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Chair's Foreword



Cllr. Giles
Morgan
Chair of the
Scrutiny Chairs
and Vice-
Chairs Forum
and Corporate
Policy and
Resources
Scrutiny
Committee

Welcome to this year's annual Scrutiny function report.

We now enter the middle of the election term and the financial situation all councils face is worrying. It's never been so important for you to see through transparency and accountability how the council spends its money. Effective governance and Scrutiny play an important role in examining the decisions of the Local Authority, and allows non-executive Members an opportunity to contribute and influence key decisions of this Council.

I wish to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to all those who have contributed to this report, and also to our valued stakeholders who have supported our meetings.

I would like to pay thanks to all Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs, Scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members for their dedication and support throughout this last year in ensuring our committees have continued to positively influence the decision-making process of the Council. Thank you also to the Cabinet Members for attending their relevant Scrutiny Committee meetings to present and answer questions on the reports we have considered.

As scrutineers we hope to better engage with our constituents, and I reiterate our aim of getting more people tuning into Scrutiny Committees to see how we work.

Introduction

Scrutiny plays a key role in improving the services that the people and children of Carmarthenshire use. The majority of decisions are made by the Cabinet of 10 County Councillors. Scrutiny offers the other 65 Councillors an opportunity to influence those decisions and act as a “critical friend”. It is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies.

Committees’ main roles and responsibilities are to:

- Examine how well the Cabinet and Council are performing;
- Hold the Cabinet to account and seek to promote open and transparent decision-making;
- Monitor the performance of the Council’s services and functions;
- Review decisions made by the Cabinet where appropriate;
- Assist the Cabinet in the development, monitoring and review of policy;
- Scrutinise, as a key element of the consultation process, the proposed revenue budget strategy and capital investment programmes;
- Enable the participation of external organisations and partners in consideration of issues that may impact upon the delivery of Council and countywide priorities;
- Input into key decisions through Pre-decision Scrutiny and Call-in.

The Scrutiny Committees

Carmarthenshire County Council has 5 Scrutiny Committees:

- [Communities, Homes & Regeneration](#)
- [Corporate Performance & Resources](#)
- [Education, Young People & the Welsh Language](#)
- [Health & Social Services](#)
- [Place, Sustainability & Climate Change](#)

All non-executive Councillors can be appointed to at least one Scrutiny Committee, depending on their specialist interests or expertise.

Each Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of Cabinet and specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective service areas. More information on Scrutiny responsibilities and terms of reference can be found [here](#).

The Committees normally meet 8 times a year on a 6 weekly basis to consider issues and reports included in a Scrutiny Forward Work Plan, which is developed at the beginning of the municipal year and updated regularly. Additional meetings are sometimes arranged if required and special or joint meetings may be held to consider urgent or cross-cutting issues.

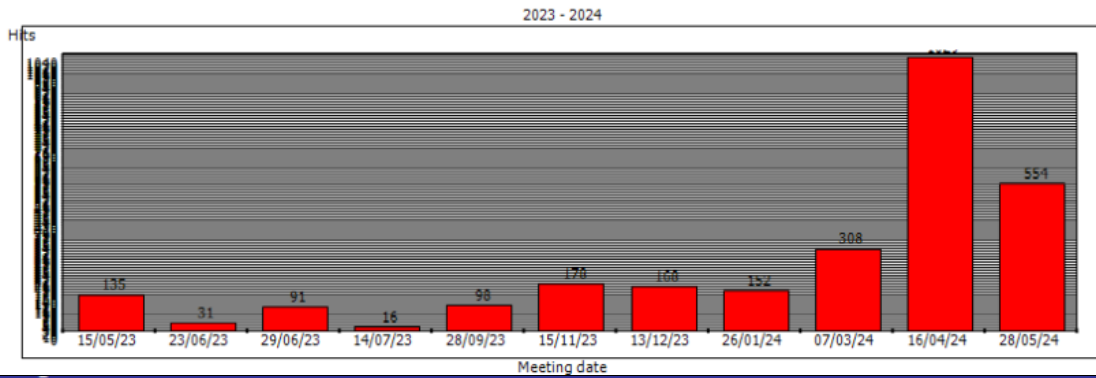
The Scrutiny Committees are politically balanced to reflect, as far as possible, the political composition of the Council as a whole. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees are appointed by Council at the beginning of each municipal year for a period of one year (e.g. May 2023 to April 2024). They also participate in the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum, which meets on a quarterly basis to oversee the strategic direction of Scrutiny.

