

**Report to:** Democratic Services Committee  
**Date of Meeting:** 22 January 2016  
**Lead Officer:** Democratic Services Manager  
**Report Author:** Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
**Title:** Developing Scrutiny in Denbighshire

---

**1. What is the report about?**

The progress to date in developing and improving the Council's scrutiny function.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To inform the Committee of the progress made in developing the Council's scrutiny function to support the delivery of its corporate priorities and improving it in line with regulators' vision for scrutiny across Wales.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That Members:

- 3.1 consider the information provided and comment on the progress made to date supporting the approach for continued improvement;
- 3.3 if appropriate identify areas for further improvement or strengthening going forward; and
- 3.4 recommend that all county councillors, committee members and officers participate in the next scrutiny self-evaluation exercise in order that the function can be properly evaluated with a view to continued improvement.

**4. Report details**

- 4.1 At its meeting on 28 November 2014 the Committee considered a report on proposals on how to develop scrutiny in Denbighshire to ensure that it worked more efficiently and effectively, focused on supporting the delivery of the Corporate Plan and added value to the decision-making process. The following link will take members to the report considered at that meeting and to the minutes of the meeting:  
<https://moderngov.denbighshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=413&MId=5057&Ver=4&LLL=0>

- 4.2 In addition to aiding the delivery of the Corporate Plan the proposals put forward also aimed to address recommendations made in the May 2014 Wales Audit Office (WAO) national report on scrutiny in Wales, *Good Scrutiny? Good Question!*<sup>1</sup>
- 4.3 In response to the WAO report an action plan was drawn up to address the regulators' recommendations, and to progress the implementation of best practices observed by scrutiny members during peer visits and discussions which formed part of the WAO review process. A copy of the action plan is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.4 Recommendation 7 of the WAO report stated that each local authority scrutiny function should "undertake [a] regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network." This Committee, at its meeting in November 2014, endorsed the adoption of the 'characteristics'. As part of the preparation process for last year's Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees a self-evaluation was undertaken based on the above characteristics. However, due to the low response rate to the self-evaluation questionnaire the findings of the exercise were not included in the Annual Report as it was felt that the conclusions could be deemed as unqualitative. For the Committee's information the results of the self-evaluation exercise are included at Appendix 2. Despite the low return rate some consistent themes for improvement were identified and these can be seen on the last page of Appendix 2.
- 4.5 The Annual Report of the Council's Scrutiny Committees for 2014/15 was presented to County Council in May 2015. The following link will take you to the relevant page on the Council's website where you can access the full and summary version of the report: <https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/your-council/about-the-council/how-the-council-works.aspx>
- 4.6 During the autumn of 2016 the Council is due to be the subject of a WAO Corporate Assessment. Having regard to this the Committee is asked to consider the progress made to date in developing scrutiny in Denbighshire, identify areas for further improvement and recommend that all county councillors, committee members and officers participate in the next scrutiny self-evaluation exercise in order that the function can be properly evaluated and consequently strengthened further.

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

A robust and effective scrutiny function will support the Council's ambition to deliver its Corporate Plan within the desired timescale. An effective scrutiny function can also assist the Council to realise its ambition of being closer to the community.

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

Costs for developing the scrutiny function and for undertaking a self-evaluation exercise will be minimal, as they will only entail different ways of working and the self-

---

<sup>1</sup> *Good Scrutiny? Good Question!* WAO, May 2014: <http://www.audit.wales/publication/good-scrutiny-good-question-auditor-general-wales-improvement-study-scrutiny-local>

evaluation exercise will generally be undertaken electronically. All costs will have to be contained within the current departmental budget.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report**

No Equality Impact Assessment is required for this report as it does not propose changes to policies or procedures. Effective scrutiny can ensure that the impact of Council decisions on people who share protected characteristics are safeguarded.

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

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) periodically monitor the delivery of the Scrutiny Improvement Action Plan.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not required.

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

An ineffective scrutiny function has the potential to result in the Council not delivering its Corporate Plan, or in Cabinet or officers not being challenged and held to account for decisions taken. This can lead to adverse regulatory reports and even Welsh Government intervention. Ensuring the Authority has an effective scrutiny function which develops to meet new demands and challenges can mitigate the risk of adverse reports or intervention. A robust and effective scrutiny function should also result in better, evidence-based decisions.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

Article 6.5.4 of the Council's Constitution stipulates that the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group may consider "issues which will assist Members to perform the scrutiny function effectively." The remit of the Democratic Services Committee includes reviewing the adequacy of provision by the authority of staff, accommodation and other resources to discharge democratic services functions (Section 9 of Part 1 of the Local Government Measure 2011).

**Contact Officer:**

Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Tel: 01824 712554