

SUBJECT:	Scrutiny Self-Evaluation ~ November 2017
MEETING:	Democratic Services Committee
DATE:	23rd April 2018
DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present the Scrutiny Self-Evaluation completed in November 2017 to the Council's Democratic Services Committee to ensure Members have an awareness of the findings of the report, specifically any issues identified which may relate to the responsibilities of this committee.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Democratic Services Committee considers the report's findings in line with its responsibility to ensure the scrutiny function is adequately supported and resourced by the Council.

3 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 This report is not being brought to the Democratic Services Committee for it to make recommendations upon the performance of the scrutiny function. The responsibility to ensure the Council has 'fit for purpose' and effectively performing scrutiny arrangements in place rests with the Council's Audit Committee, sections 81 to 87 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 making provision for Audit Committees (in relation to the scrutiny function) to;
- Review, scrutinise and issue reports and recommendations on the appropriateness of the authority's risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements;
- 3.2 The Scrutiny self-evaluation report is being brought to the Democratic Services Committee to ensure there is oversight of any issues identified within the report which may fall within the committee's remit to ensure adequate support for scrutiny in line with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The measure requires a statutory Head of Democratic Service to report to the Democratic Services Committee in respect of discharging the following functions (relevance to the scrutiny function highlighted in yellow):
- (a) To provide support and advice (but see note 1 below)
- to the authority in relation to its meetings;
 - to committees of the authority and the members of those committees;
 - to any joint committee which a local authority is responsible for organising and the members of that committee;

- in relation to the functions of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee(s), to members of the authority, members of the executive and officers;
 - to each member of the authority in carrying out the role of member of the authority (but see note 2 below);
- (b) To promote the role of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee(s);
- (c) To make reports and recommendations in respect of the number and grades of staff required to discharge democratic services functions and the appointment, organisation and proper management of those staff;
- (d) Any other functions prescribed by the Welsh Ministers.

3.3 In introducing the measure, Carl Sargeant, former Minister for Local Government and Communities highlights;

“Strong local democracy is essential to the delivery of good public services. We want scrutiny which is independent, well-resourced and effective in order to identify any weaknesses in service delivery and then to propose improvements. In that sense, the non-executive councillor is the eyes, ears and voice of the electors they represent and it is vital that all councillors play a full and vigorous role in scrutiny”.

He explains that the measure *“introduced Democratic Services committees whose role is to ensure that the non-executive role of councillors is fully supported, including when they are acting in the crucial role of scrutineers”.*

The Council’s Democratic Services Committee is therefore asked to consider this report in terms of their role, the responsibility for taking forward any improvement actions resting with the Scrutiny Manager and the Scrutiny Chairs Group.

3.4 The undertaking of the recent self-evaluation completed in November 2017 demonstrates the ongoing commitment by the scrutiny function to continually improve through regular self-evaluation and peer review. The self-evaluation process stems from a national study of scrutiny conducted by the Wales Audit Office during 2013 which involved a learning exchange team belonging to each Council in Wales conducting an initial self-evaluation of their scrutiny arrangements, prior to selecting partner authorities to shadow its scrutiny function (Caerphilly Council was selected Monmouthshire’s partner) for the study. The Councils met their respective scrutiny teams and observed each other’s scrutiny meetings before drawing their conclusions. Each Council then completed a second self-evaluation at the end of the study to acknowledge any progress made since commencing the study and to identify areas for further improvement.

3.5 Following completion of the WAO study, each Council was required to produce an Action Plan to enable the WAO to continue to monitor scrutiny’s progress as part of their on-going regulatory work. The recent self-evaluation has followed the same approach as the 2013-2014 self-evaluation, but it extended the peer review exercise to work with both Newport and Caerphilly Councils. The requirement to produce an annual ‘WAO Scrutiny Action Plan’ remains and to ensure that this is a relevant and strategic plan that drives the

development of the scrutiny function, the WAO Scrutiny Action Plan is the Council's Scrutiny Service Plan. The Scrutiny Service Plan 2018-2019 will identify actions that will be taken over a specified timescale to improve scrutiny in Monmouthshire, taking into account the findings of the recent self-evaluation and any actions agreed by the Scrutiny Chairs Group. The plan feeds directly into the Council's performance and improvement framework, is updated quarterly and serves as the key document upon which the Wales Audit Office can continue to monitor scrutiny's progress.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 4.1 This report does not provide an options appraisal for this committee ~ the role for this committee in considering this report has been clearly explained. The self-evaluation report provides an executive summary with the key findings and improvement priorities being clearly identified. The report has not duplicated these, but offers members of this committee the context and provides a platform for discussion of the report's findings.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 5.1 The self-evaluation report provides a full explanation of evaluation criteria relating to the study. Unless this Committee specifically requests the return of this report, this report will not return, but will be the responsibility of the Scrutiny Chairs Group and the Scrutiny Manager to take forward any actions for implementation (unless those actions relate to the responsibility of this committee).

6. REASONS

- 6.1 Scrutiny is a statutory function and performs a fundamental role in the Council's decision-making process. Whilst the Audit Committee is responsible for ensuring the Council's governance arrangements are fit for purpose and that scrutiny delivers its responsibilities effectively, the Democratic Services Committee is responsible for ensuring adequate resources for scrutiny and non-executive members as outlined in the Local Government (Wales) 2011 Measure.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 8.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report, however, the scrutiny function has clear responsibilities to scrutinise the above implications through the Council's decision-making process, so any impingement on their ability to conduct their role would be a matter for this committee to pursue.

9. CONSULTEES

9.1 Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Group to consider the findings of the Self-Evaluation on 19th April 2018.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Scrutiny Self-Evaluation Findings Report November 2017
- Appendix A ~ Peer Review Team's Self-Evaluation
- Appendix B ~ Peer Observation Feedback for Monmouthshire Scrutiny Function
- Appendix C ~ Monmouthshire Scrutiny Survey Findings

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