

# **A Guide to Scrutiny in Swansea**

## **A Rough Guide to Scrutiny**



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## Introduction

Scrutiny is undertaken by non – executive members. They work together to ensure that the executive is held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public.

The broad aims of the scrutiny function have been to carry out a significant and constructive programme of activities that will:

- help improve services
- provide an effective challenge to the executive
- engage members in the development of policies, strategies and plans
- engage the public

Scrutiny does this by carrying out in-depth inquiries of policy or service areas. These inquiries (or reviews) are significant pieces of work where scrutiny can make a real difference in addressing areas of concern. Once the inquiry is complete each panel will produce a final report which will pull together all the information gathered and make conclusions and recommendations.

The overall aim is to make Swansea a better place and to ensure that policies and services are responsive to people's needs.

The following guide will give a brief outline of scrutiny in Swansea.

# Scrutiny Arrangements

## How is scrutiny arranged in Swansea?

The scrutiny function is delivered through the Scrutiny Programme Committee together with a number of Scrutiny Inquiry and Performance Panels and working groups.

### Scrutiny Programme Committee:

All scrutiny activity within the Authority is managed by the Committee through a single workplan. Specific work is undertaken both through the committee and by establishing informal panels (for in-depth activities) or working groups.

The Committee is made up of 16 councillors and has many roles including:

- Managing the scrutiny work programme
- Establishing informal panels and working groups to undertake specific scrutiny activities
- Appointing councillors as 'scrutiny conveners' to chair and lead these panels/working groups
- Holding Cabinet Members to account in a formal public setting
- Asking questions on a broad range of policy and service issues
- Meeting the Council's statutory responsibilities for overview and scrutiny, including performing the crime and disorder scrutiny function
- Coordinating pre-decision scrutiny
- Responding to urgent issues and referrals from Council

### Inquiry and Performance Panels:

Informal Scrutiny panels are established by the Scrutiny Programme Committee, with conveners appointed by the committee.

There are 2 types of panel:

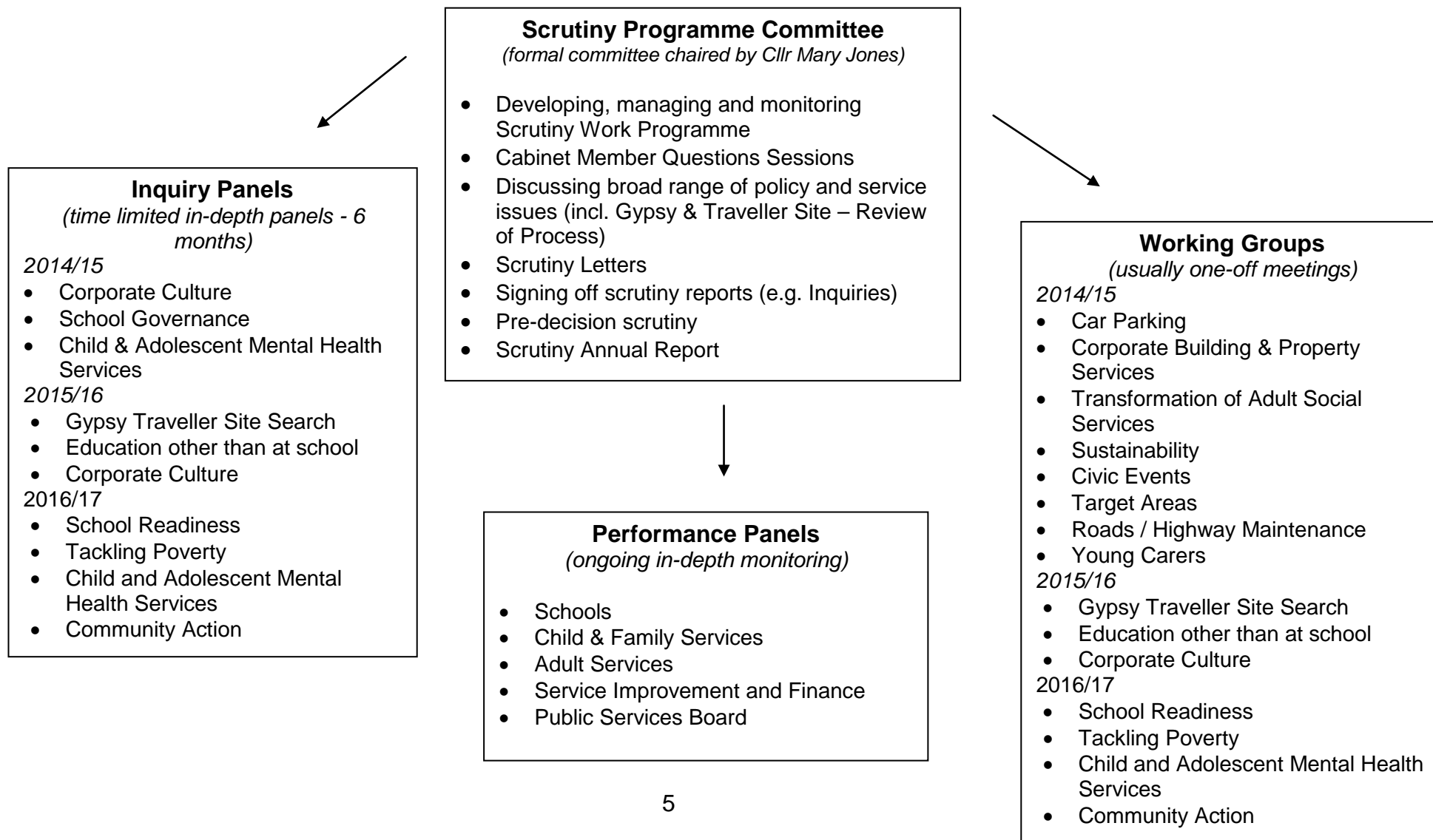
a) Inquiry Panels: these undertake discrete in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis. These will be significant topics where scrutiny can make a real difference. Inquiry panels will produce a final report at the end the inquiry, informed by the extent of evidence gathered. The committee determines the aim of each of the inquiries and key question that is to be explored. It will also set a clear time-limit for the panel to carry out and complete the inquiry.

b) Performance Panels: these provide in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas. Performance panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant cabinet members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, about the service.

**Working groups** are established when a matter should be carried out outside of the committee but does not need a panel to be set up

The following diagram shows how scrutiny is delivered in Swansea:

### **Swansea Scrutiny Structure / Work Programme (Nov 2014 to date)**



## Scrutiny Support

The work of scrutiny is supported by a specialist unit of officers.

The key roles and responsibilities of the officers include:

- Work Programme Manager – Including developing work programmes, review and evaluation and project management.
- Researcher – Including research planning and design, evidence gathering for inquiries, consultation exercises and analysis and summary of complex information.
- Facilitator – Including planning and design of events, running events and focus groups and delivering innovative methods of stakeholder engagement.

