

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

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Scrutiny Programme Committee  
City and County of Swansea - Dinas a Sir Abertawe

July 2015



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# 1. Looking Back and Looking Forward

*Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee*



The last year has been a year of improvement and development for scrutiny in Swansea. The single committee system, introduced in 2012, has become a normal part of how we do things and continues to attract interest from other Councils. The Wales Audit Office, as part of their recent corporate assessment, has confirmed that this is a flexible approach to scrutiny that allows councillors to follow their own interests. There is of course always room for improvement.

Once again we have used a scorecard approach and this allows us to compare what we have done with previous years. Some of our improved indicators include:

1. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings (72%)
2. Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members (78)
3. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed (80%)
4. Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council (84%)
5. Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council (79%)

I am particularly pleased that we have done more pre-decision scrutiny this year. Although only two topics have been covered (ICT services and the proposed Lease of Underhill Park to Mumbles Community Association, the feedback we have had has been very good and I hope we can do more of this type of work in future.

I also believe strongly that an important role of scrutiny is to hold Cabinet members to account. For this reason I want to ensure that we take the time to engage fully with all 10 of the Council's Cabinet Members in a fair and balanced way. Over the last 12 months every Cabinet Member has come to the committee. Each has taken the time to provide us with information in advance and each has been extremely constructive in the individual question and answer sessions. However, I feel we can get more out of these sessions that contain so much that will be of interest to the public.

Scrutiny continues to be a topic of national significance. The recent Welsh Government White Paper; 'Power to Local People' underlines the continuing importance being placed on scrutiny as an essential element of local democracy and good governance. This focus on scrutiny at the national level is very welcome. However, recognition will also have to be given to the

increased demands on scrutiny councillors that will come with this increasing role.

In terms of learning and development there were certainly two highlights. The first was a development session with Ian Bottrill organised through the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the second was a visit to the Welsh Assembly to see how they approach public engagement in their scrutiny work. I am grateful to everyone who made these activities possible.

Looking forward we have identified six improvement outcomes that will provide a focus for us in the year ahead:

1. We need to talk more to cabinet members so that we can plan better and ensure that our work is making a difference
2. We need to align the work of scrutiny more closely to the five corporate priorities so that we can focus and impact on the things that matter.
3. We need more briefings and development sessions so that we have the knowledge and skills we need
4. We need more coverage in the media so that the public are more aware of our work
5. We need more members of the public contributing to scrutiny meetings so that we can reflect their views in our work
6. We need closer links with regulators and inspectors so that we can provide a more coordinated and effective challenge

I look forward to report back our progress next year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

## 2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2014-15

<b>Scrutiny Practice</b>	<b>A. How much scrutiny did we do?</b>	<b>B. How well did we do it?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of committee meetings = 21 ↑</li> <li>2. Number of panel meetings/working groups = 99 ↑</li> <li>3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4 ↑</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 91% ↓</li> <li>5. Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 58% ↑</li> <li>6. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 72% ↑</li> <li>7. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 77% ↓</li> <li>8. Councillors who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 85% ↑</li> <li>9. Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 75% ↑</li> </ul>
<b>Scrutiny Outcomes</b>	<b>C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?</b>	<b>D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 78 ↑</li> <li>11. In depth inquiries reported to Cabinet = 4 ↓</li> <li>12. Action plans agreed = 4 ↔</li> <li>13. Follow ups undertaken = 4 ↑</li> <li>14. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 2 ↑</li> <li>15. Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee = 100% ↔</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 90% ↓</li> <li>17. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 80% ↑</li> <li>18. Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 84% ↑</li> <li>19. Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 79% ↑</li> </ul>

↕↑ = significant change, ↓↑ = small change, ↔ no change

### 3. About the Indicators

#### A. How much scrutiny did we do?

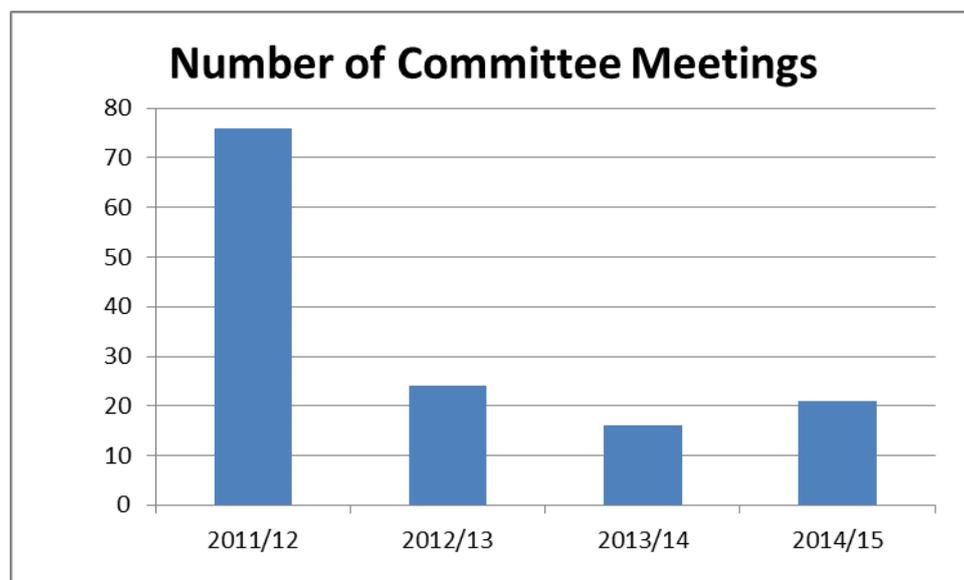
##### 3.1 Number of formal committee meetings = 21

Formal committee meetings for scrutiny are held in public and give councillors the opportunity to hold cabinet members to account and provide challenge on a range of policy and service issues.

The committee meetings for 2014-15 were as follows:

- Scrutiny Programme Committee (12 meetings)
- Special Scrutiny Programme Committee – review of gypsy & traveller site search process (9 meetings)

Comparison with previous years:



(Note: During 2012/13 before the Scrutiny Programme Committee was established three Scrutiny Boards were operating. In 2011/12 there were five boards and two committees)

##### 3.2 Number of panel meetings/working groups = 99

Panel meetings and working groups are established by the Scrutiny Programme Committee with an appointed convener.

