

# Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16



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# 1. Chair's Foreword

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



Over the last year scrutiny in Swansea has continued to improve and has been continued to make a difference. Our flexible approach to scrutiny, which has attracted interest from other councils, was recognised nationally when the City and County of Swansea was shortlisted for an MJ Award (otherwise known as the local government Oscars!) in the category of Excellence in Governance and Scrutiny. Unfortunately we did not claim the top prize but to be shortlisted for this award is a real achievement and shows how far we have come.

This year we have maintained our record of holding each of the Council's 10 Cabinet Members to account in a formal question and answer session with the Committee. Personally I am very pleased about this as this is one of the most important ways that scrutiny contributes to our local democracy. I am grateful to our Cabinet Members for taking the time to provide us with information and for being so constructive in their sessions with us. I look forward to more constructive holding to account over the coming year.

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:

- Number of panel meetings and working groups (105)
- Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny (79)
- Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny (6)
- Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet (97)
- Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny (96)

I want to pay tribute to the scrutiny councillors who have been working so hard to make a difference. This year we have had more meetings than ever before and this is because scrutiny councillors have been willing to give up their time to work on issues that they feel passionately about and they know are important to the public.

As scrutiny councillors we have been focusing on the issues that matter. Whether school improvement through our school governance inquiry, whether local services through our building sustainable communities inquiry or whether children and young people through our inquiry into mental health services for that age group. This last one is one that I have chaired and is an issue that I am particularly passionate about.

Last year in this report I hoped that we would be doing more pre decision scrutiny and, as you can see, this has indeed been the case. Over the last 12 months we have scrutinised six cabinet reports prior to decision. These have covered issues including the education outside of school, the development of the City Centre, social

care day services and the school music service. I expect that there will be more pre decision scrutiny in the year to come.

In terms of learning and development two import sessions were held this year. One session focused on children's rights and one on community services. Both sessions will help ensure that we ask the righty questions going forward. I am grateful to everyone who came and worked with us on these.

Last year we identified five improvement outcomes – ways that we wanted to improve the work that we do as scrutineers. In this report you will find details of the progress that we have made on those outcomes. There is still much to be done as we continue to improve what we do.

Finally, I want to give thanks to Councillor Robert Smith who recently stood down as Vice Chair of the committee. As well as being an excellent Vice Chair he has steered a particularly challenging piece of work on the Council's search for a Gypsy / Traveller site to a conclusion this year. He led this work with care and consideration and deserves a great deal of credit.

Councillor Nick Davies has taken over as Vice Chair I look forward to working with Nick as we continue to tackle the issue that matter over the coming year.

## 2. Swansea Scrutiny Results Scorecard 2015-16

Scrutiny Practice	<b>A. How much scrutiny did we do?</b>	<b>B. How well did we do it?</b>
	1. Number of committee meetings = 15 ↓ (21) 2. Number of panel meetings/working groups = 105 ↑ (99) 3. Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4 ↔	4. Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 93% ↑ (91%) 5. Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 96% ↑(58%) 6. Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 68% ↓ (72%) 7. Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 79% ↑ (77%) 8. Councillors who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 81% ↓ (85%) 9. Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 71% ↓ (75%) 10. Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 83%* 11. Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 75%*
Scrutiny Outcomes	<b>C. How much did scrutiny affect the business of the Council?</b>	<b>D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?</b>
	12. Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 71 ↓ (76) 13. In depth inquiries reported to Cabinet = 4 ↔ 14. Action plans agreed = 3 ↓ (4) 15. Follow ups undertaken = 5 ↑ (4) 16. Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 6 ↑ (2) 17. Cabinet members who attended at least one question and answer session at the Scrutiny Programme Committee = 100% ↔	18. Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet=97%↑ (90%) 19. Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 77% ↓ (80%) 20. Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 76% ↓ (84%) 21. Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 55% ↓(79%) 22. Councillors who agree that that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 74%* 23. Staff who agree that that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 60%*

↓↑ = significant change, ↓↑ = small change, ↔ no change \* new indicator

### 3. About the Indicators

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

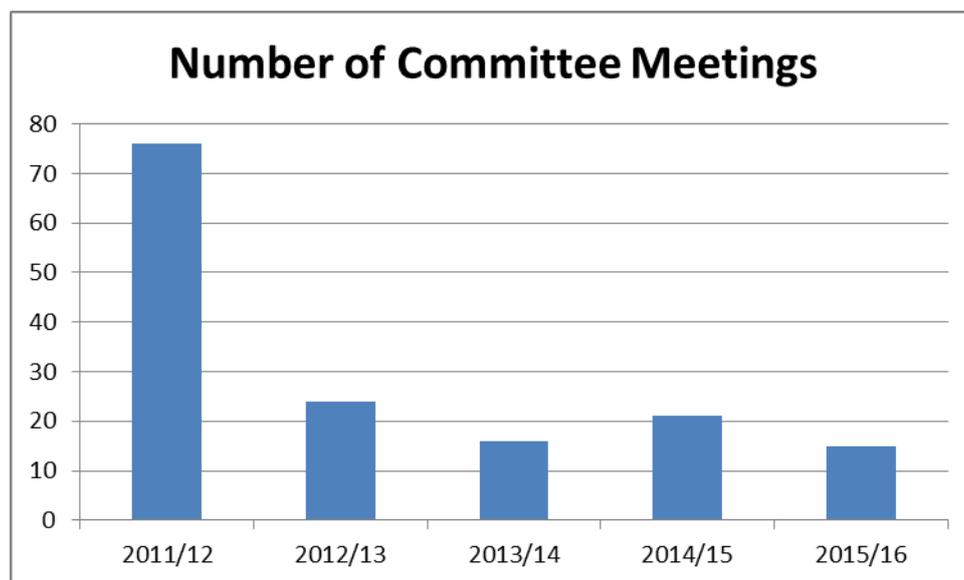
##### 3.1 Number of formal committee meetings = 15

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 2015-16 were as follows:

- Scrutiny Programme Committee (13 meetings)
- Special Scrutiny Programme Committee – review of gypsy & traveller site search process (2 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 = 105

