

Democratic Services Committee

Report of the Scrutiny Champion – Cllr. A. Woolcock

I have visited the following scrutiny committees to observe proceedings:

- Education, Skills and Culture Scrutiny Committee
14 September 2017
- Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee
22 September 2017
- Social Care, Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
5 October 2017
- Streetscene & Engineering Scrutiny Committee
1 December 2017

Generally, the meetings were good and all Members wishing to make a contribution were given the opportunity to do so.

There was evidence of good scrutiny on several occasions. There is, of course, room for improvement – including within the Policy and Resources and Policy and Resources/ Cabinet Scrutiny Committee – but I'm confident that will develop during the course of the 'new' Council.

I also believe that it would be useful to hold further training sessions e.g. chairing skills that could assist in the development of scrutiny. Additionally, Members may wish to consider visits to other authorities to observe proceedings and possibly adopt good practice.

Recent research by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, commissioned by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), shows that Wales is one of the areas that has invested heavily in reforming and improving scrutiny.

Data from the survey shows that Councillors and officers in Wales are almost twice as likely to perceive scrutiny as more effective compared to the national average across the devolved area. I believe that scrutiny in Neath Port Talbot fits in well with that description.

I have always maintained that if scrutiny is to be effective, we also need to consider, when required, the scrutiny of outside bodies, particularly

those groups that the Council provides funding. That is one area that should be developed. Additionally, it may be helpful to consider some task and finish work in some areas.

I have been asked about Members being allowed to continue questioning after the initial question has been answered during scrutiny. Standing Orders state that each Member is allowed to speak for five minutes, and only speak once.

However, in my opinion, scrutiny is different to the old Committee based structure, and if a Member wishes clarification by asking a supplementary question(s), then I believe that the Chair can be flexible. When the same Member wishes to speak again, after other Members have spoken, I believe that it may be allowed, but only if Members who haven't contributed to the debate have been given an opportunity to speak. When that situation is exhausted, it may be acceptable to allow Members to make a further contribution.

Whether that particular situation requires a change to the Council's constitution, or the matter is left to the Chair's discretion, is a matter that the Democratic Services Committee may wish to consider.