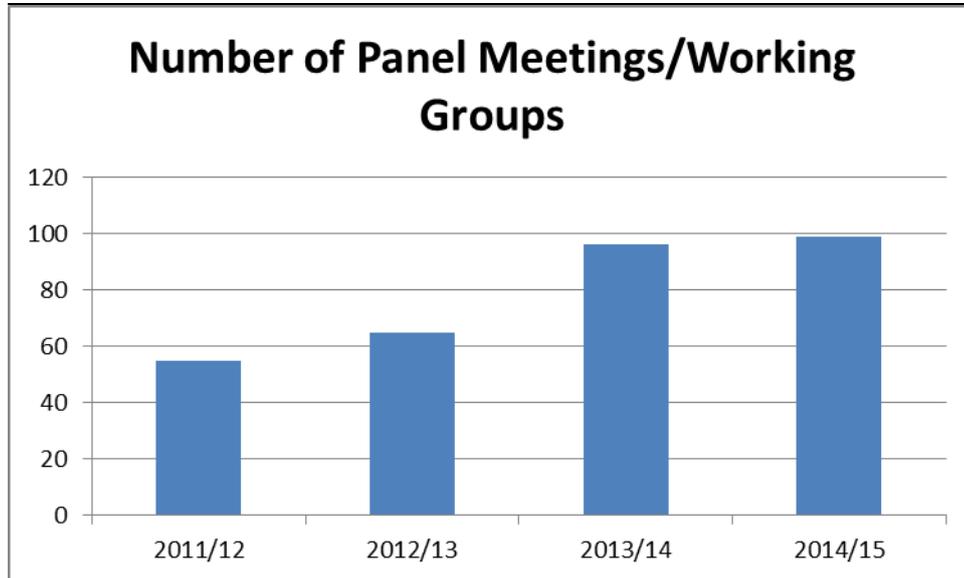
There are two types of panels:

**Inquiry panels** - these undertake in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis.

**Performance panels** - these provide in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas.

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

Comparison with previous years:

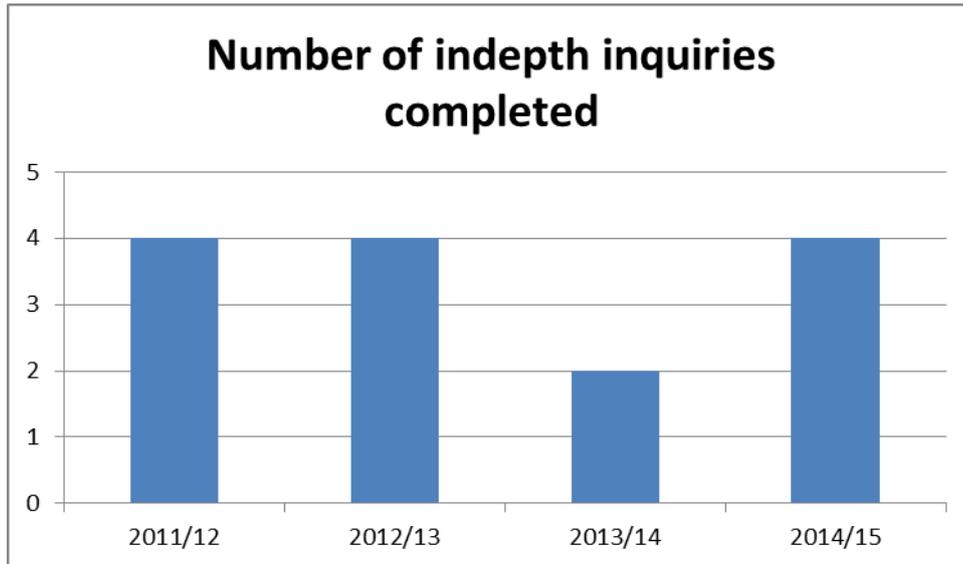


### 3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4

Work on the following in-depth inquiries was completed during 2014-15:

<b>Inquiry</b>	<b>Panel</b>
<i>Open for Business:</i> How can we increase inward investment to Swansea and the city region?	Inward Investment Inquiry Panel
<i>Public Engagement:</i> How can the Council improve its engagement practices?	Public Engagement Inquiry Panel
<i>Improving Street Scene Services:</i> How well does the Council maintain and keep clean the roads, footways and verges in Swansea, and what changes should it make?	Streetscene Inquiry Panel
<i>Building an Independence Service:</i> How can the Council and its partners best support older people to remain in their own homes?	Social Care at Home Inquiry Panel

Comparison with previous years:

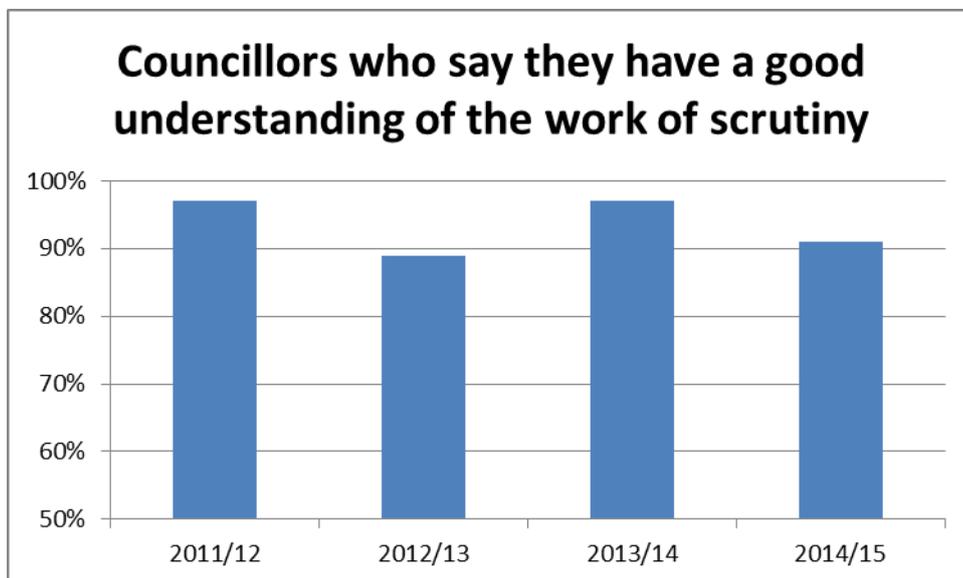


**B. How well did we do it?**

**3.4 Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 91%**

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of Councillors. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 33 (46% of all councillors).