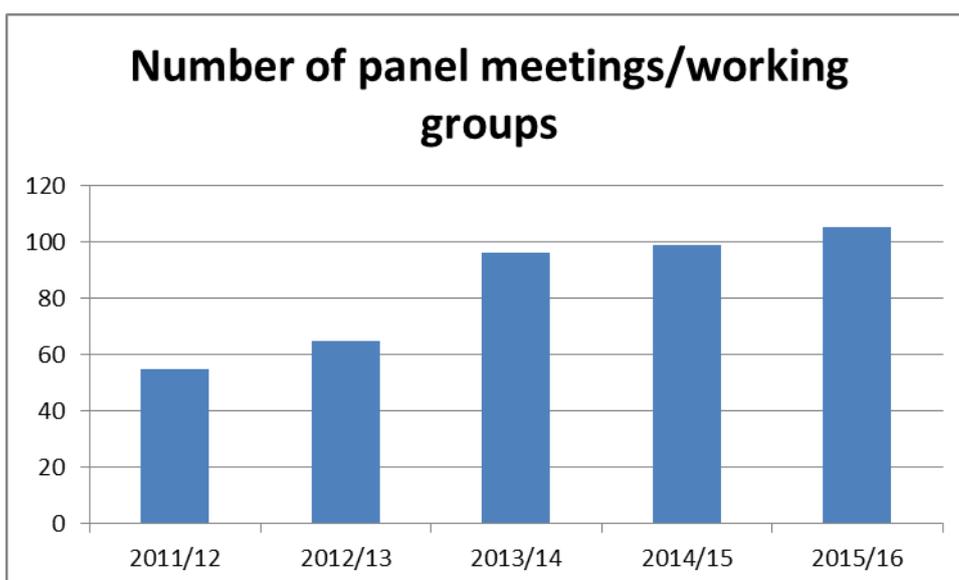
Panel meetings and working groups are established by the Scrutiny Programme Committee with an appointed convener. There are two types of panels:

**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:

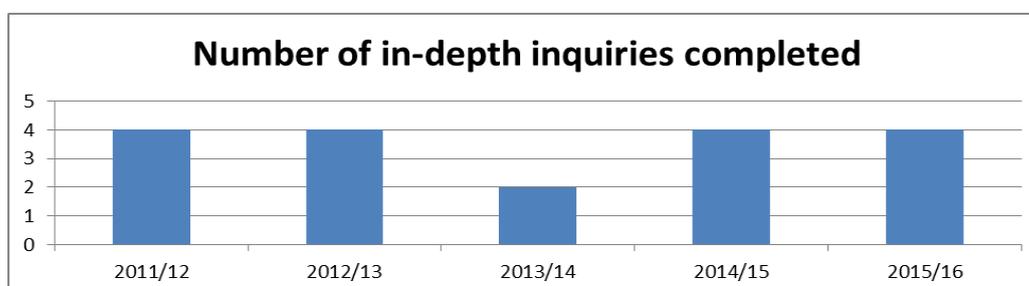


### 3.3 Number of in-depth inquiries completed = 4

Work on the following in-depth inquiries was completed during 2015-16:

Inquiry	Panel
<i>Scrutiny Review: Gypsy Traveller Site Search Process</i>	Scrutiny Programme Committee
<i>A very challenging role: How can the Council ensure that school governors provide effective challenge for their schools?</i>	School Governance Inquiry Panel
<i>High Aspirations: How are services being improved for those children and young people who need or are at risk of being educated other than at school?</i>	Education Inclusion Inquiry Panel
<i>Can do, yes please: How can Swansea Council ensure that service delivery is always supported by a can do culture?</i>	Corporate Culture Inquiry Panel

Comparison with previous years:

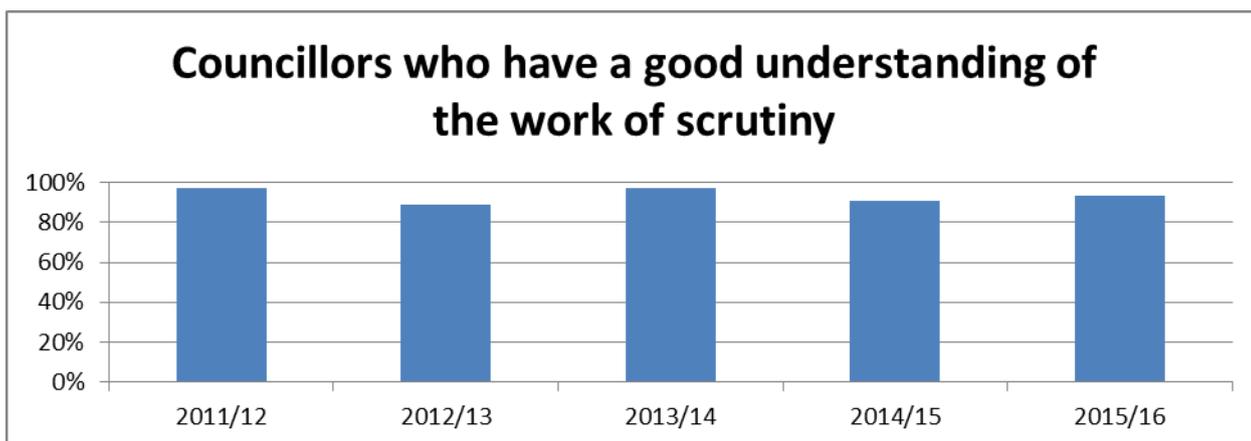


## B. How well did we do it?

### 3.4 Councillors who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 93%

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 42 (58% of all councillors).

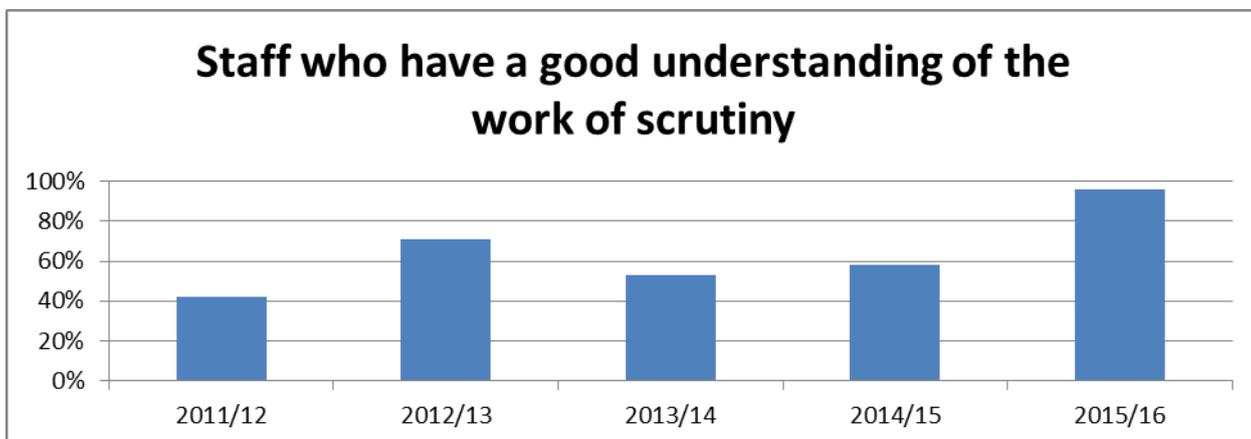
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.5 Staff who say they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny = 96%

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.