Scrutiny Facts

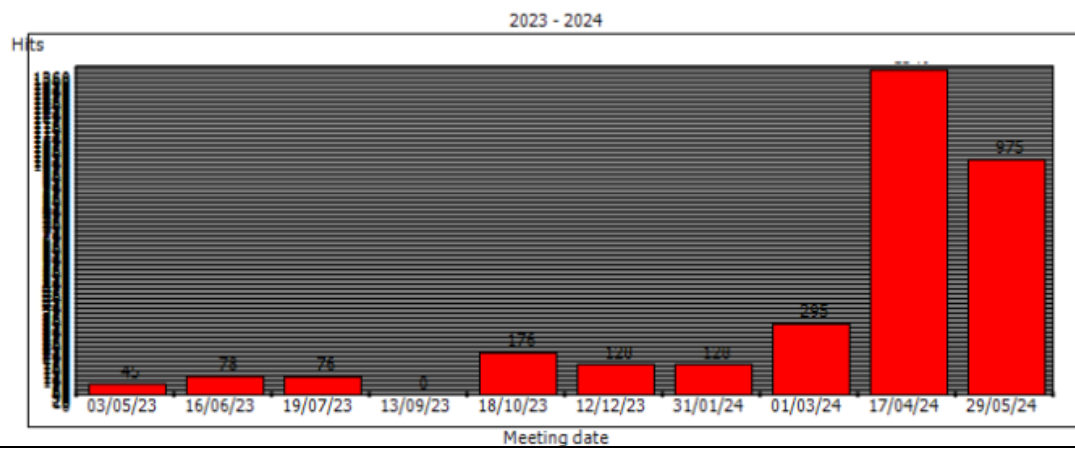
Number of formal Committee Meetings	35
Number of Development/Information gathering Sessions	80
Number of Task and Finish Reviews	4
Meetings of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum	5
Public Questions/Topics for discussion	1
Call In requests	0
Webcasting of meetings 2023/24 municipal year:	
Total number of live and archived views per committee:	
• Communities, Homes & Regeneration	474
• Corporate Performance & Resources	384
• Education, Young People & the Welsh Language	408
• Health & Social Services	589
• Place, Sustainability & Climate Change	562
Visits to the Scrutiny Committee landing page	1027

Visits to the Scrutiny meeting pages to view agendas, minutes and attendees:

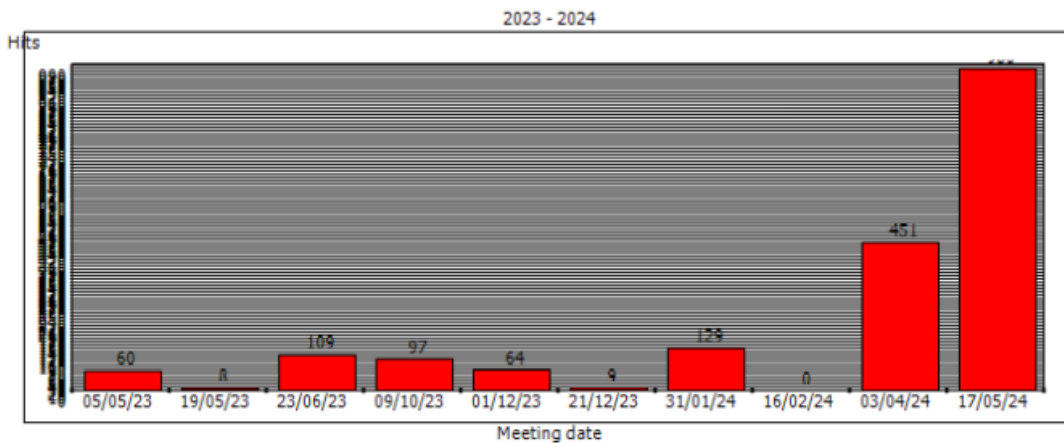
Page statistics for Communities, Homes & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meetings



