

Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-22



scrutiny

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For further information on any of the information contained within this report, or on the Scrutiny process in Newport please contact:

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Introduction

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is the term given to the non-political process within the Council, whereby the decision makers (the Cabinet) are held to account for the decisions taken, whether they have been implemented effectively and whether they have resulted in improved services for people of Newport.

The Cabinet (also known as the executive) has the power to make the decisions needed to action the policies agreed by the Council. The remaining Councillors (non-executive) then form the scrutiny element, whose role is to challenge the performance of the Cabinet and hold them to account for the decisions taken. Scrutiny Committees can make recommendations and scrutinise the policies, decisions and performance of the Cabinet. The Cabinet, in turn, consults with, and responds to, Scrutiny Committee recommendations.

The underlying principle of Scrutiny arrangements is to ensure that the decision-making process is open, accountable and transparent.

Scrutiny has the following roles:

- Hold the Cabinet to account for the decisions it makes;
- Ensure that the Cabinet and Officers perform effectively and that the Council is delivering what it said it would.
- Listens to the views of the public and make sure the public voice is heard;
- Develops and reviews policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and provides the best outcomes for the people of Newport.

Scrutiny Committees do not have decision-making powers. In all cases, the role of the Scrutiny Committee is to examine available options or consider how effectively an area is performing and then to make recommendations to the decision making body whether that is the Council; the Cabinet, an Individual Cabinet Member or external partners.

Scrutiny Committees are usually conducted in public, and the Committees are live-streamed on the internet. Recordings of the meetings are also available online for the public to access after the event.

The Scrutiny Committee can operate in a number of ways, depending on the issue that they are looking into. The most common approaches are either to consider issues via a report at Committee meetings, or to set up a working group to look at an in-depth issue.

Since the introduction of the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act, Scrutiny has had a statutory role to scrutinise the work of the Public Service Boards. PSB's are accountable to Scrutiny Committees in respect of how they work jointly to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of their area by contributing the achievement of the wellbeing goals in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

Under the Act, Scrutiny has the power to:

- Review or scrutinise the decisions made or actions taken by the PSB;

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- Reviewing or scrutinise the governance arrangements of the PSB;
- Acting as a consultee on key documents;
- Monitoring progress on the PSBs implementation for the wellbeing plan and assessing the delivery of objectives.

In carrying out these roles, the Scrutiny Committee can require any statutory member of the Board to give evidence, the capacity in which they do so must relate to the exercise of joint functions conferred on them as a statutory member of the board.

How can the public get involved in the Scrutiny Process?

Scrutiny Committee meetings are normally open to the public and the agendas are published one week in advance of the meeting, on the Council's website. Members of the public are usually welcome to attend any Committee meeting to observe proceedings, but Scrutiny meetings have been held virtually since April 2020 in order to meet the social distancing requirements under Covid restrictions. The public have been able to watch the Committees live using a live stream service on the Council's website, or to view recordings of the meetings after the event.

Agendas, reports and minutes of meetings can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Members of the public can suggest items for the Scrutiny Committee to look into by writing, emailing or phoning the Democratic Services Team:

Democratic Services Team
Newport City Council
Civic Centre
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NP20 4UR

Tel: 01633 656656

Email: democratic.services@newport.gov.uk

What is the purpose of this Annual Report?

Each year the Council produces a Scrutiny Annual Report, which is intended to give an overview of the work undertaken by each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the previous 12 months. This report also sets out the planned actions for the next 12 months, summarised in Section 9, within the Action Plan for 2022/23.

This report looks at the work of the Scrutiny Committees from May 2021 to April 2022. The Annual Report is an essential tool for measuring the performance of Scrutiny, evaluating the progress made against previous targets and setting priorities for the coming year.

