

Report to: County Council

Date of Meeting: 10 May 2016

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 2015/16

1. What is the report about?

The Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report to Council for 2015/16

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To present to Council the Scrutiny Committees' annual report on their activities during 2015/16.
- 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 2015/16 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 year's Annual Report follows a similar format to that used in previous years. This gives the reader a brief overview of how scrutiny operates, the work scrutiny has undertaken to try and support the delivery of the Council's seven corporate priorities as well as other work undertaken by scrutiny members and task and finish groups. The report also tells 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 report will in due course be available on the Council's website.
- 4.3 During 2015/16 scrutiny has undertaken a mix of pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny work. It has also regularly been involved in performance monitoring work, participated in consultation exercises and invited a number of external or partner

organisations to meet with committees to discuss areas of common interest or concern.

- 4.4 Three separate Cabinet decisions were the subject of call-in requests to scrutiny during the year. All of these 'call-in' requests related to Cabinet decisions to close schools. Whilst scrutiny decided that none of these decisions merited being referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration, full and detailed consideration was given to the grounds on which they were called-in and representatives from the respective governing bodies were invited to address the committees, before any conclusions were reached.
- 4.5 The attached report contains a summary of each scrutiny committee's resolutions, and also details some of the work of the Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group, established to examine the impact of the 'Cutting Our Cloth' budget decisions on Denbighshire's communities and residents post their implementation. It also outlines the progress of the Adult In-house Social Care Task and Finish Group's work.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 When considering a request for a matter to be scrutinised, be it a request from an elected member, an officer or from the general public, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) applies the following criteria to determine whether the 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?
- 4.8 It is pleasing to report that more members of the public have attended scrutiny meetings during 2015/16 than in previous years, albeit that this was probably due to the contentious nature of the subjects under discussion. In addition, a number of comments were received from members of the public seeking committees to raise them when discussing specific agenda items.
- 4.9 Reference was made in last year's annual report to the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) national study into scrutiny in Wales, *Good Scrutiny? Good Question!* This report concluded that there was a need to strengthen scrutiny's role across local government and public services in general. It also stressed the benefits of using scrutiny as a means for engaging with residents and service-users in order to take better decisions which lead to better outcomes for residents. During this last year scrutiny has started enhancing its work in this area. For example, in addition to inviting residents to suggest areas for scrutiny it has invited them, via social media and press releases, to submit evidence to the Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group. Scrutiny has also continued to meet with a number of partner organisations and external companies/providers to discuss matters of concern for residents and to participate in consultation exercises which they were undertaking.

- 4.10 As a result of the national WAO report a set of '*Outcomes and Characteristics for Effective Scrutiny*' were developed and adopted on a Wales-wide basis. The aim of these characteristics is to support the delivery of better outcomes, through better decision making, based on better engagement with residents and stakeholders. Public bodies, including local authorities, are expected to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their scrutiny functions against these characteristics. Denbighshire has recently undertaken a self-evaluation against the characteristics and the general themes emerging from that self-evaluation are outlined in the attached Annual Report.
- 4.11 During the forthcoming year scrutiny will be examining the conclusions of the self-evaluation exercise in more detail and using that information to strengthen the function. With the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 scrutiny will going forward have a role to play in monitoring the Council's plans to embed the goals and principles of the Act into its day to day business.

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 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? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report

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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