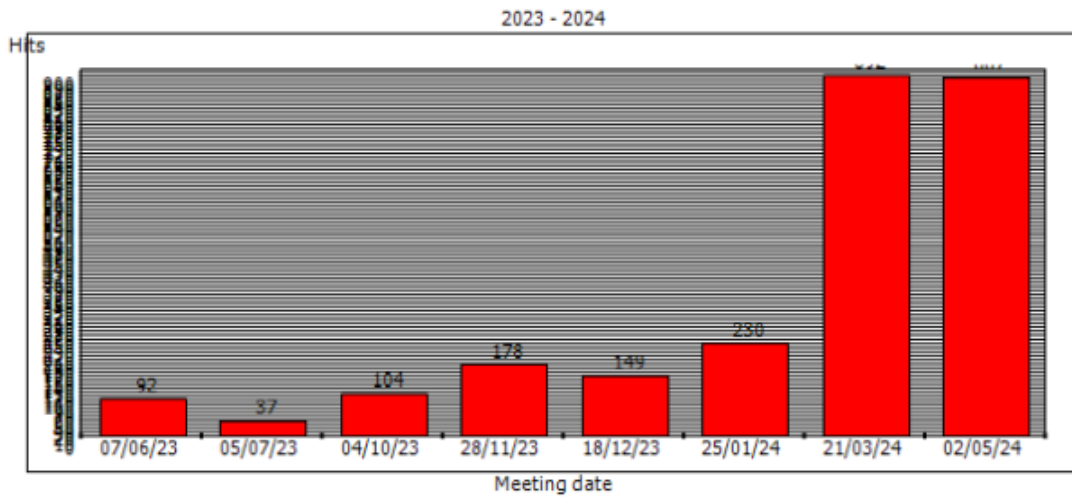
Page statistics for Corporate Performance & Resources Scrutiny Committee meetings



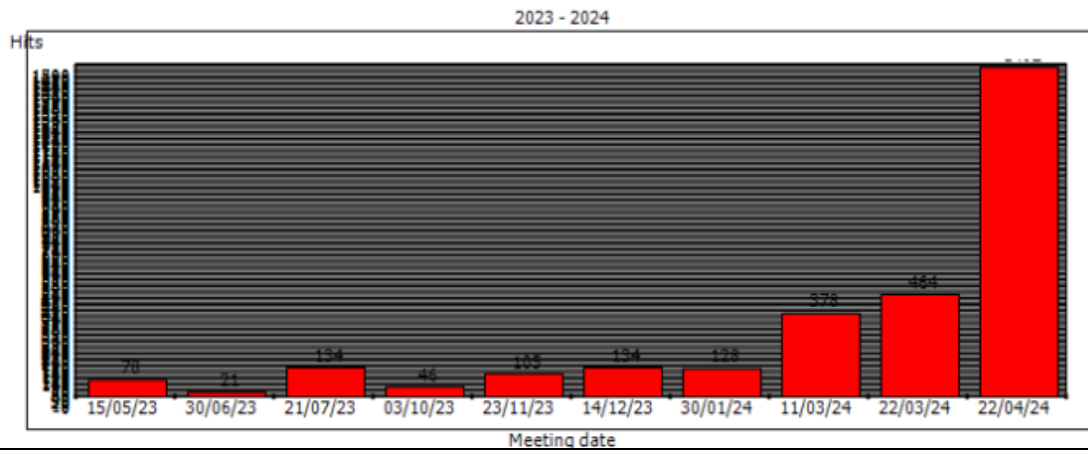
Page statistics for Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee meetings



Page statistics for Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee meetings



Page statistics for Place, Sustainability & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee meetings



Scrutiny Monitoring Reports

All Scrutiny Committees receive the following monitoring reports as standard and have previously agreed the frequency, format of reports and how these are received:

- Performance Monitoring Reports - One of the principal roles of a Scrutiny Committee is to monitor the performance of services and functions under its remit. They undertake this work mainly through the consideration of performance monitoring reports, which provide a balanced picture of performance. Each Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to consider the Council's Annual Report which was produced in accordance with the relevant provisions within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 and the Annual Report is based on our four Well-being Objectives as outlined in the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2022-27. The 2023-24 report took a slightly different structure to its predecessors, in that progress had been noted under the 'outcomes we hope to achieve' which formed our well-being objectives. This ensured a greater and more seamless alignment between our Corporate Strategy and how the Authority reports on its progress.
- Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Reports – Each Scrutiny Committee receives reports on the revenue and capital budgets for the services within their remit.
- Actions & Referrals Updates – During the course of the municipal year several recommendations and requests for additional information are made by Scrutiny Committees to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role.

Scrutiny Committee Annual Reports

Each Scrutiny Committee produced an annual report of its activities and outcomes and /or impact and these can be found below:

- [Communities, Homes & Regeneration](#)
- [Corporate Performance & Resources](#)
- [Education, Young People & the Welsh Language](#)
- [Health & Social Services](#)
- [Place, Sustainability & Climate Change](#)

Each report includes information on development sessions requested by each Committee which assists in ensuring members have the knowledge and skills to equip themselves to undertake their roles successfully. These sessions are in addition to those provided as part of the Authority's Member Development Programme.