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Key Developments

The current Committee structure was adopted by the Council in May 2017. Since then, the Committees work has been focussed on the Council's scrutiny function relating to the roles below:

Performance Monitoring	Holding the executive to account
Policy Review and Development	Including consultation on decisions before they are made (pre-decision Scrutiny)
Performance of partnerships	in particular the PSB and One Newport (but also NORSE, EAS, SRS, Newport LIVE).
Scrutiny of Corporate Strategies /Plans – Coordination / management	Such as the Corporate Plan, Improvement Objectives. of work programmes - including referrals, policy review groups, recommendations monitoring and setting processes for looking at Corporate issues such as the budget, public engagement, the Corporate Assessment)

Scrutiny's function has made a greater impact by devoting three of the four Committees to performance-based work, becoming more outcomes based and linking to the Cabinet work programme, creating a cohesive approach to improve performance within the Council.

The four Committees;

- Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
- Performance Scrutiny Committee – People
- Performance Scrutiny Committee - Place and Corporate
- Performance Scrutiny Committee – Partnerships

A training course facilitated by Academi Wales on Constructive Conversations was offered to all Scrutiny Chairs in July 2021, and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee took up the opportunity. The course focussed on the principles of constructive challenge, and the necessary skills to make a difference through questions and suggestions. The four week course aimed to provide attendees with tools and frameworks that supported achieving an effective level challenge, and making progress and impact in committee meetings.

Officers supporting Scrutiny received training from Public Governance Wales during the reporting period. The training focussed on the principles and methodology underpinning strong and effective scrutiny.

Below is a summary of the major developments and achievements this year.

1.1 **Performance Scrutiny Committee – Place and Corporate Performance Scrutiny Committee – People**

The Performance Scrutiny Committee for People met seven times during the period, and the Performance Scrutiny Committee for Place and Corporate met on six occasions during this time. During this period, there was a restructure which meant that the structure of the Council changed, however this did not have a material impact on the service areas scrutinised by each Committee.

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In June the Committees received end of year updates on Service Plans 2020-21 for each of the Service areas considered under their Terms of Reference, and have used this evidence base to scrutinise performance in a wider context. The Service plans have included financial information, links with corporate goals, Wellbeing goals and work towards goals set externally to the Council. These end of year updates also included details on how the Council have adapted and responded to the challenges faced by services and communities due to the pandemic. The Committees reflected on the response to the crisis, and also scrutinised the Council's Covid Recovery Aims that aim to ensure an effective response to the immediate and future needs of Newport's communities and businesses. The Committees thanked Officers for their work towards achieving the objectives, and for producing the comprehensive updates. A number of recommendations were made to Cabinet commending the quality of the updates, and to promote key achievements within Newport so that residents had an update on how the Council had taken actions to provide support during and subsequently to the pandemic. Committees also requested that information sharing seminars on a number of topics across the service areas were organised for all elected members in future to help with information sharing, for example, the Local Energy Plan.

Following on, in November 2021 the Committees considered mid-year updates on progress against objectives set for 2021-22 as part of the performance review cycle. The Committees reflected on the information regarding progress and challenges set out in the reports, and questioned officers during committees to draw out further information and context. The Committees requested further all-member seminar sessions on topics relevant to the updates, for example, the Burns Report. The People Committee also requested a visit to some of the key projects being delivered in Newport, such as Windmill Farm.

Outside of the cycle of performance review, the People Committee also scrutinised a report on In-House Residential Care and the Director of Social Services Annual Report. The Committee reviewed the current and planned developments in Children's Residential Care aimed at increasing the local provision available for looked after children, and the progress against the service area's objectives. The Committee were satisfied with progress made, and the model of provision that the Council was endeavouring to deliver.

The Director of Social Services presented the annual report concerning the delivery, performance, risks and planned improvements of the Social Services function in the Council. The Committee were asked to consider the report and their comments were added to the covering report when considered firstly by Cabinet, then Council. The Committee noted the report and requested some further statistics as a follow up to support the contextualisation of the report.

