

# CYNGOR GWYNEDD

## Report to a meeting of Cyngor Gwynedd

**Date of Meeting:** 7 March 2024

**Title of Item:** Review Scrutiny Arrangements

**Contact Officer:** Ian Jones,  
Head of Democracy Services

### 1. DECISION

The Council is asked to:

Adopt Option 1 – which is to adhere to the current scrutiny committee arrangements and approve the actions to improve efficiency contained in Appendix 2.

### 2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

#### Review

2.1 A promise was made to review the committees' workload following the Full Council's decision in June 2022 to place corporate matters within the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee. It was decided that it would be sensible to review the workload of the various committees at the same time as considering the amendments to our scrutiny arrangements following receiving the Audit Wales report.

#### June 2022 decision

2.2 Following the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, it became clear that it was not possible for the Governance and Audit Committee to continue scrutinising corporate matters. It was decided to place the corporate matters as a responsibility of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and recommended reviewing the arrangements after matters stabilised following around 18 months.

2.3 The current terms of reference of the scrutiny committees following the Full Council's decision in June 2022, is seen in **Appendix 1**. The document highlights the changes needed to reflect the Communities Scrutiny Committee's field of work following recent changes. Subject to the decision the Monitoring Officer will report separately on constitutional changes.

## Audit Wales

- 2.3 Audit Wales held an independent review of scrutiny efficiency in Cyngor Gwynedd during the first few months of 2023 and submitted its final report at the end of September 2023. It was an encouraging report with 6 recommendations – actions have already been reported to the Governance and Audit Committee. Please see **Appendix 2**.

## Consultation

- 2.4 An opportunity was given to Members and officers to provide input to the review. Two workshops were held for Councillors on 20/10/2023 and 10/11/2023. 23 Members attended. Councillors were given the opportunity to express their views on the most suitable location to scrutinise corporate matters along with other matters relating to scrutiny.

### The most appropriate location to scrutinise corporate matters

- 2.5 Below are the messages arising from the workshops when discussing the most appropriate location to scrutinise corporate matters:
- There was no clear direction arising from the workshops regarding the 'home' of corporate matters
  - There was no clear direction to the scrutiny arrangements for the future
  - There was a general sense that the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's workload was too heavy and that either corporate matters and/or economy matters could be moved to another committee.
  - Observations were given that the Communities Scrutiny Committee was the most appropriate location for these elements
  - It was added that an additional committee could be created (a fourth committee for those matters - economy and corporate) and leaving the education matters in their own scrutiny committee
  - Not everyone agreed with this and the data up until now in terms of the number of items scrutinised does not support additional pressure on one committee.
  - One member asked for one principal scrutiny committee and more investigations
  - Some called for 4 (or 5) scrutiny committees and more investigations
  - Some noted that the current arrangements were correct and that past experience indicated that there were not enough matters to hold another committee over the Council period.

## Possible options

- 2.6 As a result of the above comments the options below were formed. It is noted **that the matters noted would be implemented following Audit Wales' review for any option.**
- 2.7 The options:

<b>Option 1 - no change to the current arrangements</b>	
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<p>Number of items per committee has been quite consistent.</p> <p>The arrangements seem to be working well and the opinion of the external auditors noted that.</p> <p>Actions against the recommendations to hone the arrangements further.</p>	<p>Some Councillors have noted frustration with the current arrangements.</p>

<b>Option 2 - Move corporate matters to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, and leaving Education and Economy matters in one committee.</b>	
+	-
<p>Release the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's 'time' to prioritise approximately 2 - 3 additional items per year.</p>	<p>The work pressures of the Communities Scrutiny Committee are become heavier, and there will be a need to prioritise to keep to three items per meeting.</p>

<b>Option 3 - Move corporate and economy matters to the Communities Scrutiny Committee, and leaving Education matters on their own in a specific committee.</b>	
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<p>Education matters are given due attention (in the opinion of some members)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work pressures on the Communities Scrutiny Committee are very heavy (a risk whether it would be sustainable?)</li> <li>• Work pressures on the education department is very high to feed a specific committee</li> <li>• A challenge whether there are enough items to maintain a committee with education matters only over five years without repeating too much?</li> </ul>