Pre Decision Scrutiny and holding the Executive to account

Pre Decision Scrutiny

The move to pre-decision Scrutiny means that Scrutiny Committees can now ask to see reports from the Cabinet Forward Plan at an early stage, allowing each Committee to feed

and input into policy development at an early stage. All Councillors also receive a copy of the Cabinet Plan as and when updated versions are published so they are aware of the decision to be made over the forthcoming 12 months.

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny receive an advanced copy of the Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports which allows them to ask for specific information to be made available for discussion at Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet Member Involvement

Cabinet Members normally attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee to allow scrutiny of their respective portfolios in relation to decisions taken. Cabinet Members present reports and answer questions in relation to proposed decisions that have been included within the Forward Work Plan/included on the agenda.

Task and Finish Reviews

Four Task and Finish reviews were commenced/undertaken during the year with their findings considered or to be considered by Cabinet:

- Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish report on Management of Fly Tipping in Carmarthenshire
- Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish report on Childhood Obesity in Carmarthenshire
- Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Task and Finish on a review of the Corporate Contact Centre
- Communities Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish report on the operation of the adaptations service

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Forum

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees are the members of the Scrutiny Forum. The Forum takes an overview of all the Council's scrutiny work, with members challenging each other to ensure that the right matters are prioritised. The role of the Scrutiny Forum is

- To discuss and propose improvements to the scrutiny function for consideration by the Council's Constitutional Review Working Group;
- To discuss and propose items for discussion at the biannual meetings with the Cabinet;
- To act as a forum for sharing and disseminating scrutiny good practice;
- To receive feedback on Scrutiny Network Events and other relevant meetings;

- To assist in the identification of learning and development needs for the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the scrutiny committees and Committee members.

he Forum met on 5 occasions during the past year.

Outcomes:

- New Annual Report template introduced
- Self Assessment Survey agreed and actioned
- WLGA procured to deliver Scrutiny Self Assessment 2 day workshop
- Pre decision Scrutiny impact evaluated

There is an opportunity for the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs to meet with the Cabinet twice per year.

Scrutiny of Joint Committees

Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group

The Partneriaeth Scrutiny Councillor Group is a regional group that consists of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all the Education Scrutiny Committees from across the Partneriaeth Consortium. The meetings are administered by the City & County of Swansea's Scrutiny Team. The aim of the Group is to ensure there is consistent scrutiny across the region on matters within the remit of Partneriaeth. It meets twice a year to discuss Partneriaeth items and the opportunity is also taken to consider other education items of common interest. The meetings take place on a rota basis between the Local Authorities that form the Partneriaeth Consortium. The Chair of the Group is also rotated and is normally the Chair of the hosting Local Authority. Three meetings were held during the Carmarthenshire municipal year. Further information on the Partneriaeth Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#).

Swansea Bay City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee

The Swansea Bay City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee is a regional scrutiny committee consisting of 12 non-executive members of the four Swansea Bay City Deal Constituent Authorities. The Joint Scrutiny Committee was established in July 2018 to review and scrutinise the Swansea Bay City Deal Joint Committee. It aims to ensure greater public accountability over decisions made by the Joint Committee and any of its sub-committees and related entities. This complements Local Authority scrutiny work on individual projects of the City Deal that fall within their remit. The Joint Scrutiny Committee is hosted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. The Joint Scrutiny Committee meets on a quarterly basis. Three members of Carmarthenshire County Council sit on the Joint Scrutiny Committee, including the Scrutiny Champion. Four meetings were held during the municipal year. Further information can be found [here](#).

South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee

Formally constituted in January 2022, the Corporate Joint Committee for South West Wales covers the Local Authority areas of Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire and Swansea. The Committee will improve the regional planning, co-ordination and delivery of transport, land use planning, economic development and

energy. The Corporate Joint Committee has established a Governance and Audit Sub-Committee and an Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee. Three non-executive members of Carmarthenshire County Council have been appointed to both Sub-Committees. The Governance and Audit Sub-Committee met twice during the calendar year and the Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee met three times over the municipal year. The Scrutiny Sub-Committee is hosted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (further information can be found [here](#)) and the Governance and Audit Sub-Committee is hosted by Pembrokeshire County Council (further information can be found [here](#)).