Staff Support during Covid-19

The Committee for Place and Corporate also considered reports setting out Staff Support during Covid-19 and an update on the Council's Economic Recovery Strategy. The report outlined the situation prior to the first lockdown of March 2020 and the subsequent actions taken by the Council, focussing specifically on the Health and Safety measures and support for employee well-being and communications. The Committee considered the actions taken to mitigate against staff welfare issues and consider if there were any further opportunities to support the workforce. The Committee Members were satisfied with the support provided to staff throughout the Covid-19 pandemic set out in the report.

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Economic Recovery Strategy

The Council considered the Economic Recovery Strategy and presentation on the progress against the key objectives of the plan supporting Newport businesses and investment. The Committee noted the commitment and resilience shown by Officers and the wider Council during the challenging period and subsequent issues caused by the pandemic. The Committee made recommendations to Cabinet that the effective relationships and communication developed with local businesses and other parts of the community continue to be developed.

Both of these Committees also considered Draft Budget proposals relevant to their respective service areas as part of the Council's budget setting consultation process. The Committee's assessments of the proposals and considerations in taking the decisions were shared with Cabinet. The Committee's feedback on the budget process and public engagement were shared with Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

2.2 Overview and Management Scrutiny

The Committee convened on eight occasions during this period.

New Normal

The Committee considered the potential opportunities, disadvantages and considerations with regard to potential changes to the Council's operating model under the Council's New Normal strategy. The Committee helped to shape the approach to staff welfare, and recommended that residents can continue to access the services they need in the most appropriate way. Members explored the barriers and opportunities these changes posed in terms of active travel, using available technology, and potential outcomes regarding the Council's estate.

Annual Safeguarding Report

The Committee considered the Annual Safeguarding Report, which retrospectively summarised the challenges faced during and post-lockdowns, which had impacted on all service areas. The Committee noted the consistent increase of referrals to the Safeguarding team, and explored the Council's capacity to respond to these complex issues effectively, considering structure, resource and capacity.

Annual Information Risk Report 2021/ Annual Digital Report 2020-21

The Committee appraised the Annual Information Risk Report 2021 as part of the Council's best practice approach to information management and security. The report provided the Committee with an overview of arrangements in place and highlighted the importance of information governance. The Committee sought further information and clarification through their line of questioning, and were satisfied with the comprehensive responses received. In the same meeting, the Committee went on to evaluate the Annual Digital Report 2020-21 which had some similarities in content to the Information Risk Report, due to the interwoven nature of the work in these areas. The Committee noted the key role that technology played in the Council's response to the pandemic during this period, and how this had been supported through Digital Services. The Committee noted this achievement and asked questions concerning the future development of technology and digital services for staff and residents, and the funding arrangements underpinning this.

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Public Spaces Protection Orders

In July 2021, the Committee considered two papers concerning Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO). Firstly, the Committee helped to shape the consultation and engagement for the Public Spaces Protection (dog control) Order 2021, which sought to improve the local community's quality of life and public health through new restrictions on how people may use specified areas. This order covered issues such as the control of dogs on public sites including dog fouling, keeping dogs on leads and excluding dogs from specified zones or sites. Secondly, the Committee considered the extension of the City Centre PSPO, and again made recommendations concerning the public consultation, as well as the terms of the PSPO itself.

Later in the reporting period, the Committee considered and reviewed the outcome of the consultation for both PSPO's following completion, and approved the Orders to be considered at Full Council.

Corporate Annual Report and Director of Social Services Report

The Committee were presented with the 4th Corporate Annual Progress Report 2020-21 on the Council's progress against the Corporate Plan 2017-22, alongside the annual reports from the Director of Social Services. The reports reflected on the previous year, assessing the progress and improvements made, and the plans for development in the remainder of the term. Whilst detailed performance updates for each of the service areas were considered by Performance Scrutiny Committees in earlier meetings, the Corporate Annual Report summarised the Council's overall delivery against service plans and statutory requirements for the Committee's consideration. It was noted that there had been some significant changes in national and local measures during this time due to the wide-reaching impacts of the pandemic, and these had been considered in detail in the Performance Scrutiny Committees, before the over-arching report was brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee deliberated the context and challenges contained in the reports through their lines of questioning, and thanked officers for their efforts during the challenge period