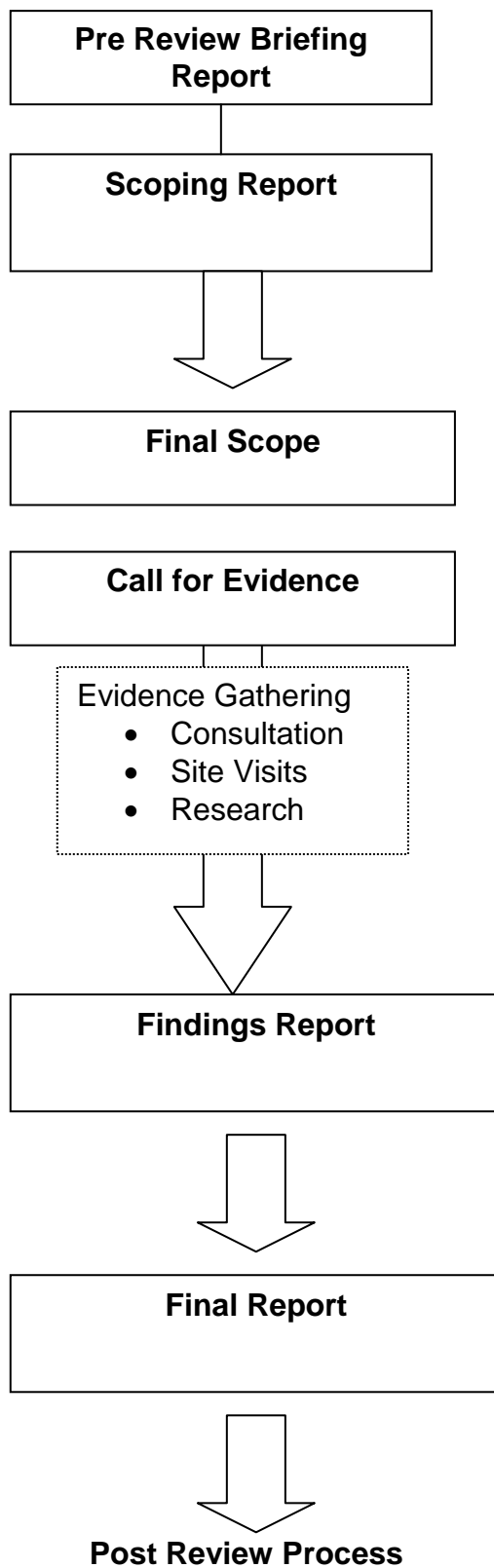
Each piece of work is supported by a dedicated scrutiny officer.

The work of scrutiny relies on council departments, external organisations and members of the public to provide information and evidence.

The practical arrangements for formal committee meetings are made by officers within Democratic Services with extra support from the legal team. This includes the preparation and distribution of agendas and the minuting of meetings.

## The scrutiny inquiry panel process

The scrutiny inquiry panel process is as follows:



Templates for any of the reports mentioned above can be obtained by contacting the Scrutiny Team.

## Case Studies

Further information on these and other reviews can be found at [www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinyreports](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinyreports)

### **Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)**

**Purpose:** The aim of the inquiry was to establish how the council can work with health partners to reduce demand for specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

**Evidence Gathering:** The cross party Inquiry Panel of 12 Councillors worked informally to gather evidence from a number of sources including a briefing paper provided by health partners, question and answer sessions with the Head of Child and Family Services and the Chief Education Officer, Swansea Council Voluntary Service Parent/Carer Forum, Primary and Secondary Head teachers and researched good practice examples.

**Findings:** The Panel published a report at the end of the inquiry which made a number of recommendations for Cabinet including calling for collaborative development of prevention and early intervention services, sustainability of good services, development of peer support and ensuring parents and carers are involved in planning and development of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

**Follow Up:** The implementation of agreed recommendations will be followed up by the Scrutiny Panel in the next few months, and they will assess the impact of the inquiry.

### **Readiness for School**

**Purpose:** The aim of the inquiry was to establish how school ready children in Swansea are. It also led to the Panel to consider how child ready schools actually are.

**Evidence Gathering:** This 8 member Panel gathered evidence from a number of sources including primary schools, the Head teacher of Trallwn Primary School, Swansea Library Service, a visit to St Helens Flying Start, Stepping Stones, Swansea Children's Centre and met with parents, staff and health visitors.

**Findings:** The Panel prepared a final report which was presented to Cabinet. The report made a number of recommendations including a call to support initiatives displaying good practice, support the ethos of flying start and its way of working across the whole of Swansea, work with schools to ensure they are child ready and welcoming to pupils, ensure that early years services are prepared for changes in Additional Learning Needs Reform, and to develop a minimum standard in relation to transition to school for both schools and day care settings.

**Follow Up:** Cabinet is expected to agree all 9 scrutiny recommendations (15 June). The Inquiry Panel will reconvene in the next 6-12 months to find out the impact of this work.



## Contact Us

The Scrutiny Team can be contacted using the following details:

Address: Scrutiny  
The Guildhall  
Swansea  
SA1 4PE

Telephone: 01792 637732

Email: [scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk)

Further information can be found at: [www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny) or on our blog at <http://www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk/>

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