Improvement / Self-Assessment

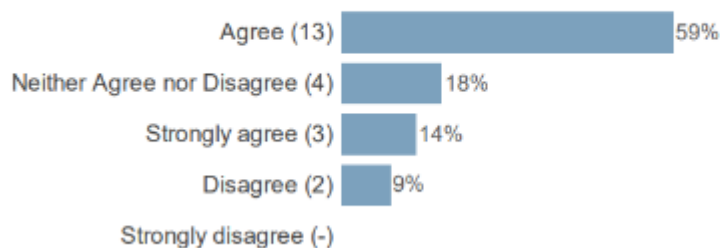
As part of its Follow Up Review on Overview and Scrutiny “Fit for the Future”, Audit Wales found that the Authority had not yet met one of their proposals for improvement and put in place arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny. In addition, Audit Wales felt that the Scrutiny Committee annual reports were largely an account of work undertaken rather than an assessment of effectiveness or impact.

During the year the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum adopted a revised Annual report template.

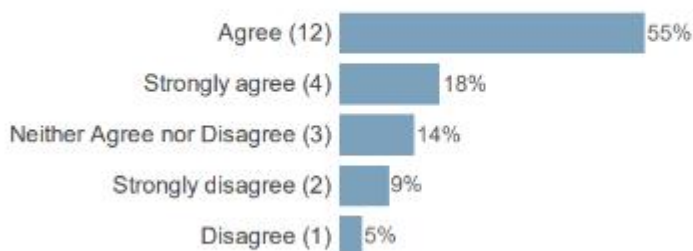
In terms of self-assessment, the Chairs and Vice Chairs agreed to undertake an initial survey and agreed a series of questions at its meeting in September 2023.

Whilst the number of responses to the survey were disappointing (29.3%) an example of the main findings were:

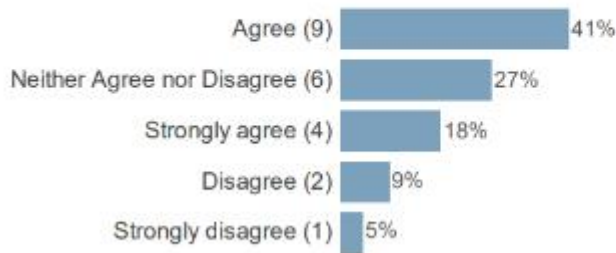
Please consider the following questions and select one response for each question. (I am satisfied with the effectiveness of the Scrutiny function in relation to its role)



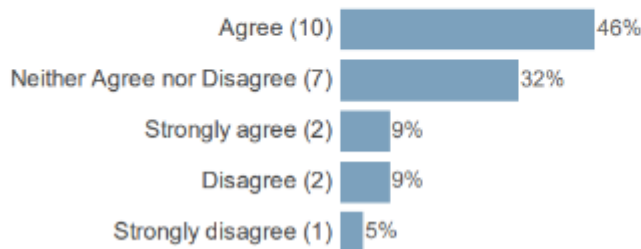
Please consider the following questions and select one response for each question. (I am satisfied with the overall effectiveness of my Scrutiny Committee)



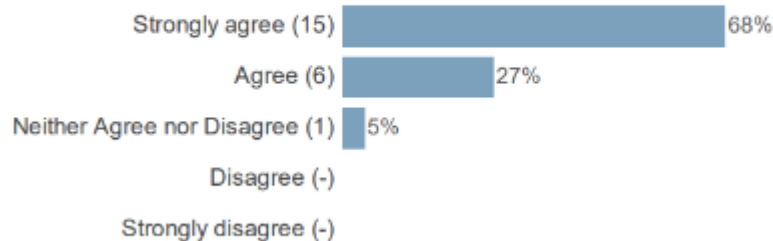
Please consider the following questions and select one response for each question. (I believe that stakeholders have the ability to contribute to the development and delivery of Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes)



Please consider the following questions and select one response for each question. (I believe that Scrutiny provides an opportunity for the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes)



Please answer the following questions: (I am satisfied with the level of support provided to the Scrutiny function by the Democratic Services Unit)



In order to engage with as many Scrutiny members as possible and to allow members to evaluate and self reflect on the work of Scrutiny at Carmarthenshire, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs Forum also considered and agreed to procure the services of the WLGA's 2 part scrutiny self assessment workshop. The Workshops are scheduled to be held in the Summer of 2024.

A move to pre-decision Scrutiny had made a positive impact on the Scrutiny function however there is ongoing concern on the lack of items being placed on the Cabinet Forward Plan and this issue had been raised with the Authority's Corporate Management Team.