Climate Change Strategy

The Committee were presented with a draft report on Climate Change Strategy, and were asked for their comments and recommendations prior to a period of consultation with residents. The Committee made recommendations concerning the methods of consultation, and commented on the draft strategy. The Committee requested further information regarding statistics and costs, and recommended that the report include more Welsh language content prior to moving to Full Council.

Welsh 5 Year Strategy

The Committee were presented with the Council's five-year strategy setting out how the Council will promote and facilitate the use of Welsh for staff and residents. The Committee were asked to consider whether the Strategy reflects the Council's ongoing commitment to the Welsh language effectively.

2022/23 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Committee was engaged as part of the consultation process Cabinet is required to conduct regarding the proposals, before recommending an overall budget and required council tax to the Council for approval. The

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Committee was asked to consider the process undertaken for the draft budget proposals, the public engagement undertaken and to make any comments on the budget process or the public engagement to the Cabinet. The Committee were also asked to endorse the comments made by the Performance Scrutiny Committees to be forwarded to the Cabinet. The Committee asked questions regarding the report content, the process of consultation and the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee noted that receiving consultation data sooner would enable them to be more constructive in their recommendations and comments, however, the Committee noted the challenges in the budget setting timetable, particularly as the budget draft settlement had been received later than usual in this year. The Committee submitted their comments and recommendations as part of the consultation process.

2.3 Performance Scrutiny Committee- Partnerships

The Committee met on eight occasions during this period to scrutinise performance of Partnerships

Regional Public Services Board

The Committee considered the arrangements for the formation of the Regional Public Services Board (PSB), and what this could entail for the Council as a result. The report took Members through the formation of the Regional Gwent Services Board and the Regional Public Services Board in every area in Newport, such as One Newport which was established by the Wellbeing Future Generations Act. The Members line of questioning explored the administration and terms of the arrangement, and the opportunities and challenges that the Regional PSB offers. The Committee raised a number of queries that they wished to be part of the considerations; they recognised that the Board arrangements were still being developed, and requested to be kept apprised of progress.

Public Services Board Well-being Plan Annual Report 2020-21

The Committee considered the Wellbeing Plan Annual Report presented by the Public Services Board (PSB), and submitted their comments to be shared with the PSB. Partners were invited to be part of the meeting and updated the Committee on progress made against the four Wellbeing objectives of the plan. The Committee welcomed the detailed update, and the responses to their queries. The Committee felt that the report and update reflected the strength of the partnership arrangements, both in the significant achievements made, but also in the transparency around the issues and challenges being addressed.

Norse Joint Venture Partnership

In November 2021, the Council's partnership with Norse was scrutinised by the Committee. The Committee considered the comprehensive report shared, and considered the content and partnership arrangements through their line of questioning. Following up on the content of the Committee explored the performance and financial performance through their queries with the officers present. Members noted the value of the opportunity to appraise the partnership, and recommended that the performance update come to the Committee on an annual basis.

Education Assessment Service – Value for Money 2021-22 / Education Achievement Service Business Plan 2022-25

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The Committee also considered the externally commissioned Education Achievement Service (EAS) Regional Value for Money (VfM) report 2020-21 and presentation. The Committee appraised the progress being made since the previous report update, and how well the consortium was working together to deliver value for money. The Committee were satisfied with the report, and shared their summary comments to the Cabinet Member and the EAS.

Later in the reporting cycle, the Committee scrutinised the EAS Business Plan 2022-25 as part of the wider consultation process. The Committee considered the updated plan, and made recommendations to Cabinet that commended the clarity of the information set out in the report.

