

**Report To:** County Council

**Date of Meeting:** 22 May 2012

**Member Presenting:** Councillor Huw LI Jones

**Report Author:** Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group/  
Scrutiny Coordinator

**Title:** Annual Report of the Council's Scrutiny  
Committees

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

1.1 The Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report to Council for 2011/12.

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

2.1 To present to Council the Scrutiny Committees' annual report on their activities during 2011/12.

**3. What are the recommendations?**

That Council considers the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committees for 2011/12 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. Traditionally this report is presented at Annual Council, but this year due to the need to transact other important business at Annual Council the report is being presented to Council at its second meeting.

4.2 As a result of the local authority elections earlier this month the Council now has 23 newly elected councillors, to some of whom scrutiny will be an entirely new entity. It is hoped that the Annual Report will assist to introduce the work of the scrutiny committees to all new members and provide valuable background information on the function's role to all elected members.

4.3 This year's Annual Report follows a similar format to that used in previous years, and as in recent years it includes the results of a self-evaluation exercise undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the scrutiny function. As last year's self-evaluation exercise identified some areas which required further work in order to strengthen them,

we have appraised these areas again based on the findings of this year's self-evaluation exercise. The conclusions drawn can be seen on pages 6 and 7 of the attached Annual Report.

- 4.4 One issue which has been a recurring problem for scrutiny committees over a number of years is maintaining a quorum at committee meetings. As is stated in the attached Report, 6 out of the 26 formal scrutiny committee meetings held during 2011/12 were inquorate - either for the entire meeting or they became inquorate during the course of the meeting. The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group is particularly concerned about this and, whilst there is no evidence that this has impaired scrutiny's effectiveness to date it does nevertheless have the potential to undermine scrutiny and the democratic process in the long run. Consequently, with a view to addressing this problem the Group has recommended that at the end of the 2012/13 municipal year the attendance record of each individual member of the Council's scrutiny committees should be published in the Annual Report. If for some reason members are unable to attend a meeting the record will show that apologies were tendered, as long as they were submitted prior to the meeting being held.
- 4.5 The 2011/12 municipal year was the first year of the Council's new scrutiny committee structure, when the four operational based scrutiny committees of Environment & Regeneration, Lifelong Learning, Resources and Social Services & Housing, were replaced with three thematic committees, namely Communities, Partnerships and Performance. Prior to the end of the municipal year the new structure's effectiveness was evaluated to ensure that it met the authority's requirements and fulfilled the objectives of the original re-structure. Reference is included in the attached Report to the review. The general conclusion was that, subject to a few minor modifications, the new structure was fit for purpose.
- 4.6 Last year for the first time the Annual Report included a form which enabled the general public to suggest areas or services for scrutiny's consideration. The inclusion of this form was an attempt to generate public interest and improve their interaction with scrutiny, an aspect with which the majority of local authorities continue to struggle. As is reported within the Report this form did generate some interest from the general public who suggested a handful of areas for scrutiny to consider.
- 4.7 The referral form mentioned in the above paragraph was incorporated into a scrutiny information pamphlet which was also produced for the first time last year. The publication of this pamphlet was another attempt at generating residents' interest in scrutiny's work by explaining in lay man's terms what scrutiny does, how it could help them and how they could engage with scrutiny. A similar leaflet will again be produced summarising scrutiny's work for 2011/12 and seeking members of the public to suggest areas for scrutiny to consider.

4.8 The 2012/13 municipal year marks an important year for local authority scrutiny committees when new powers and duties will be conferred on them when the provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 will be enacted. Amongst the new powers and duties bestowed on Council scrutiny committees will be:

- the **power** to establish joint scrutiny committees with other local authorities;
- the **power** to co-opt non Council members as members of local authority scrutiny committees;
- a **duty** to scrutinise other organisations who deliver services of a public nature to residents of the area;
- a **duty** to consult with citizens and to take into account their views on major issues of policy;
- a **duty** to publish the forward work plans of the Council's scrutiny committees; and
- a **duty** on Council Executives to respond to reports and recommendations made by scrutiny committees

Further information on each of these provisions and the options they present will be brought to members later this year, as and when final statutory guidance is published.

## **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 and residents' wishes.

## **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 production of the scrutiny information leaflet will incur minimal costs which will have to be contained within existing budgets. The information leaflets 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 and available on the Council's intranet and website.

6.2 Any costs incurred with respect to the new powers conferred on scrutiny committees by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 will have to be funded and contained within the Council's existing budget for democratic costs. Any costs arising from the holding of joint scrutiny meetings with other local authorities will have to be negotiated with the relevant local authority and met from within the existing budgets.

**7. What consultations have been carried out?**

Members of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group have been consulted on the contents of the Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report.

**8. 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 an information leaflet will need to be contained within existing budgets and any costs arising from the establishment of joint scrutiny meetings will have to be the subject of negotiations between the relevant authorities.

**9. 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.

**10. 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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