External Auditors / Inspections

Education Services in Carmarthenshire County Council

An Estyn report of Education Services in Carmarthenshire (July 2023) found that the authority has effective oversight and scrutiny processes.

“The chair and members of the Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee have a clear and mature understanding of the role of the committee and are supported effectively by the Authority’s officers and senior leaders. The chair of the Scrutiny Committee has a good overview of the service’s priorities and appropriate knowledge of relevant education issues. Elected members play a leading role in monitoring the progress of the education service’s strategic plan. A good training programme supports the scrutiny arrangements to promote committee members’ understanding of their responsibilities and the issues that are in need of their attention. The scrutiny programme is organised purposefully, with flexible opportunities to add items for scrutiny as necessary, which enables them to make timely and informed decisions. Leaders and officers of the education service provide appropriate information which allows elected members to make informed decisions on complex issues. The quality and usefulness of the scrutiny reports have improved over time and they are now more concise, relevant and purposeful.”

Public Participation and Engagement

Scrutiny meetings are held on a multi-location basis, this means a mix of physical and remote attendance and all formal meetings are webcast live. This way our residents and stakeholders can attend our Scrutiny Committees, and view the work and discussions of elected members. Access to our webcasts are available on our website for 6 months after the date of the meeting. In line with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council has a published [Public Participation Strategy](#) which sets out the ways in which local people are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of the Council.

Getting involved in scrutiny is one of the best ways to influence decision making at the Council, as Councillors will hear experiences first hand. There are a number of ways the public can get involved in the work of scrutiny:

- Asking a question or attending a Scrutiny meeting
- [Suggesting a topic for review](#)
- Contribute evidence for scrutiny reviews
- Keeping up-to-date with what's happening in Scrutiny through our dedicated [Scrutiny webpages](#), promotion and engagement through the publication of Scrutiny information, agendas, and Committee terms of reference
- Town & Community Council are contacted annually to inform of the Scrutiny function and welcoming any topic suggestions that they wish to put forward
- [Forward Plans](#) provide early sight of information, Committee schedules and those matters for consideration

- Scrutiny Annual Reports – each Scrutiny Committee publishes an annual report providing an overview of the work undertaken by each Scrutiny Committee
- Committee meetings are broadcast live and archived for up to 6 months
- Stakeholders and external representatives are invited to contribute to broaden the committees’ understanding and inform discussions. Some of the representatives that have attended this year include: Schools, Hywel Dda Community Health Board
- We have co-optees on our Education, Young People and Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee, representing parent governors, the Church in Wales and the Catholic Church.

Whilst public engagement remains disappointing, our webcasting viewing figures are positive.

During the year, we received one topic for review. The topic referred to gaps in provisions around the area of preconception and early years support and this was presented by a member of the public to the Health and Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

During the year, the Forum discussed with the Marketing and Media Manager ways to improve public engagement in Scrutiny and the need to review the existing Scrutiny Communication Strategy to include the promotion of new explanatory videos on the work of the Scrutiny Committee.

Outcome:

Family support strategy added to the Health and Social Services Forward Plan

Communication Strategy reviewed by Chairs and Vice-Chairs Forum

Challenges

Ensuring the Cabinet forward work programme is complete and robust.

Member engagement and commitment to the work of the Scrutiny Committees.

Increasing public participation and promotion of Scrutiny.

Ensure that Scrutiny complies with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and continues its focus on the need to reduce the inequalities of outcomes that result from socio-economic disadvantage.

Forward Work Plans

All forward work plans are available on the Authority’s [website](#).

The list of forthcoming items for the next meeting of each Scrutiny Committee is reviewed at the preceding meeting.

Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based within the Law, Governance and Civil Services division of the Chief Executive's Department. Support for the scrutiny function includes:

- formulating and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings in accordance with the Forward Work Plans;
- providing support and constitutional advice to the Scrutiny Committees and to members of those Committees as well as producing minutes of their meetings and ensuring any issues arising from those meetings are actioned;
- giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to members of the Council and its officers;
- managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire by engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny with the Cabinet;
- advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, as and when guidance is published;
- managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Plans in conjunction with Scrutiny Committee members;
- managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the administration of Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups, assisting in writing reports in conjunction with the Groups and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews;
- Assisting with the Scrutiny Member Development Programme.

Information on [Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire](#).

To contact the Democratic Services Unit, please call 01267 224028 or e-mail scrutiny@carmarthenshire.gov.uk