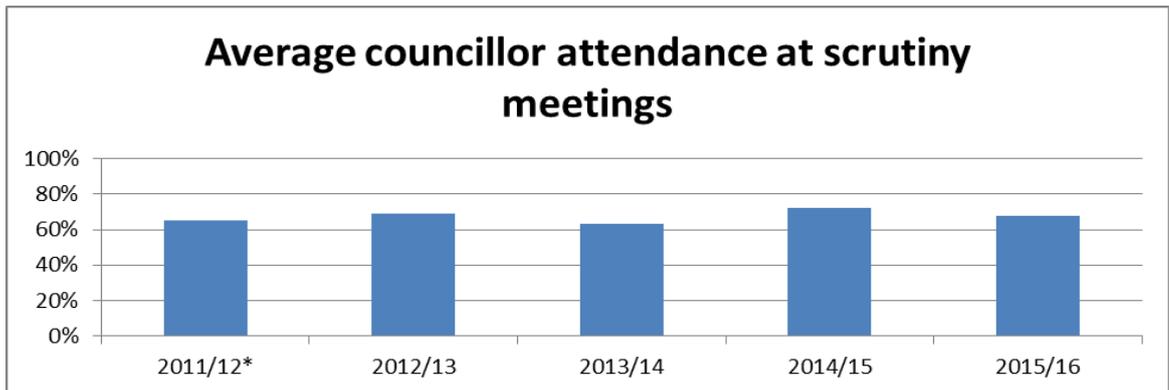
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.6 Average councillor attendance at scrutiny meetings = 68%

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. 2015/16's figure is an overall attendance figure that includes the Scrutiny Programme Committee, panel meetings and the working groups.

Comparison with previous years:

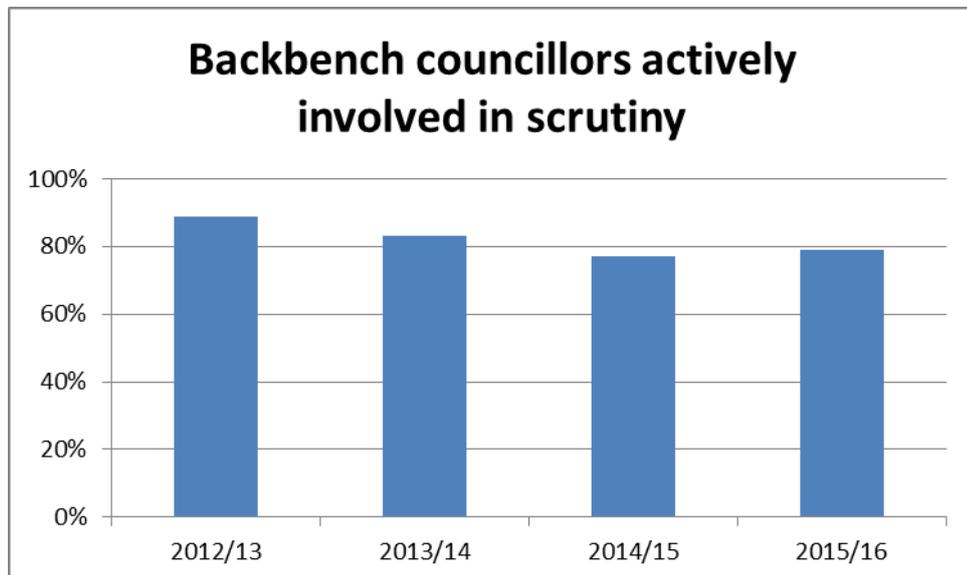


\*formal meetings only

### 3.7 Backbench councillors actively involved in scrutiny = 79%

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

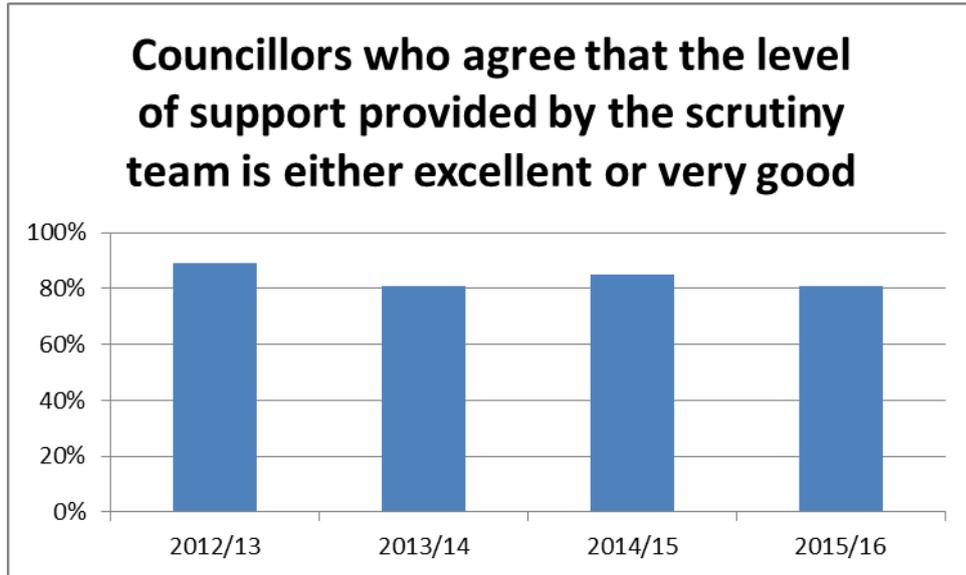
Comparison with previous years:



**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 = 81%**

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 42.

