

Report to:	County Council
Date of Meeting:	12 May 2015
Member Presenting:	Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts
Report Authors:	Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group/ Scrutiny Coordinator and Democratic Services Officer
Title:	Annual Report of the Council's Scrutiny Committees

1. What is the report about?

The Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report to Council for 2014/15.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To present to Council the Scrutiny Committees' annual report on their activities during 2014/15.
- 2.2 To comply with Article 6.3.7 of the Council's Constitution which stipulates that scrutiny committees must report annually to full Council on their work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That Council considers the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees for 2014/15 and comments accordingly.

4. Report details.

- 4.1 The Constitution of Denbighshire County Council stipulates that the Authority's scrutiny committees will report annually on their activities during the year to County Council.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) wanted this year's Annual Report to follow the concise format which has been used in recent years. This gives the reader a brief overview of how scrutiny operates, the work committees have undertaken, and informs residents how they can participate and contribute to the scrutiny process. A copy of the draft report can be seen at Appendix 1 to this report. The more detailed report, which forms the basis of the summary version, will be sent to councillors under separate cover. This version will also be available on the Council's website.
- 4.3 As well as containing a summary of each scrutiny committee's resolutions, this year's report concentrates on outlining scrutiny's work in challenging the Council's plans to deliver its corporate priorities by 2017. Scrutiny's objective

in examining in detail these plans is to support the delivery of the seven corporate priorities which make up the Corporate Plan and assist the Council to realise its ambition of being close to the community.

- 4.4 As in recent years the Annual Report includes a form which enables the general public to suggest areas or services for scrutiny's consideration. The rationale behind this form is to try and generate public interest and improve residents' interaction with scrutiny in line with the Welsh Government's expectations for local authorities.

Wales Audit Office (WAO) Scrutiny Improvement Study

- 4.5 At end of May 2014 the Wales Audit Office (WAO) published its findings and recommendations following its national study on scrutiny in Wales. The WAO's report *Good Scrutiny? Good Question!* highlights the need to strengthen scrutiny's role across local government and public services in general. It also stresses the benefits of using scrutiny as a means for engaging with residents and service-users in order to make better decisions which lead to better outcomes for residents.

Welsh Government's White Paper on Reforming Local Government

- 4.6 In February 2015 the Welsh Government (WG) published its White Paper called *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People*. The White Paper sets out the WG's vision for local government in future, which includes its aspirations for scrutiny. This vision closely reflects the recommendations contained in the 2014 WAO report. Both documents can be accessed by following the links below:

Good Scrutiny? Good Question! <http://www.wao.gov.uk/publication/good-scrutiny-good-question-auditor-general-wales-improvement-study-scrutiny-local>

The White Paper *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People*. The link below should take you to the document on the WG's website, Chapter 8 *Strengthening the Role of Review*, sets out the vision for scrutiny:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?lang=en>

- 4.7 The SCVCG has considered both documents and, having regard to the recommendations of the WAO report and the vision outlined in the White Paper, in a bid to balance national and local priorities and ensure that scrutiny works for the benefit of local residents, it has asked the Council's scrutiny committees in future to focus on four key areas when setting their work programmes. These areas are:

- the corporate priorities and delivering the Corporate Plan;
- budget savings and their impact on Denbighshire and its residents;
- other high priority areas which scrutiny can influence and effect change; and
- other urgent or unforeseen areas of high priority

4.8 In future, when considering a request for a matter to be scrutinised, the SCVCG or individual scrutiny committees will apply the following criteria to determine whether an item merits scrutiny:

- is it a matter of public interest?
- does Scrutiny have the ability to influence or change things?
- does it relate to an underperforming service?
- does the matter affect a large number of residents or a large geographical area?
- is anyone else looking at it?

4.9 Looking ahead to the forthcoming year, representatives from the three scrutiny committees will be working together on the 'Cutting Our Cloth' Task and Finish Group, established to evaluate the impact of the budget cuts on the Corporate Plan, on residents and on the Council's performance.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Effective scrutiny will assist the Council to deliver its corporate priorities in line with community needs, residents' wishes and within budget.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The publication of the Annual Report forms part of the regular committee reports despatch to county councillors and other recipients, therefore there are no additional costs entailed with its publication. The Annual Report upon approval and translation will be distributed to Council outlets such as libraries, One Stop Shops, leisure centres and to town and community councils, with electronic versions sent to all school councils within the County. It will also be available on the Council's intranet and website.

6.2 Any costs incurred with respect to the work of task and finish groups will be met from within the existing budgets.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

Effective scrutiny of Council policies, procedures and decisions should mitigate the risk of there being any adverse impact on people who share protected characteristics.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Members of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group have been involved with the drafting of the Annual Report and have been consulted on its contents.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no significant financial implications resulting from this report. As mentioned in paragraph 6 above any costs relating to the production of the Report will be contained within existing budgets, as will any costs arising from the establishment of task and finish groups.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

No risks have been identified with respect to the consideration of the Committees' Annual Report.

11. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3.7 of the Council's Constitution stipulates that the Council's scrutiny committees must report annually on their activities to full Council.

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