Comparison with previous years:

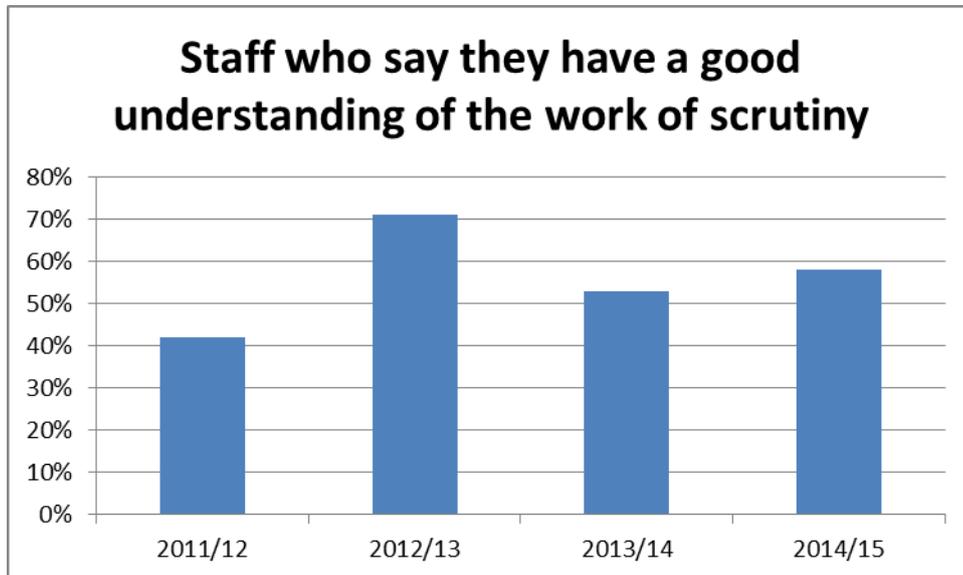


**3.5 Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 58%**

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny is an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of staff and

partners. The number of people answering this question was 83 which is a low number from which to draw meaningful conclusions.

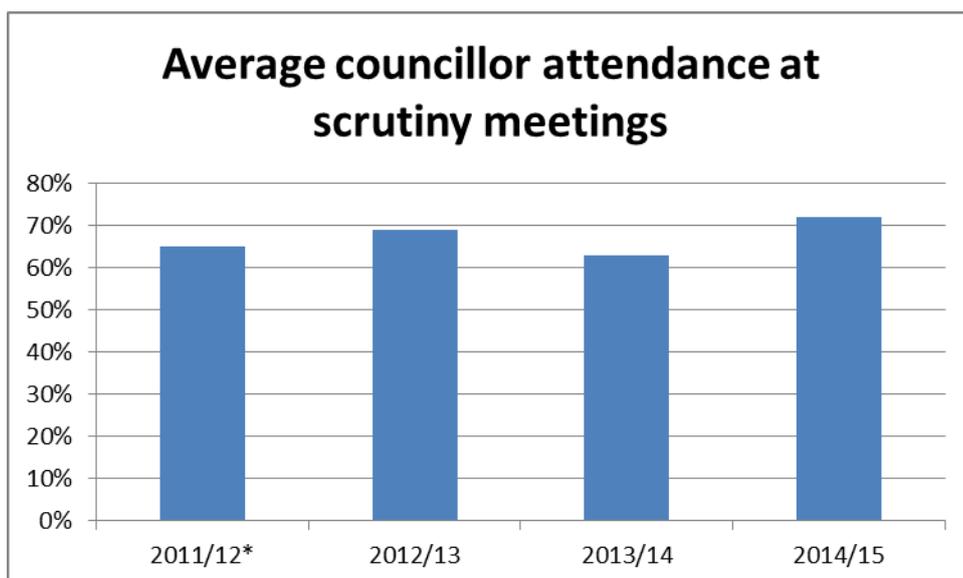
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.6 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 72%

The rate of councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process. Attendance figures for councillors attending formal meetings are collected by the Members Support Team and published on the Council's website. 2014/15's figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panel meetings and the working groups.

Comparison with previous years:

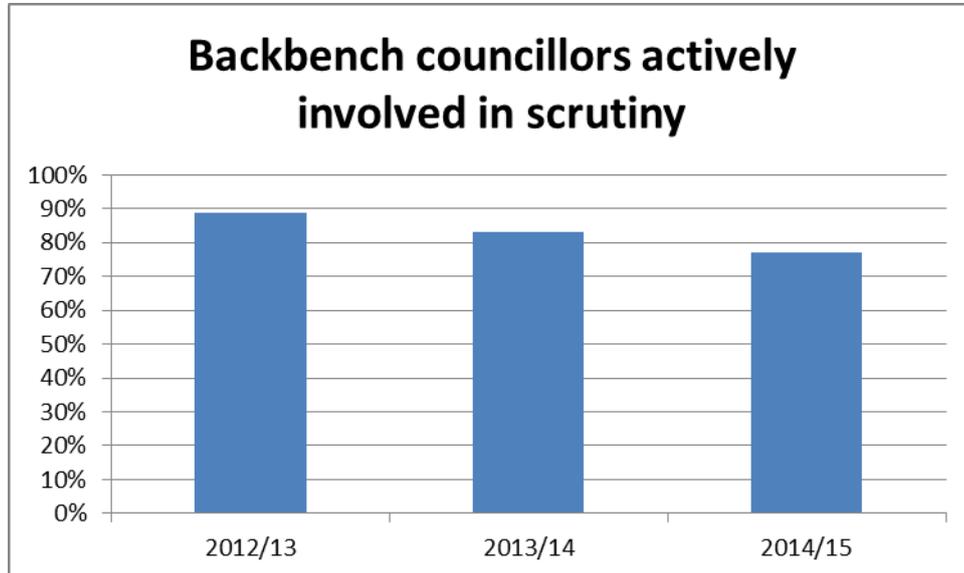


\*formal meetings only

**3.7 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 77%**

The large majority of backbench councillors were involved in scrutiny either through the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panels or working groups.

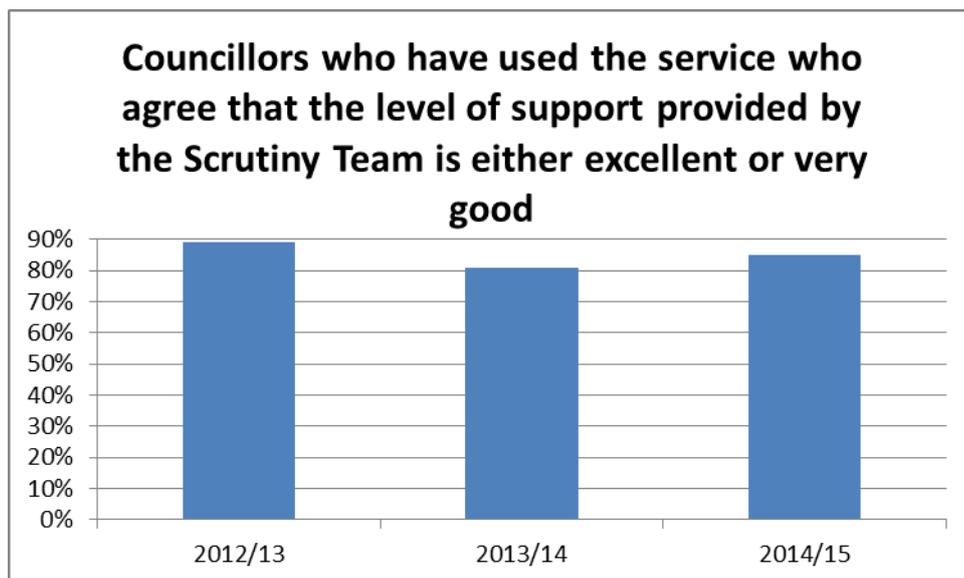
Comparison with previous years:



**3.8 Councillors who have used the service who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 85%**

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data is collected via an annual survey of councillors. The number of councillors answering this question was 33.

