

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO AUDIT COMMITTEE

30 JANUARY 2020

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER LEGAL, HR AND REGULATORY SERVICES

WALES AUDIT OFFICE – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – FIT FOR THE FUTURE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a progress update on the recommendations made in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) report to the Audit Committee meeting of 6 September 2018 ‘Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future?’ for noting.

2. Connections to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority:

- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council’s priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 6th September 2018 the Audit Committee was presented with the completed WAO report in respect of the ‘Overview and Scrutiny – Fit for the Future?’ review. The WAO undertook this piece of work as part of a national report and explored how ‘fit for the future’ scrutiny functions are within the Authority. The review considered how the Council is responding to challenges, including the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in relation to their scrutiny activity, and how it undertakes scrutiny of Public Service Boards (PSBs).
- 3.2 The review concluded that the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny function is well run, but needs to adapt to meet future challenges and should consider opportunities to work differently and also proposed the following areas for improvement, namely:
- P1 The Council should explore more innovative methods for undertaking scrutiny activity to make the most effective use of the resources available and improve the impact of scrutiny activity.
- P2 The Council should improve the timeliness with which scrutiny committees are provided with information they request to enable them to undertake their work more effectively.

- P3 The Council should consider the skills and training that scrutiny members may need to better prepare them for current and future challenges, and develop and deliver an appropriate training and development programme.
- P4 The Council should consider how it can involve the public and other stakeholders in its scrutiny activity.
- P5 The Council should review the type of scrutiny support required to enable the scrutiny function to respond to current and future challenges.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 The following progress has been made to date in relation to the WAO proposals for improvement:

- P1 Research has been undertaken by the Scrutiny Team to look at best practice elsewhere, particularly how other local authorities get the public involved in the scrutiny process.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously discussed options on how the Council could explore more innovative methods for undertaking Scrutiny activity to make the most effective use of resources available and improve the impact of Scrutiny activity. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended the introduction of a Scrutiny Chairs Research Group. The Scrutiny Chairs would carry out an 'Information Gathering' exercise on an item from the Forward Work Programme. The evidence will be compiled and included to complement the Officers report which will assist the Committee when the item is subsequently brought before them for Scrutinising. The Scrutiny Chairs agreed to use the 'Strategic Review of Health & Safety Responsibilities' in schools as the Chairs first topic for investigation.

Members of the Scrutiny Team attend and participate fully in two Scrutiny Networks, namely the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Scrutiny Officers' Network and the South East Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network. Both Networks provide an invaluable opportunity for Scrutiny Officers to exchange ideas on best practice and to receive training.

- P2 Regular Officer Planning meetings now take place with the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to enable them to have more involvement and input into the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme items that are recommended by Officers.

At the Forward Work Programme planning workshops, Members suggested that recommendations are reported back to each scrutiny Committee with a Red, Amber, Green status so it is clear what has been responded to. The Scrutiny Team chase those recommendations that are not marked as Green until Members are satisfied.

Regular quarterly meetings are held between Cabinet, Corporate Management Board (CMB) and Scrutiny Chairs. These meetings have

been very positive, with Cabinet Members and Officers suggesting input on items from Scrutiny which the Scrutiny Chairs have agreed to add to and also change the order of the Forward Work Programme to accommodate pre decision topics. Action notes are now taken at this meeting which are provided to attendees for accuracy and distributed to all present for information.

- P3 All Scrutiny Members have been surveyed in relation to their development needs, and offered refresher training on a topic already received.

The WLGA has recently delivered training to Scrutiny Committee Members on Questioning Skills to enable Members to be equipped with the necessary skills to effectively scrutinise and challenge service performance. A repeat session will be arranged. In addition, the WLGA will be delivering Scrutiny Committee Chairs training on a date to be agreed.

- P4 Scrutiny meetings which are webcasted are promoted by the Communications Team on the Council's social media platforms in order to encourage public engagement in Scrutiny participation.

In June 2019 a proposed decision of Cabinet in relation to Supported Bus Services was called in by Scrutiny, which resulted in a meeting of Scrutiny being held to consider the Call-in. The meeting was webcasted, which was publicised by the Communications Team. Members of the public were encouraged to engage in the Call-in process and were given an opportunity to address the Committee. Four members of the public took the opportunity to address the Committee.

In November 2019 a proposed decision of Cabinet in relation to Playing Fields, Outdoor Sports Facilities and Parks Pavilions was also called in, resulting in the Call-in being considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Team worked again with the Communications Team to publicise the meeting, which generated significant public interest, with 15 members of the public, representing sports clubs in the County Borough addressing the Committee, while 6 sports clubs submitted written representations for the Committee's consideration. This enabled the 'voice' of local people and communities across the County Borough to be heard as part of the process.

A shortcut has been added to the banner on the Council's website to the webcasting page via the 'My Council' web page, to raise awareness of the Scrutiny function and encourage public participation.

Scrutiny meetings which have been webcast during 2019 have featured the following items:

- Supported Bus Services
- Corporate Landlord function
- Homelessness Strategy
- Empty Properties
- Safeguarding

- **Supporting People Grant Programme**

A programme of scrutiny meetings that are to be webcast will continue to be developed, covering a wide range of topics.

In an attempt to engage further with the public and stakeholders, it is planned to hold a future Scrutiny Committee meeting in the community on an area of interest to the local community.

Consideration has also be given to holding a live social media session to give the public an opportunity to get involved, similar to the Q&A sessions which have been undertaken on Budget Consultations.

P5 Pre-meetings have been implemented in order to provide the Chair and Members of the Committee with the opportunity to develop lines of enquiry prior to conducting business and taking evidence from attendees and invitees. It is ensured that discussion/debate which takes place in the pre-meeting is brought back in the public meeting.

The Scrutiny section within Democratic Services has recently gone through a recruitment process to fill vacancies within the team. The section now consists of a full time Senior Democratic Services Officer – Scrutiny and two full time Scrutiny Officers, thereby increasing capacity within the team.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedural rules

5.1 The report does not have any impact upon policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications relating to the report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Audit Committee note the report.

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Background documents: None