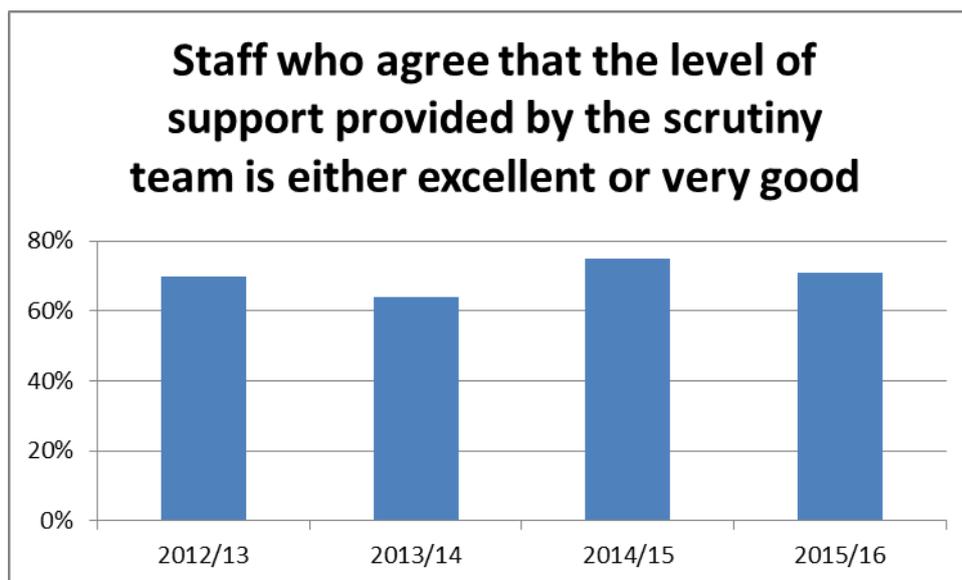
Comparison with previous years:



**3.9 Staff who agree that the level of support provided by the Scrutiny Team is either excellent or very good = 71%**

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 21.

Comparison with previous years:



**3.10 Councillors who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 83%**

As part of an annual survey, councillors are asked whether they feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. The number of councillors answering this question was 42. This was a new indicator for 2015/16.

**3.11 Staff who agree that the scrutiny arrangements are working well = 75%**

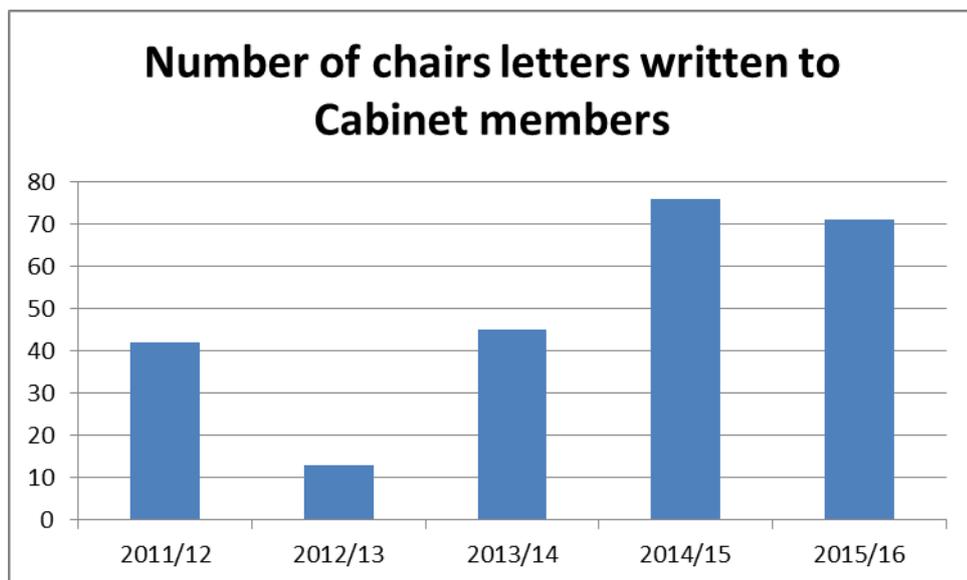
As part of an annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether they feel the scrutiny arrangements are working well. Only those staff and partners who have worked with scrutiny within the last 12 months are asked this question. 20 staff and partners answered this question. This was a new indicator for 2015/16.

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

#### 3.12 Number of chairs letters written to cabinet members = 71

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:

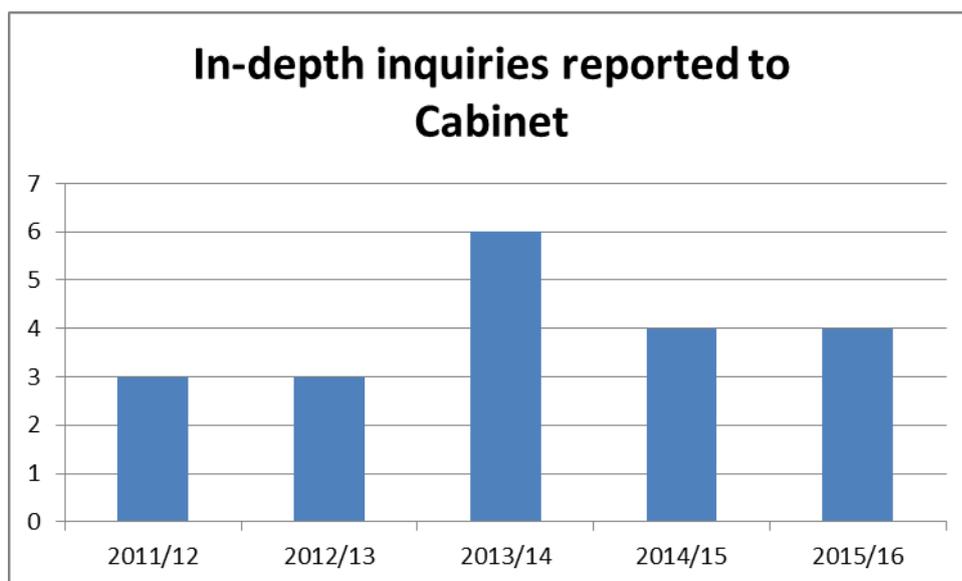


#### 3.13 In-depth inquiries / reviews reported to Cabinet = 4

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:

- Scrutiny Review: Gypsy Traveller Site Search Process (5)
- School Governance (16)
- Education Inclusion (20)
- Corporate Culture (19)

Comparison with previous years:

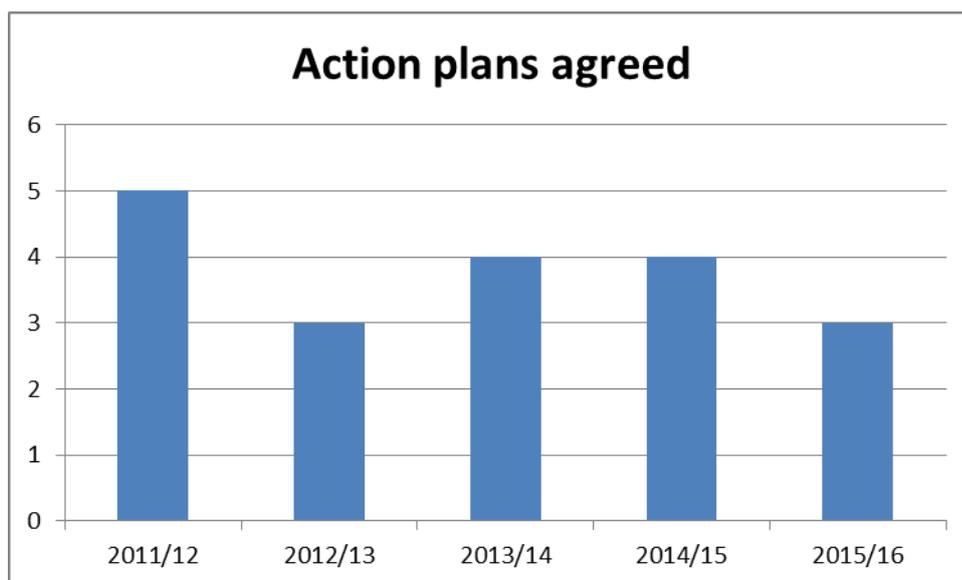


### 3.14 Action plans agreed = 3

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 2015-16:

- Social Care at Home
- Corporate Culture
- Education Inclusion

Comparison with previous years:

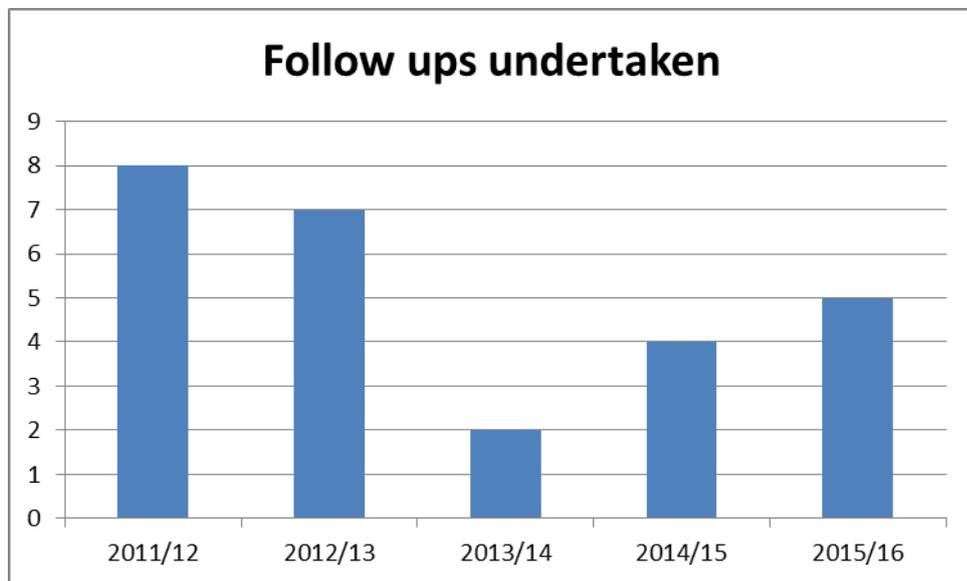


### 3.15 Follow ups undertaken = 5

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 2015-16:

- Attainment and Wellbeing
- Economic Inactivity
- Inward Investment
- Public Engagement
- Streetscene

Comparison with previous years:

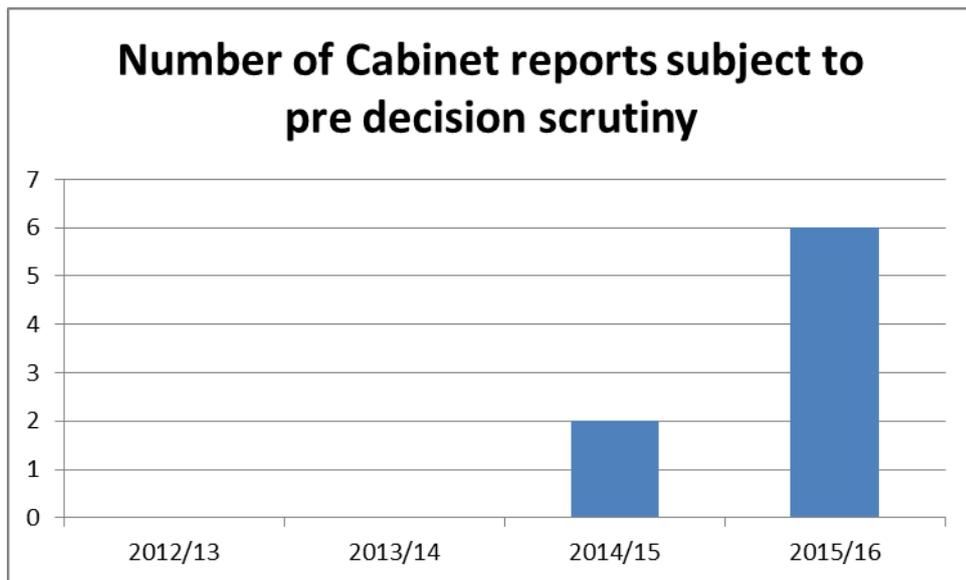


### 3.16 Number of Cabinet reports subject to pre decision scrutiny = 6

Pre decision scrutiny involves scrutiny councillors considering cabinet reports before cabinet makes a final decision. In 2015/16 6 cabinet reports were subject to pre decision scrutiny, these were:

- The Future of Education Other Than At School Services in Swansea
- Disposal of Former Civic Centre and Adjoining Land, Penllergaer
- Development of City Centre Sites – Selection of Development Partner(s) and Authorisation to Amend the Current Year Capital Programme (FPR7)
- Review Of Abergelli & The Beeches Alternative Day Services
- Budget Reports
- Review of School Music Service Arrangements

