for commissioning domiciliary care and engaged with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales regarding concerns with a specific 'care provider'. The Committee also initiated a new reporting framework so that it can now be immediately alerted to future problems with 'care providers'.

● The Social Services and Well-being Act

Regularly reviewed the Council's approach in regard to the implementation of the new Social Services and Well-being Act, and highlighted concerns to both Cabinet and Welsh Government in regard to the additional demand that will be created for services and the fact that the Act is not 'cost neutral'.

● Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Continued to evaluate and question progress in relation to the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board's strategy regarding its work to improve the support provided for the mental well-being of children and young people.



○ How is SCRUTINY Supported?

Scrutiny is supported by officers from Democratic Services, who are tasked with looking after the democratic process within the Vale. The team ensures that all Councillors have all the necessary information and evidence they need in order to properly consider any topic or area of interest. For example, this can include hearing evidence from expert witnesses or arranging site visits. The team also conducts research and writes reports on behalf of the Committees and in relation to any Task and Finish Group work undertaken.

○ EVENTS During the Year

In response to Wales Audit Office's report entitled "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!", and to address the areas highlighted for improvement, an Action Plan has been devised to ensure that Scrutiny in the Vale is operating as effectively as possible. A workshop between Members of Scrutiny, the Cabinet and Officers was held during July 2015 to discuss the Action Plan and its implementation.

The Action Plan itself has been monitored by the Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen Group and the Democratic Services Committee and a number of improvements have been progressed, such as the production of a Protocol that covers the roles and responsibilities between Scrutiny and Cabinet.

To improve public engagement in the decision-making processes, the Council has introduced the provision of public speaking on matters that appear on a Scrutiny Committee meeting agenda. Written representations are also welcomed. Members of the public are allowed three minutes to speak on each Agenda Item that they have registered to speak on. In instances when issues of high public interest are being considered, separate arrangements for public speaking are put in place.

An online registration form can be accessed via the following link, or, alternatively, members of the public can contact Democratic Services by telephone.

http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/Public-Participation

Between the end of 2015 and the start of 2016, staff from the Wales Audit Office conducted a Corporate Assessment of the Council that sought to answer the following question:

“Is the Council capable of delivering
its priorities and improved outcomes
for citizens?”

During the course of drafting this Annual Report, the findings of the Wales Audit Office assessment have been extremely positive and have been published through the Cabinet process.

○ Looking FORWARD

2016/17 will see a fresh and new approach to the way that Scrutiny operates in the Vale. The Council has agreed that the work of Scrutiny should be closely aligned to four Well-being Outcomes that form the main basis of the Council's new Corporate Plan, and as a result of this the titles and remits of the Scrutiny Committees have been reconsidered, with the five Committees now being (since May 2016):

- Corporate Performance and Resources
- Environment and Regeneration
- Healthy Living and Social Care
- Homes and Safe Communities
- Learning and Culture

The key aspect will be in moving away from the previous "service focused" scrutiny arrangements, to the scrutinising of four Well-being Outcomes. This will involve a greater degree of "cross cutting" across Council services and Directorates, each working together to achieve the Council's main aims and objectives.

Key work for 2016/17 will be:

- Scrutinising how well the Council is meeting its objectives, as outlined in the new Corporate Plan;
- Make positive contributions to policy development and to the continuous improvements to Council functions;
- Looking at the impact of the financial savings that the Council has to achieve and scrutinising the implications of further reduction in resources;
- Evaluating proposals around services that will come out of the Council's Reshaping Services project;
- Exploring the potential for shared services or joint working arrangements in delivering services;
- Continuing to monitor the attainment levels of our pupils and to assess challenges facing schools;
- Receive updates on the progress of the Action Plans developed from the Task and Finish Group reviews into Traffic Management and Assistive Technology;
- Receive progress reports around the implications of the Welfare Reform Agenda;
- Looking at the 21st Century Schools Programme in Barry;
- Regeneration and sustainable development.

○ Want to KNOW MORE?

Should you wish to find out more about the work of Scrutiny, you can do so at:

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Please look at our website to see the dates, times and venues of forthcoming Scrutiny meetings:

http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/our_council/council/minutes,_agendas_and_reports/minutes,_agendas_and_reports.aspx

Alternatively you can contact Democratic and Scrutiny Services at the address below:

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