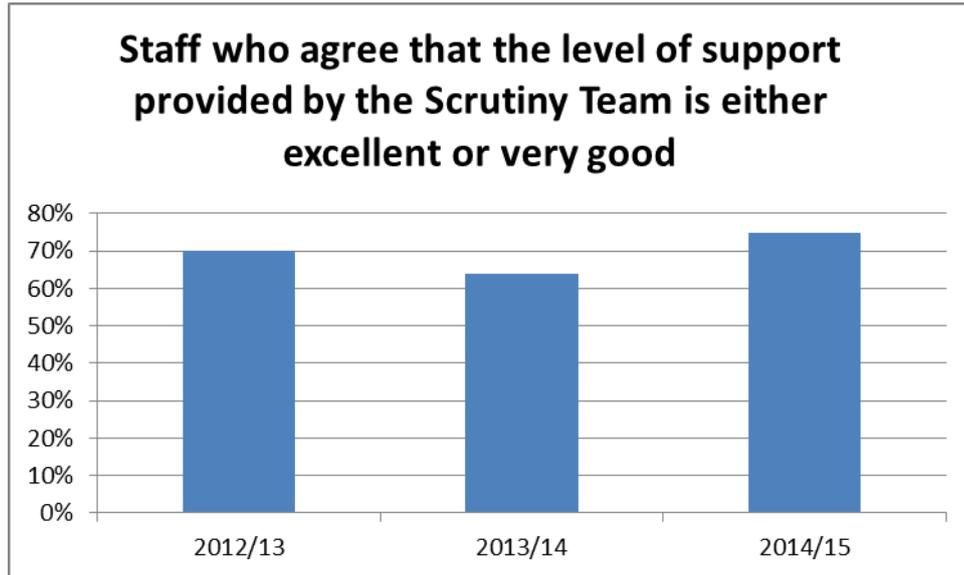
Comparison with previous years:



**3.9 Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 75%**

The Scrutiny Team provides capacity for the committee and the panel meetings/working groups to undertake their work by undertaking, for example, project management, research, report writing and liaison with cabinet and witnesses. This data is collected via an annual survey of staff and partners. Only those who have used the service are asked this question. The number of people answering this question was 12.

Comparison with previous years:

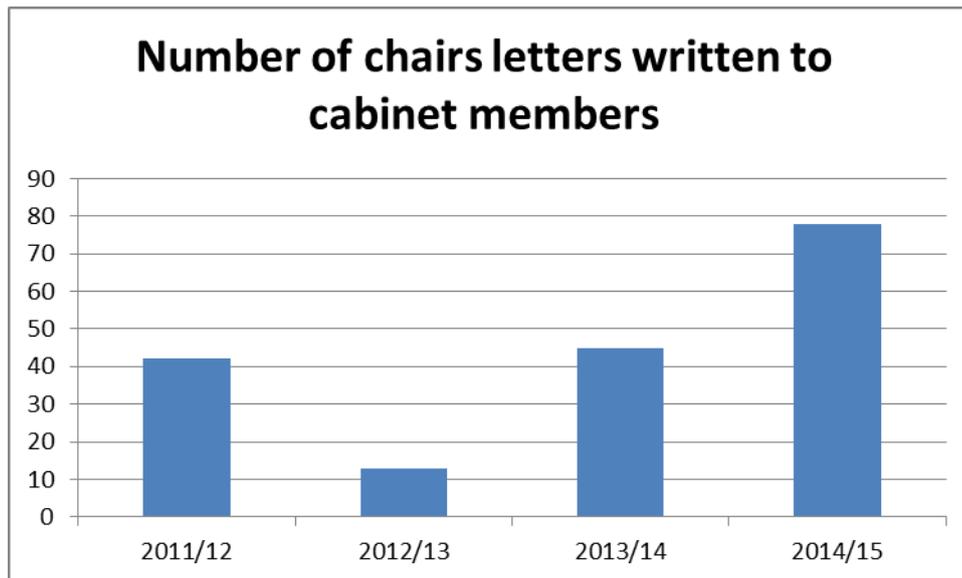


**C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?**

**3.10 Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 78**

Chairs letters allow the committee and panel meetings/working groups to communicate quickly and efficiently with the relevant cabinet members. They use these letters to raise concerns, highlight good practice, ask for further information and make recommendations.

Comparison with previous years:

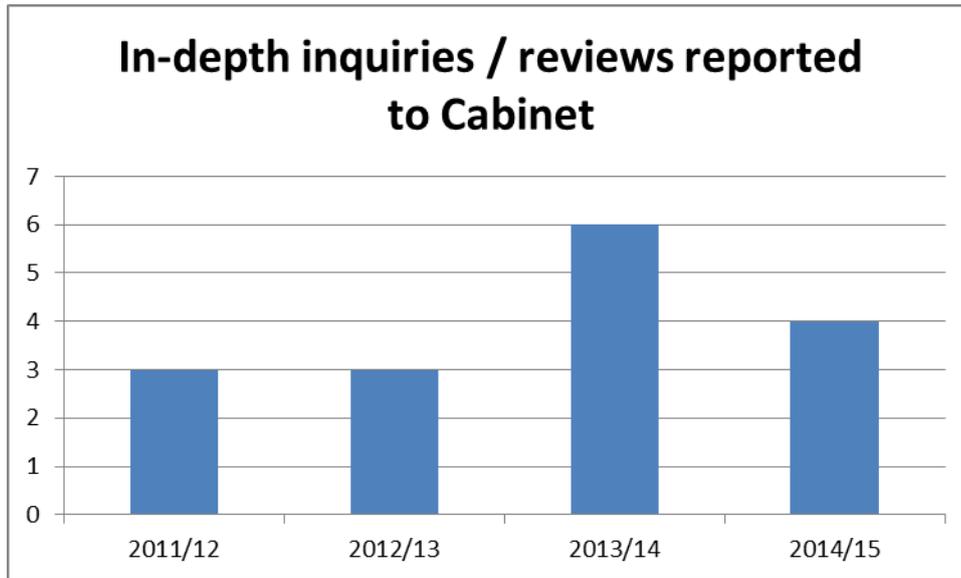


### 3.11 In-depth inquiries / reviews reported to Cabinet = 4

In depth inquiries are reported to Cabinet for a response to the recommendations agreed by scrutiny and action plan on how the recommendations will be implemented. The following in-depth reviews were reported to Cabinet from scrutiny with the number of recommendations from each shown in brackets:

- Inward Investment (12)
- Streetscene (21)
- Public Engagement (16)
- Social Care at Home (22)

Comparison with previous years:

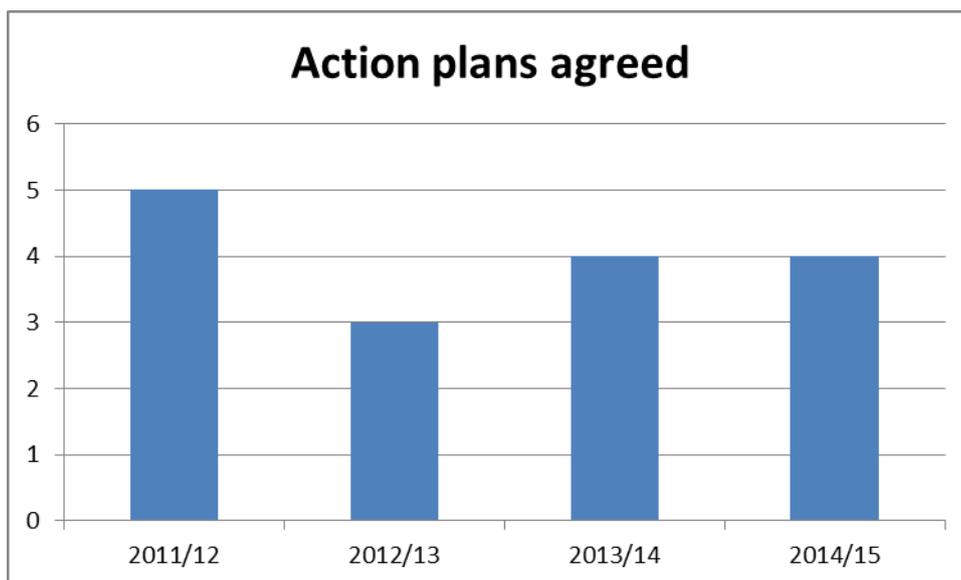


### 3.12 Action plans agreed = 4

Once recommendations and an action plan have been agreed by cabinet, scrutiny will follow up on progress with implementation and impact. The following action plans were agreed following in-depth inquiries during 2014-15:

- Inward Investment
- Streetscene
- Public Engagement
- Social Care at Home

Comparison with previous years:

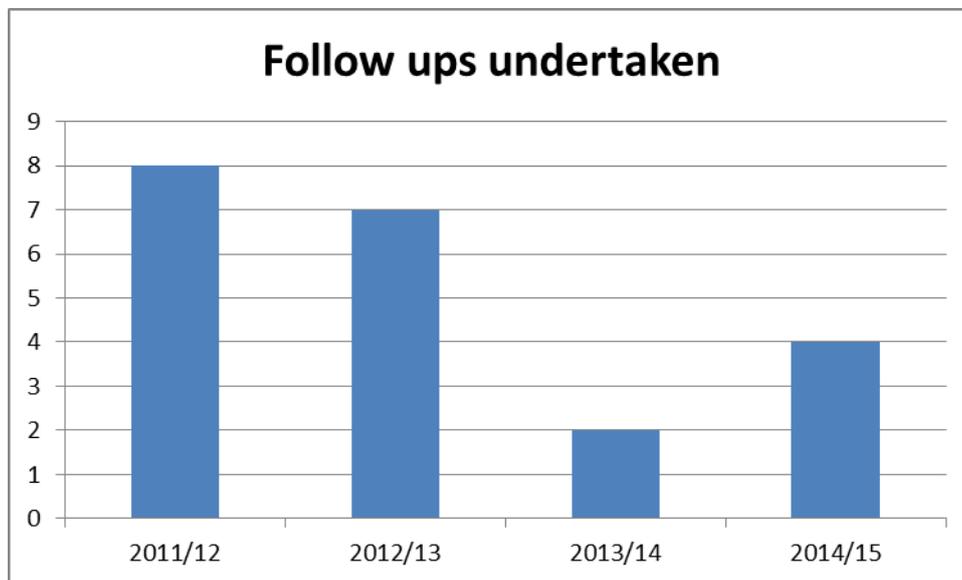


### 3.13 Follow ups undertaken = 4

In order to check whether the agreed action plans have been carried out, scrutiny will ask for follow up reports from cabinet members. If councillors are satisfied they can then conclude the work for that inquiry. The following follow ups were considered in 2014-15:

- Services for Looked After Children
- Tourism in Swansea
- Public Transport
- Affordable Housing

Comparison with previous years:

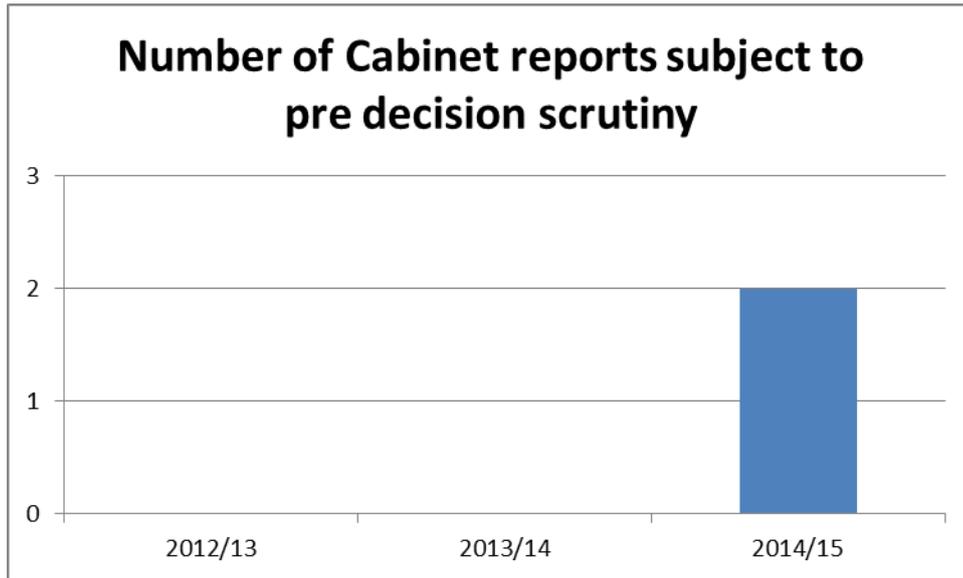


### 3.14 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 2

Pre decision scrutiny involves scrutiny councillors considering cabinet reports before cabinet makes a final decision. In 2014/15 2 cabinet reports were subject to pre decision scrutiny, these were:

- Proposed Lease of Underhill Park to Mumbles Community Association
- Everyone's IT - The Move to an in-House Managed ICT Service

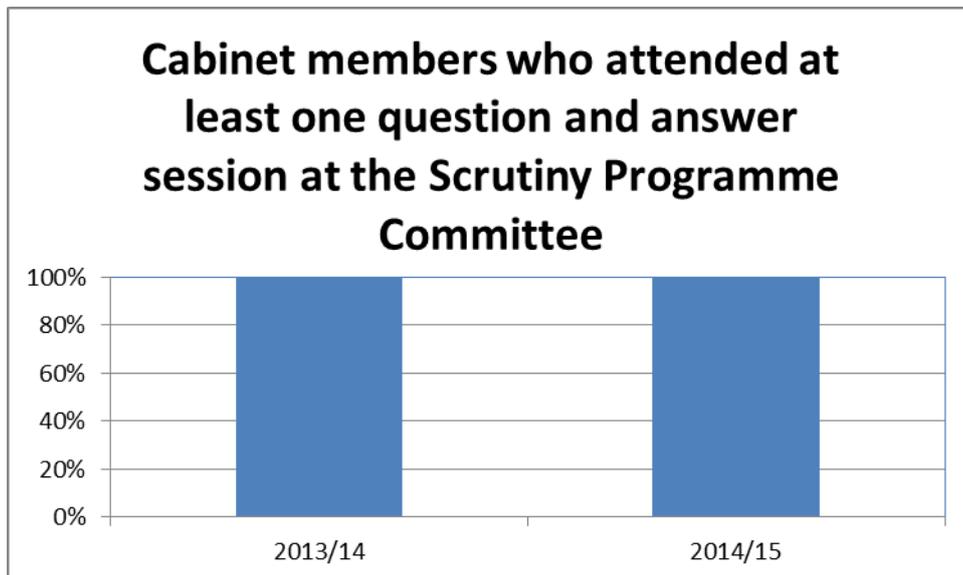
Comparison with previous years:



**3.15 Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee – 100%**

Cabinet members attend scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information. Cabinet attendance at scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the ‘holding to account’ role of scrutiny is functioning well. In 2014/15 every Cabinet member attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee. This indicator was added in 2013/14.

Comparison with previous years:

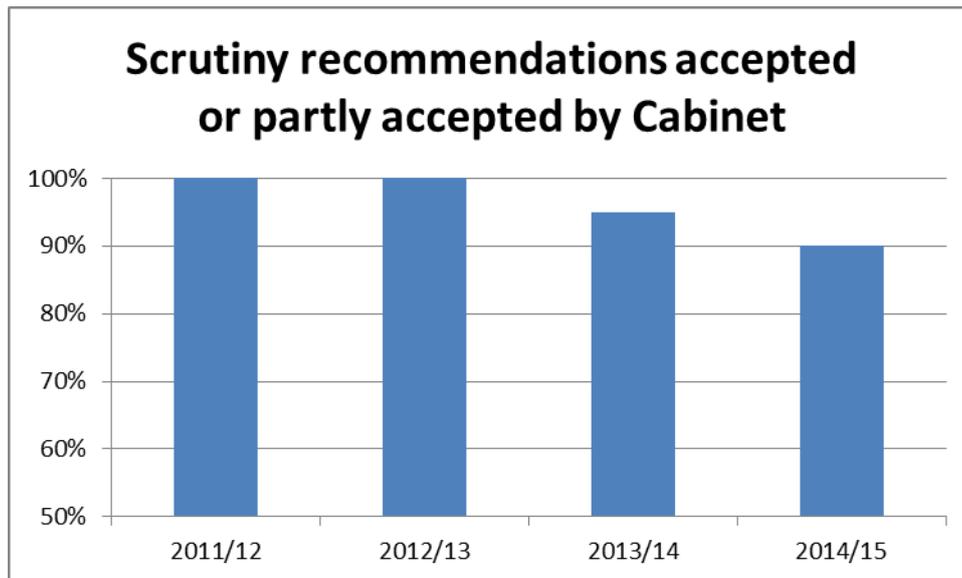


## D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

### 3.16 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 90%

The rate that cabinet accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence. Cabinet responded to 49 scrutiny recommendations in 2014-15 of which 39 were accepted and 5 were partly accepted. 5 were rejected.

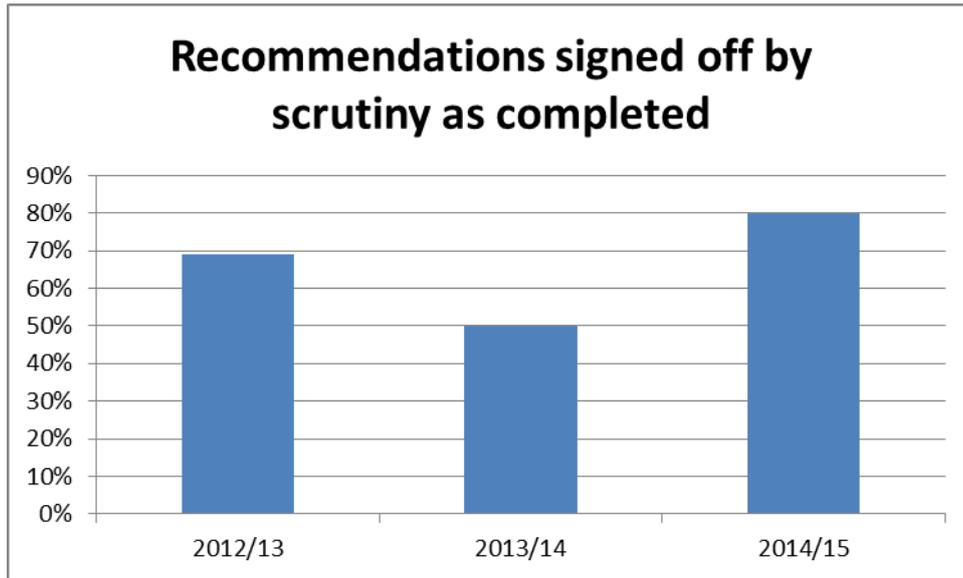
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.17 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 80%

When follow up reports are presented to scrutiny they detail which of the recommendations from the in depth inquiry have been completed in line with the cabinet member's action plan and which have not. Scrutiny councillors then consider whether they agree with the assessment taking into account the evidence they are presented with. This indicator represents the percentage of recommendations accepted by scrutiny as being completed for the year (51 recommendations were considered of which 41 were signed off as complete).