<b>Option 4 - establish a fourth scrutiny committee.</b>	
<p>No change to the Care Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>No change to the Communities Scrutiny Committee.*</p> <p>Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee (dropping the corporate element)*</p> <p>A fourth committee to look at Corporate, performance and language matters (scrutinise the implementation of the language strategy). To ensure sufficient resources to hold a fourth committee, the Language Committee would have to be removed.</p>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education matters are given due attention (in the opinion of some members) OR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depending on the performance arrangements</li> <li>• No specific Language Committee by Cyngor Gwynedd (scrutinise through</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee's 'time' to prioritise approximately 2 - 3 additional items per year.</li> <li>• High status to a report on performance and scrutinise arrangements to meet the standards and promoting the language</li> </ul>	<p>this committee, and strategic input through the county language forum)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources go to support committees, less time for investigations.</li> <li>• Need to consider scrutinising language matters in a specific field (i.e. education, local development plan)</li> </ul>
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\* the 'economy' element could be moved to the Communities Scrutiny Committee in this option, see the +/- in option 3.

### Journey to a decision

2.8 The information and possible options were presented to the following meetings asking them to consider the options and the pros and cons of each.

05/12/23	Joint meeting of the Scrutiny Forum and Cabinet Members	Option 1 – keep current arrangements
06/12/23	Management Team (Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads)	Option 1 – keep current arrangements
11/12/23	Scrutiny Forum	Option 1 – keep current arrangements

2.9 Note below the basis of the Scrutiny Forum's conclusions:

- A positive report was received from Audit Wales, and getting to grips with the action plans will build on the success of the current arrangements and strengthen them, by further improving scrutiny efficiency
- Good progress has already been made with our scrutiny arrangements, and implementing some of the steps have already been seen, such as sharpening the recommendations by the committees and the development of the cabinet's forward programme.
- Experience has shown that work programmes stabilise over a period of five years
- While prioritising matters can be challenging, it enables scrutiny on a cross-section of matters and avoids excessive scrutiny on one subject that could be of specific interest to individuals
- Developing the arrangements for the Area Forums/briefing sessions and presenting information will allow Members to get detailed information about their area in a specific way, by enabling the Scrutiny Committees to scrutinise strategically on specific matters

2.10 A report based on the conclusions of the Scrutiny Forum was submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee on 18/01/24 for them to approve that the review arrangements had been completed properly. The Committee decided to recommend that the Full Council approve Option 1 subject to work being carried out to improve the efficiency and operations of the Scrutiny Committees.

2.11 As noted already in the report, it is intended to get to grips with the actions in response to the Audit Wales recommendations in order to build on the success of the current arrangements and strengthen them, by further improving scrutiny efficiency. The actions are believed to address the clause in the Governance and Audit Committee's recommendation that work be carried out to improve the efficiency and operations of the Scrutiny Committees.

#### Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

2.12 The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act places a 'well-being duty' on public bodies aimed at achieving 7 national well-being goals for Wales - a Wales that is prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal, has cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and is globally responsible. The recommendations have been prepared having regard to these requirements and in accordance with the 5 ways of working.

### **3 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

3.1 Broad consultation was undertaken through the member workshops, joint meeting of Scrutiny Forum and Cabinet, Management Team, Scrutiny Forum. The recommendations were submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee before submitting to the full Council for a decision.

#### **3.2 THE STATUTORY OFFICERS' OBSERVATIONS:**

##### **Monitoring Officer:**

The consultative and discussion work that has been undertaken to reach the recommendation is highlighted here. It has allowed consideration of options and reaching a conclusion on the need for change. It also provides a way forward to respond to the recommendations of the Audit Wales report. I confirm that I will deal with the necessary changes to the Constitution resulting from the decision of the Council.

##### **Statutory Finance Officer:**

*I believe that the decision sought will not create additional spending commitments, and I support the intention to improve the efficiency of the arrangements.*

#### **APPENDIX:**

Appendix 1 – Terms of reference of scrutiny committees  
Appendix 2 - Improvement action steps