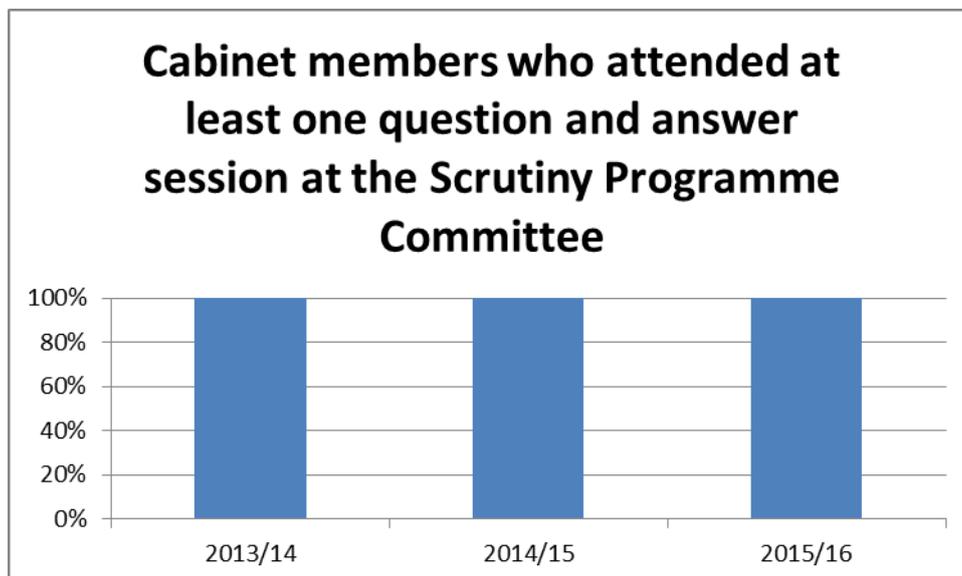
Comparison with previous years:



**3.17 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 2015/16 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:

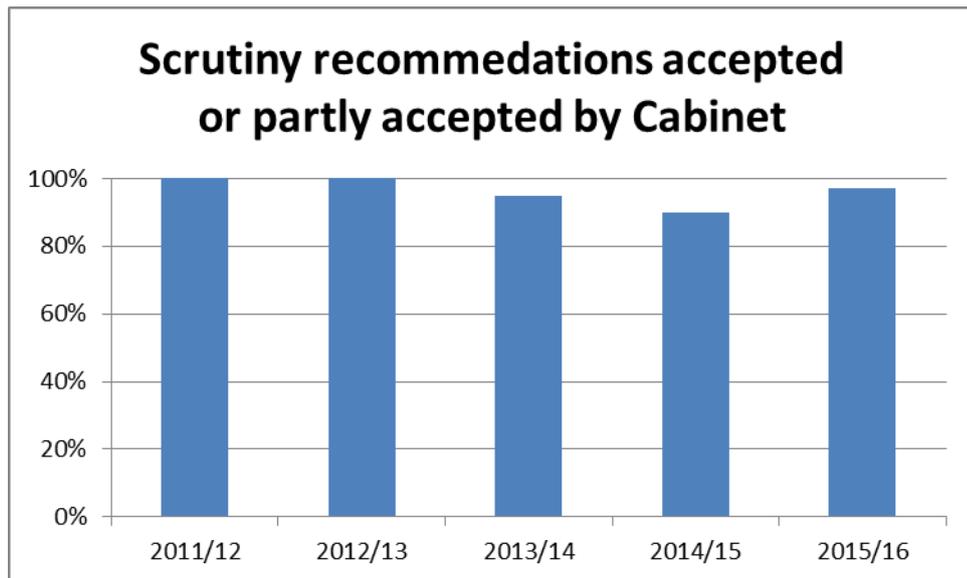


## D. What were the outcomes of scrutiny?

### 3.18 Scrutiny recommendations accepted or partly accepted by Cabinet = 97%

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 61 scrutiny recommendations in 2015-16 of which 54 were accepted and 5 were partly accepted. 2 were rejected.

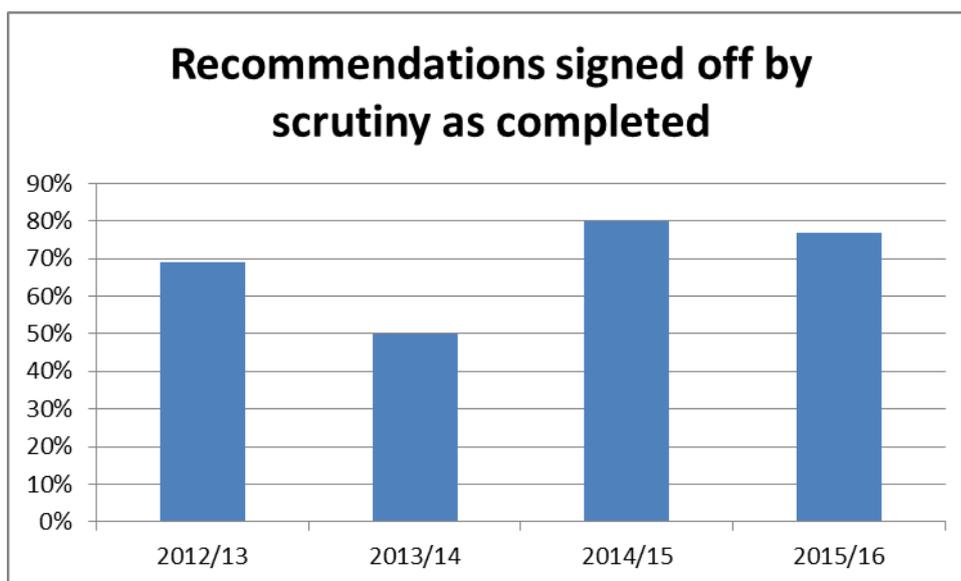
Comparison with previous years:



### 3.19 Recommendations signed off by scrutiny as completed = 77%

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 (62 recommendations were considered of which 48 were signed off as complete).

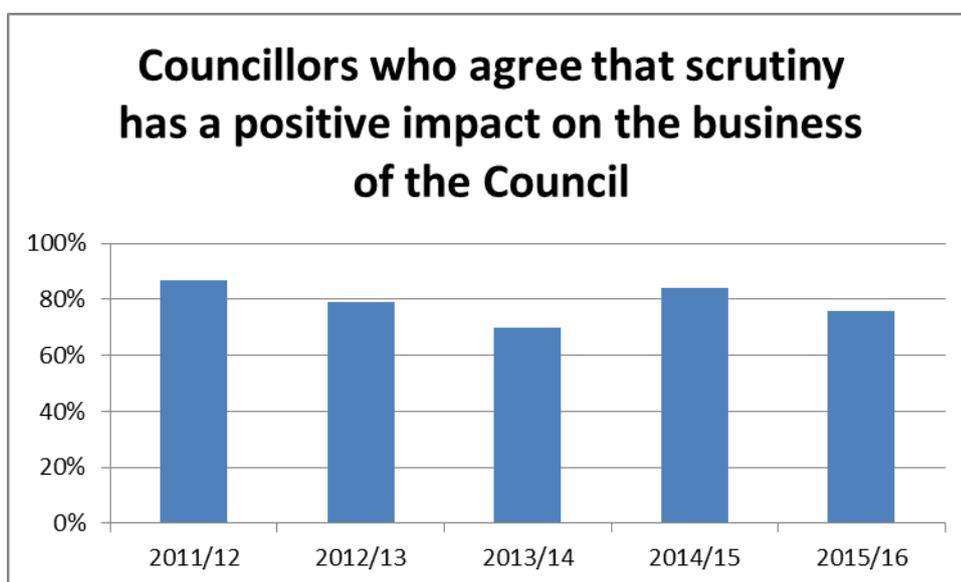
Comparison with previous years:



**3.20 Councillors who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 76%**

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 42 (58% of all councillors).