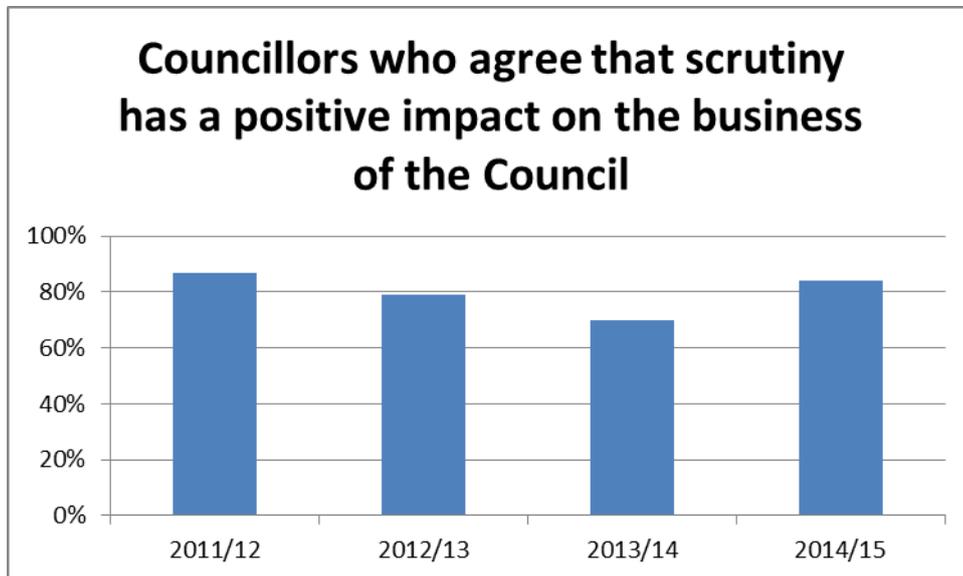
Comparison with previous years:



**3.18 Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 84%**

As part of an annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey was 33 (46% of all councillors).

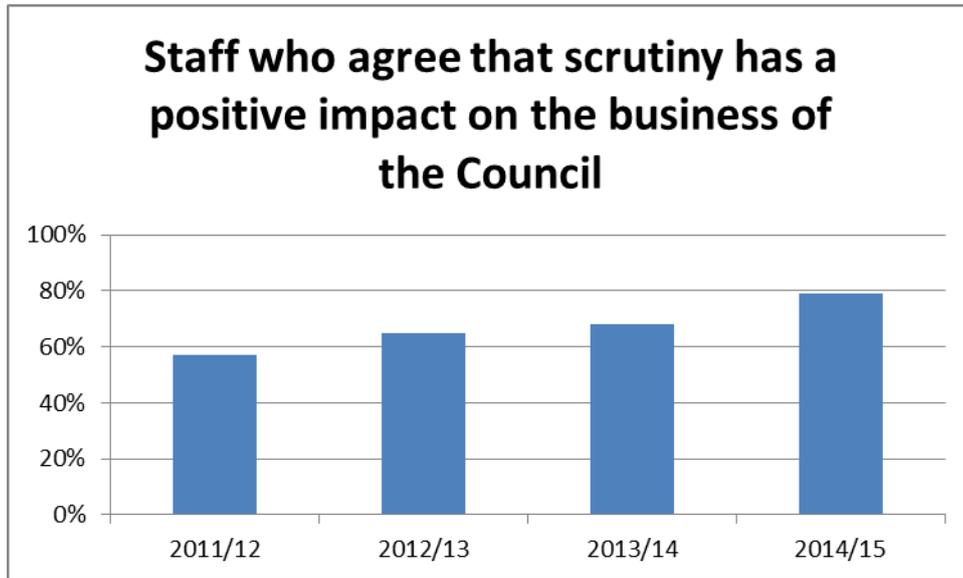
Comparison with previous years:



**3.19 Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 79%**

As part of an annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether they believe that scrutiny has made a difference. The number of people answering this question was 83.

Comparison with previous years:



## 4. Feedback and Improvement

This section gives a summary of what people have told us about scrutiny other than via the survey questions reported on as part of the scorecard. It draws on the text responses from our survey, feedback gathered from meetings and the recent reports from the Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review, Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment and the CSSIW Performance Report. It includes the opinions of councillors, council officers, partners and inspectors.

### 4.1 How people see scrutiny

Scrutiny was defined by people in a number of ways:

- An internal regulatory function of the council
- Critical challenge to delivery of key Council business
- An opportunity to explain some of the most important issues to members and receive constructive feedback
- Evaluating council services and decisions and allowing us to establish what's working well and what needs more development for the future
- Research and investigation on how we operate and where we can work smarter for less
- An alternative look at our services
- Something that should be the *raison d'etre* for a backbench councillor
- A necessary activity to help ensure standards are met, objectives achieved etc

The Wales Audit Office described scrutiny like this:

The Council's scrutiny structure consists of a formal Scrutiny Programme Committee, performance panels and time limited inquiry panels. The structure is intended to enable a more flexible response to issues through the establishment of time limited inquiry panels and affords members the opportunity to participate in the scrutiny of topics that matches their areas of interest

Generally speaking people see scrutiny as an important council function that is constructive, supportive, friendly and positive. For example:

- Good work being carried out - lots of positive evidence coming through
- Very positive with wide ranging topics across the authority
- Making an increasingly valuable contribution to the council's work.

The Wales Audit Office said that 'the Council's scrutiny's single committee structure enables a flexible and focussed approach'. The CSSIW described the scrutiny arrangements for child and adult services as 'effective and 'robust'.

Many also said that scrutiny is still developing, that it 'needs to have a clearer focus on outcomes and impact' as there is 'always room for improvement'.

Several people told us that scrutiny can be fragmented and that there are differences in the way that different panels work. Similarly the Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review team heard 'a range of different views on the effectiveness of these arrangements'.

## **4.2 What people like about scrutiny**

When asked, people were able to point to a number of positive aspects of scrutiny in Swansea.