Shared Resource Services (SRS) Update

In December 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered an update report on the Shared Resource Service's arrangements for IT service delivery. The SRS has provided a number of updates to Scrutiny since Newport City Council joined the partnership in April 2017, but due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the development of a new work programme there had been a delay in returning to Committee to following up on previous recommendations. The Committee assessed the update upon the SRS's progress to date, particularly focussing on the information regarding delivering the Investment Objectives. The Members noted the content of the report and reflected on the challenges posed by the pandemic, which had been overcome through the deployment of additional IT kit and functionality to officers and schools. The Committee noted the progress made and put forward a number of comments to the SRS and officers.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Committee Members were appraised on the contribution of Newport City Council in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) entering care, following being dispersed in line with the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Members considered the information set out in the report, and followed this up with their line of questioning to understand the collaborative approach to this complex issue. The Committee presented some recommendations, and requested an annual update on this topic to include further cases studies and where there had been positive outcomes for the children supported through the Council's services.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Officers presented an update on Gwent Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) strategy 2018 – 2023, which was approved by each of the Gwent Public Services Boards in 2018. prior to publication in May 2018. The report described the progress made against the six strategic priorities of the Strategy in 2020/21. The Committee considered the report and the progress of the key strategic priority work plans for VAWDASV within the corporate arrangements for the whole Council. The Committee noted the positive work of the partnership and committed to member training, and promoting awareness of programmes and support available within their communities. The Committee recommended developing the partnership further in Newport with additional organisations, and requested anonymised and redacted case studies be included in future reports where appropriate.

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Gwent Local Assessment of Wellbeing Consultation

The Committee scrutinised the consultation draft concerning the Assessment and submitted their comments to the Public Services Board for consideration. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 statutory guidance 'Shared Purpose – Shared Future' sets out a requirement for each Public Services Board (PSB) to prepare and publish an assessment of the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area no later than a year before it publishes its local well-being plan. Following establishment of the Gwent PSB the first Gwent Well-Being Assessment was scheduled to be published by 5th May 2022, and this was an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the draft and comment on the consultation process. The Committee noted the work that had produced the draft consultation, and requested that they would be appraised of progress and provided with additional data in further updates.

One Newport Wellbeing Plan 2021-22 Q2 Performance

In February 2021, partners such including Anuerin Bevan Health Board, Natural Resources Wales and GAVO presented Scrutiny with an update on the progress made against the key steps of the five objectives set out in the well-being plan as agreed by the partners. The update reflected the collaborative work that was carried out through the partnership arrangements rather than in individual agencies or organisations. The Committee noted the performance updates, and thanked the partners for attending to provide updates and answer queries. The Committee requested further information on developments and initiatives and suggested further opportunities to progress towards the intended outcomes set out in the plan.

Newport Barnardo's Strategic Partnership

Social Services and Barnardo's updated the Committee on the longstanding partnership between the organisations. Members were asked to review the work of the Barnardo's Partnership in providing effective family support services for children and families in Newport, and to consider for proposals for continued work and developments in 2022/23. The Committee praised the partnership for the detailed presentation and report, and the regional recognition of the collaborative approach. Members endorsed the aim to increase accessibility of services in all communities and requested further information regarding some of the challenges faced by residents.