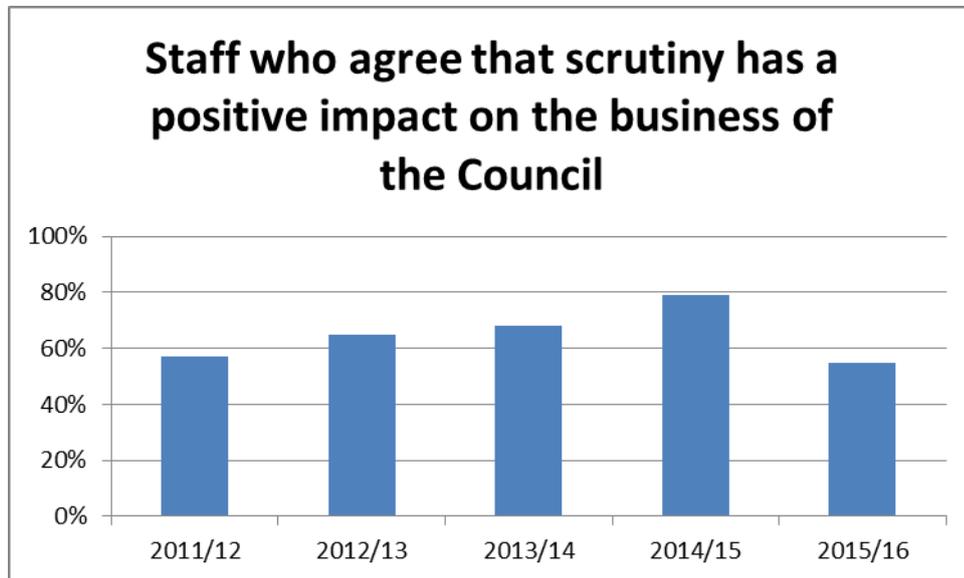
Comparison with previous years:



**3.21 Staff who agree that scrutiny has a positive impact on the business of the Council = 55%**

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:



**3.22 Councillors who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 74%**

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, councillors are asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. This is a new indicator for 2015/16.

**3.23 Staff who agree that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance = 60%**

It is important that the Scrutiny Work Programme strikes a balance between community concerns and strategic issues. As part of the annual survey, staff and partners are asked whether they believe that the Scrutiny Work Programme balances community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. Only those staff and partners who had been involved with the work of scrutiny within the last 12 months answered this question. 22 staff and partners answered this question. This is a new indicator for 2015/16.

## 4. Feedback and Improvement

### 4.1 Quotes about Scrutiny in Swansea

#### **Councillor May Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee**



“The single committee system has become a normal part of how we do things and continues to attract interest from other Councils. Our flexible approach has allowed councillors to follow their own interests but also to focus on topics that matter to the public. At a time when scrutiny faces more and more demands it is vital that we have a system that makes the best use of the resources we have.

I believe strongly that an important role of scrutiny is to hold Cabinet members to account. For this reason we have taken the time to engage fully with all 10 of the Council's Cabinet Members in a fair and balanced way. 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.

As well as chairing the Committee I have been able to lead work on child and adolescent mental health and Swansea Local Service Board (now Swansea Public Services Board).

#### **Councillor Robert Smith, Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee**



“For me the strength of our scrutiny system is its flexibility to deal with different topics in different ways. As Vice Chair of the Committee I have been leading a piece of work on our provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers and this has required the formal setting of the committee. I have also signed up for the Schools Performance Panel and working groups on tethered horses and civic events. These meetings have the option to be less formal and issues can be dealt with quickly – there is no need to apply a one size fits all approach.

#### **Councillor Rob Stewart, Leader of the City and County of Swansea**



“The scrutiny set up we have in Swansea makes an essential contribution to the work of the Council. We know from inspections that the system is effective and that the challenge that backbench councillors provide to Cabinet is robust. I believe I can speak for all of my colleagues in that Cabinet when I say that we are regularly held to account for our performance and made aware of issues of concern by scrutiny. As Leader I have been particularly concerned to ensure that backbench councillors are able to play a full part in council

business and our flexible model of scrutiny has played its part in helping this to happen.

### **Councillor Clive Lloyd, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Performance**



“As the Cabinet Member responsible for councillor support and development I believe the way that scrutiny operates is a real positive for back benchers. I know the in depth inquiry work in particular has helped councillors to get a real grip on the issues in a particular area and do some really good work as a result. As well as hearing positive reports from colleagues I know the system is working well because we have received enquiries from a number of other councils who are interested in how we do things.

### **Catherine M. Farrell, Professor of Public Management, University of South Wales**



“Over the last year, I have participated as a co-opted member of a scrutiny inquiry panel which focused on the authority's improvement of the governance of schools.

It is the strength of the evidence base which has impacted on the quality of the report which is sector leading in a number of respects including the inclusion and involvement of a range of stakeholders.

The report has been distributed widely and is of particular application in the governance of schools. It also has huge relevance in other areas of governance both within and outside local authorities.

### **Dave Anderson Thomas, Parent Governor Co-optee, Scrutiny Programme Committee**



“The members of the scrutiny panel and officers from the authority gave me their full support and guidance from day one. It was the first time I had been involved in the workings of local government and in particular, the challenges of working with various political agendas and the etiquette of formal council meetings. I would recommend getting involved with Scrutiny to Swansea residents who want to make a difference and influence their family's future.