Several referred to way that scrutiny provides independent challenge to Cabinet members and council officers. For example:

- It acts as a critical friend with robust challenge and positive feedback
- An opportunity to challenge the executive and question senior officers
- It acts as an evaluation tool and requires Officers to review their area of service in light of comments/observations etc. made
- Evaluation of your services and decisions is vital if we are to improve
- It allows independent assessors to examine Council procedures and working practices and comment appropriately upon their findings
- Scrutiny has been an important part of our improvement journey
- Helps Cabinet Members to think about their whole portfolio

Similarly, the Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review team found 'a sense that scrutiny provided challenge' and that 'many members could identify occasions where it had made an impact'.

Linked to this the Wales Audit Office highlighted that there are 'clear processes in place for reporting the outputs of scrutiny work and for following up and monitoring the implementation of recommendations, as well as the responsibilities of the Cabinet in responding to recommendations'.

A second point raised by a number of people was the opportunity that scrutiny provides for backbench councillors to influence council business:

- The opportunity for all councillors to play a role and follow their interests.
- Enables all Councillors to have a role outside of Cabinet
- Gives a chance to stop and look at areas of concern
- The ability to bring matters of concern into the public domain.

This was also mentioned by the Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review team who reported that:

...some non-executive members felt the Scrutiny Panels provided a means for them to elevate and explore issues that were important to them, thereby increasing their involvement in council business and scope to influence.

A third prominent benefit of scrutiny in the feedback was the way that scrutiny helped to build the knowledge of backbench councillors:

- A chance to glean information
- Having in-depth advice on areas which panels are looking into
- It keeps all aware of the achievements and difficulties faced by services
- Councillors develop good depth to their knowledge when they engage with a panel over a period of time
- A good learning experience for a comparatively new Councillor like me. A good opportunity to experience other points of view.
- It is informative and interesting

Other good aspects of scrutiny highlighted by those feeding back included the openness of scrutiny, the cross cutting approach, the varied nature of the topics, the opportunity to look at issues in-depth and the support provided by officers.

### **4.3 How scrutiny could be improved**

When asked about how scrutiny could be better, people highlighted a range of issues. The more prominent were:

- The length of time taken for some pieces of scrutiny work could be shorter
- Outcomes from scrutiny could be clearer
- Prioritise better so as not to try and do too much with limited resources
- Have a clearer relationship with the Cabinet Advisory Committees

Respondents also suggested that the scrutiny workplan could be aligned better with council priorities. This point was also made by the Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review Team who said that: 'There were some concerns that scrutiny needed to develop a stronger improvement role and that its focus should be more closely aligned to council priorities'. As a result they made the following recommendation:

The Council should consider how scrutiny could be closely oriented towards the Council's top priorities by, for example, establishing inquiries shaped around them. This would help develop scrutiny's improvement role as well as ensuring activity and resources have maximum impact

The Wales Audit Office found during their Corporate Assessment that there was 'a lack of access to information about proceedings and to the information

provided to panel members'. However, as they noted in their report, steps have since been taken to improve this through Scrutiny Dispatches and the recently introduced Scrutiny Publications page on the council website.

Other issues raised by individuals included:

- Better opportunities to triangulate the perspectives of those with a) strategic responsibilities b) operational responsibilities and c) service users.
- Sometimes too eager to look for blame instead of focussing on learning and development.
- Not enough councillors are involved.
- Lack of time for questioning cabinet members
- Lack of robustness - scrutiny being too cosy at times
- Lack of understanding of the role of scrutiny by those being scrutinised
- Time should be set aside for public questions
- Better information about the work of scrutiny across all councillors
- An additional committee to share the workload
- Attendance can be poor - could be improved
- More co-opting to complement the knowledge of councillors
- Sometimes can get party political.

#### 4.4 Looking back – what we have done to improve

Last year we agreed five improvement themes. Here is a summary of what we have done to address them:

<i>Theme</i>	<i>What We Did</i>
<b>Impact:</b> Making more of a difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny: Two sessions held with positive feedback from scrutiny and cabinet members.</li> <li>• Measurable outcomes established at the outset of inquiries where possible – identifying the ‘indicators we want to change’.</li> <li>• Stakeholder mapping introduced for inquiries</li> <li>• More dialogue with Cabinet about inquiry reports</li> <li>• Revised ‘follow up’ report for Cabinet Members considering the wider impact and involving stakeholders in the follow up process.</li> <li>• Impact of scrutiny is communicated better via press releases, blog posts and social media</li> </ul>
<b>Work Planning:</b> Focusing on the things that really matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed the format of our annual work planning conference to include a greater focus on the corporate priorities</li> <li>• Improved links with Audit Committee and Democratic Service Committee (sharing of work plans, chairs attending meetings).</li> </ul>

<p><b>Public Engagement:</b> Giving citizens a voice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed our work against the National Principles of Public Engagement</li> <li>• Encouraged wider involvement in question setting by all Scrutiny Councillors and public through email, blog and social media.</li> <li>• Use of social media to promote significant stories e.g. scrutiny blog: <a href="http://www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk">www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk</a></li> <li>• Scrutiny Dispatches – a quarterly report to council on impact</li> <li>• Using partners to help, where appropriate, with consultations for scrutiny inquiries e.g. schools for young people</li> <li>• Engaging with stakeholders beyond completion of inquiries</li> <li>• On-line publications page developed to make the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible: <a href="http://www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications">http://www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Training and Development:</b> Ensuring we have the skills we need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Engagement training provided, facilitated by Council's Consultation Coordinator.</li> <li>• Development session with the Centre for Public Scrutiny</li> <li>• Visit to the Welsh Assembly to learn about their approach to Public Engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Continuous Improvement:</b> Getting better at what we do</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held a review session for the Committee and Panel Conveners</li> <li>• Collected feedback and developed improvement proposals as part of the annual reporting process</li> </ul>

#### 4.5 Looking forward - what we need to change

Over the year we have had the benefit of a number of improvement activities including:

- Impact Action Plan agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee (July 2014)
- Communications Action Plan agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee (September 2014)
- Improvement session with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (January 2015)
- Wales Audit Office Corporate Assessment (June 2015)
- Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review (November 2014)
- Scrutiny Programme Committee Improvement Session (March 2015)

We have reviewed all of these activities and the other feedback that we have received and produced a simplified set of improvement outcomes for the year ahead:

1. We need to talk more to cabinet members so that we can plan better and ensure that our work is making a difference
2. We need to align the work of scrutiny more closely to the five corporate priorities so that we can focus and impact on the things that matter.
3. We need more briefings and development sessions so that we have the knowledge and skills we need
4. We need more coverage in the media so that the public are more aware of our work
5. We need more members of the public contributing to scrutiny meetings so that we can reflect their views in our work
6. We need closer links with regulators and inspectors so that we can provide a more coordinated and effective challenge

Over the next 12 months we will work on practical ways to achieve these outcomes and improve scrutiny in Swansea.