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9. Actions 2021-22 Update

Ref	Proposal for Improvement	Intended Outcome	Status	Update
1	Develop a structured programme for member training and development to improve members' scrutiny skills and improve their understanding of their scrutiny role as part of the induction programme for new members following the May 2022 local elections.	Members understanding of their Overview and Scrutiny Role increases	Completed	A full induction curriculum has been developed to support Members induction for the first 12 months following local elections in May 2022. This includes training for Scrutiny Committee Members and Chairs.
2	<p>Providing further training for scrutiny members on the new socio-economic duty under the Equality Act to improve their understanding and consideration of the duty when undertaking scrutiny activity.</p> <p>Develop revised report templates for scrutiny, to include specific reference to the socio-economic duty.</p>	The principles of the socio-economic duty are more familiar to members and those are applied during scrutiny processes	Completed	<p>Training on the socio-economic duties under the Equality Act was presented to Members in 2021, and training on the Equality Act is part of the planned induction curriculum for rollout post-local elections.</p> <p>Revised report templates were rolled out in May 2021</p>
3	Effectively holding Cabinet members to account for service performance when invited to scrutiny meetings.	Ensure that the Council has arrangements to enable scrutiny to hold Cabinet members to account more effectively and ensure Cabinet Members are equipped and prepared to be held accountable for the roles they hold.	Completed	During this period Cabinet Members attended Performance Scrutiny Committees as part of the reporting cycle and responding to questions from Committee Members on agenda items. Performance Scrutiny. This has supported accountability for service delivery through the performance management and service planning process.

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4	Reviewing the role of Scrutiny Committees in the light of the new corporate performance self-assessment process, the arrangements for regional PSB's and the development of CJC's	Ensure that the Scrutiny arrangements meet the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and continue to operate effectively in the light of the legislative changes.	Ongoing	<p>In March 2022, Governance and Audit Committee recommended integrating the self-assessment into the Council's annual Corporate Well-being Report (Annual Report) to assess the overall performance and governance of the organisation.</p> <p>The Council will also update its Planning, Performance and Risk Management Framework and its supporting Planning and Performance Policy to incorporate the new requirements of the legislation. The revised framework and policies will be presented in 2022/23.</p> <p>Discussions at the Gwent wide leadership group 'G10' and at each PSB about the merger of the Gwent PSBs to form a single regional PSB took place during this time, however, no decision was made to agree the proposal during the period. Discussions with Partnerships Scrutiny will be ongoing and continue, to ensure the development of effective local Scrutiny for Newport partnership arrangements. This will include a range of work including community safety and the ongoing monitoring of the current Well-being Plan.</p>
5	Develop and publish a Public Engagement Strategy to ensure arrangements are put in place to support public involvement and	Ensure that the Scrutiny arrangements meet the requirements of the Local Government & Elections	Completed	A Participation Strategy was developed through Democratic Services Committee and in consultation with residents. The Strategy was adopted by Full Council in May 2022.

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	<p>participation. To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilising social media to promote Committee work. - Encourage public participation and involvement. - Improving the public's engagement with the scrutiny function by using a wider range of engagement methods 	<p>(Wales) Act 2021 in terms of public engagement and participation.</p>	<p>The key objectives in the strategy aim to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness of the functions the council carries out to local residents, businesses and visitors. • Share information about how to go about becoming an elected Member, or Councillor, and what the role of Councillor involves. • Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the council. • Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the council, including comments, complaints and other types of representations. Promote awareness of the benefits of using social media to communicate with residents to Councillors.
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9. Actions 2022-2023

Ref	Proposal for Improvement	Intended Outcome	Completion Date	Responsible Officer
1	Review membership of committees, including Chairs, following local elections in May 2022	The scrutiny structure will meet legislative requirements and reflect the proportionality of political groups elected to Council, as per the Council's Constitution.	May 2022	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and elected members
2	Deliver a structured programme for member training and development to improve members' scrutiny skills and improve their understanding of their scrutiny role as part of the induction programme for new members following the May 2022 local elections.	Members understanding of their Overview and Scrutiny Role increases	May 2023	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
3	Reviewing the role of Scrutiny Committees in the light of the new corporate performance self-assessment process, the arrangements for regional PSB's.	Ensure that the Scrutiny arrangements meet the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and continue to operate effectively in the light of the legislative changes.	March 2023	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager and Scrutiny Advisors
4	The end to end Scrutiny process of support for Scrutiny will be reviewed in collaboration with Officers and Chairs as part of the continuous improvement cycle.	Opportunities to strengthen scrutiny arrangements will be identified and implemented	May 2023	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager, Scrutiny Chairs, Scrutiny Advisors and Senior Leadership Team

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