### **Alan Thomas, (Lay) Chair of Audit Committee**



“I have been working closely with scrutiny over the last 12 months to ensure that we are fully aware of each other's forward programme - this ensures that there is no overlap or gaps and that we are clear as to our respective roles. I have attended the Scrutiny Committee and the Chair of Scrutiny has attended my Committee. I was also pleased to be able to participate in the Annual Scrutiny Work Planning Conference.

From an Audit Committee perspective I have no concerns about duplication in work plans. I would also point to the significant amount of scrutiny being undertaken and work completed. I wish to praise the commitment of those scrutiny councillors involved and the management of the overall work programme.

## The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales



The most recent **inspection report** that looked at scrutiny was by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. In October 2015 they reported that Swansea's Scrutiny arrangements were '*effective and well managed*'. Also that:

"CSSIW have attended scrutiny sessions where performance information has been presented and have witnessed the robustness of the challenge given from elected members.

CSSIW attended a number of performance panel meetings for both adult and children's services during the year. Information about the scrutiny activity has been improved with the publication of "Scrutiny Despatches" with access to recent reports and inquiry panel findings. Social media is also being used to improve access to this activity and to evidence work achieved.

## The Wales Audit Office



In June 2015 the Wales Audit Office published their **corporate assessment** of Swansea Council. They concluded that: '*The Council's scrutiny structure enables a flexible and focussed approach and access to information about scrutiny activity has improved in recent months*'. Furthermore:

"In recent months the Council has been taking steps to improve access to the information about its scrutiny work. Scrutiny Dispatches are being published explaining current inquiries and a Scrutiny Reports Library provides better access to the reports produced by inquiry panels. Social media is also being used to raise awareness of scrutiny activity.

## 4.2 Improving Scrutiny

In our last annual report we identified six improvement outcomes; things that we wanted to be better at. Over the course of the year we have discussed these outcomes at the committee and in panel meetings. Below is a summary of some of the things that we have done as a result and some things that we still want to do.

### 1. **We need to talk more to cabinet members so that we can plan better and ensure that our work is making a difference**

*What we have done*

- The Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee has established a regular informal meeting with the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Performance to discuss cabinet business and the interface with scrutiny.
- The conveners for the Schools, Child and Family Services and Transforming Adult Social Services Panels have consulted the relevant Cabinet Members about their work programmes.
- The Cabinet Member has been involved in developing the plan for the Building Sustainable Communities inquiry.
- The Convener of the Service Improvement & Finance Panel has met with the Cabinet Member to agree the pre-decision scrutiny of commissioning review cabinet reports
- Suggestions from Cabinet Member letters have been considered and some added to the work plans by the Child and Family Services and Transforming Adult Social Services Panels

*What we still want to do*

- More involvement of Cabinet members in early stages of inquiry to support planning (ie: at pre inquiry working group) to improve impact
- More regular meetings between performance panel conveners and relevant Cabinet members to improve work plans

### 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.**

*What we have done*

- The Committee has established new Inquiry Panels on Building Sustainable Communities and Tackling Poverty – these are both corporate priorities.
- The Schools Performance Panel has discussed the corporate priorities that relate to Schools Performance and detail them at the beginning of each agenda.
- Corporate Priorities were considered by the Service Improvement & Finance Panel as part of their work plan discussions for 2016/17.
- The terms of reference for the Child and Family Services Panel were aligned with the priorities in the corporate plan – specifically safeguarding vulnerable people.

*What we still want to do*

- Improve visibility of the corporate priorities on Panel agendas and work plans.
- Review the corporate priorities when planning in depth inquiries.

**3. We need more briefings and development sessions so that we have the knowledge and skills we need**

*What we have done*

- The committee has discussed training and identified a need for sessions on; the Council budget and financial scrutiny; scrutiny questioning skills; and effective scrutiny.
- Scrutiny training needs will be met through the Councils training and development programme.
- Scrutiny Councillors received training during the year on Children's Rights and the Scrutiny of Community Services (provided by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales)
- The Schools Performance Panel have received briefings on topics as part of regular meetings.

*What we still want to do*

- Hold extra briefing session where needed to improve the knowledge of Committee and Panel members.
- Prepare an induction programme for scrutiny councillors following the elections in 2017.

**4. We need more coverage in the media so that the public are more aware of our work**

*What we have done*

- The 'Scrutiny Dispatches' quarterly report is written in a more newsworthy style, and with assistance from the Communications Team press releases have been developed for media coverage.
- Press releases have been posted on the Swansea Scrutiny Bulletin Board and shared via twitter
- Media coverage for a range of scrutiny work including; music service item, inward investment, education inclusion, building sustainable communities, waste management, tackling poverty, budget scrutiny, grand theatre and child and adolescent mental health services.

*What we still want to do*

- More press releases to be issued and published via the Scrutiny Bulletin Board for key agenda items e.g. budget scrutiny and when reports are being published
- Better monitoring of media coverage and feedback to councillors

**5. We need more members of the public contributing to scrutiny meetings so that we can reflect their views in our work**

*What we have done*

- The Committee's agenda now includes a public question time
- Invited questions for the Committee's Cabinet Member Q&A sessions and requests for scrutiny
- 25 meetings (22%) had members of the public attending – there were a total of 143 attendances by members of the public in total
- 29 meetings (33%) considered public contributions either through questions or evidence (e.g. surveys)
- A total of 29 members of the public attended six meetings of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Panel and were given the opportunity to participate in 4 of the meetings.

*What we still want to do*

- Continue to develop ways of involving the public in scrutiny

**6. We need closer links with regulators and inspectors so that we can provide a more coordinated and effective challenge**

*What we have done*

- The Schools performance Panel met with a representative from Audit Committee
- Estyn gave evidence to the School Governance Scrutiny Inquiry
- The Schools Panel have made connections with Estyn via email contact and send them copies of agendas
- Estyn have attended the Schools Panel to observe.
- Service Improvement and Finance Panel receive the Wales Audit Office Annual Report each year and use it to identify any areas of concern that may benefit from scrutiny involvement.
- The Child & Family Services Panel have developed a relationship with the lead CSSIW inspector and provided work plans and letters

*What we still want to do*

- Further discussions with Wales Audit Office to develop links between our work plans, improve mutual awareness and make use of audit and scrutiny findings

### **4.3 Additional Areas for Improvement**

As well as the six improvement outcomes above, the Committee also identified the following issues as part of their end of year review:

- While 79% of back bench councillors were involved in scrutiny last year, there is scope for greater councillor participation
- Pre decision scrutiny is being used more but the process could be improved to ensure that Cabinet can respond properly to the views of scrutiny councillors

These issues will be considered by the committee over the coming months.