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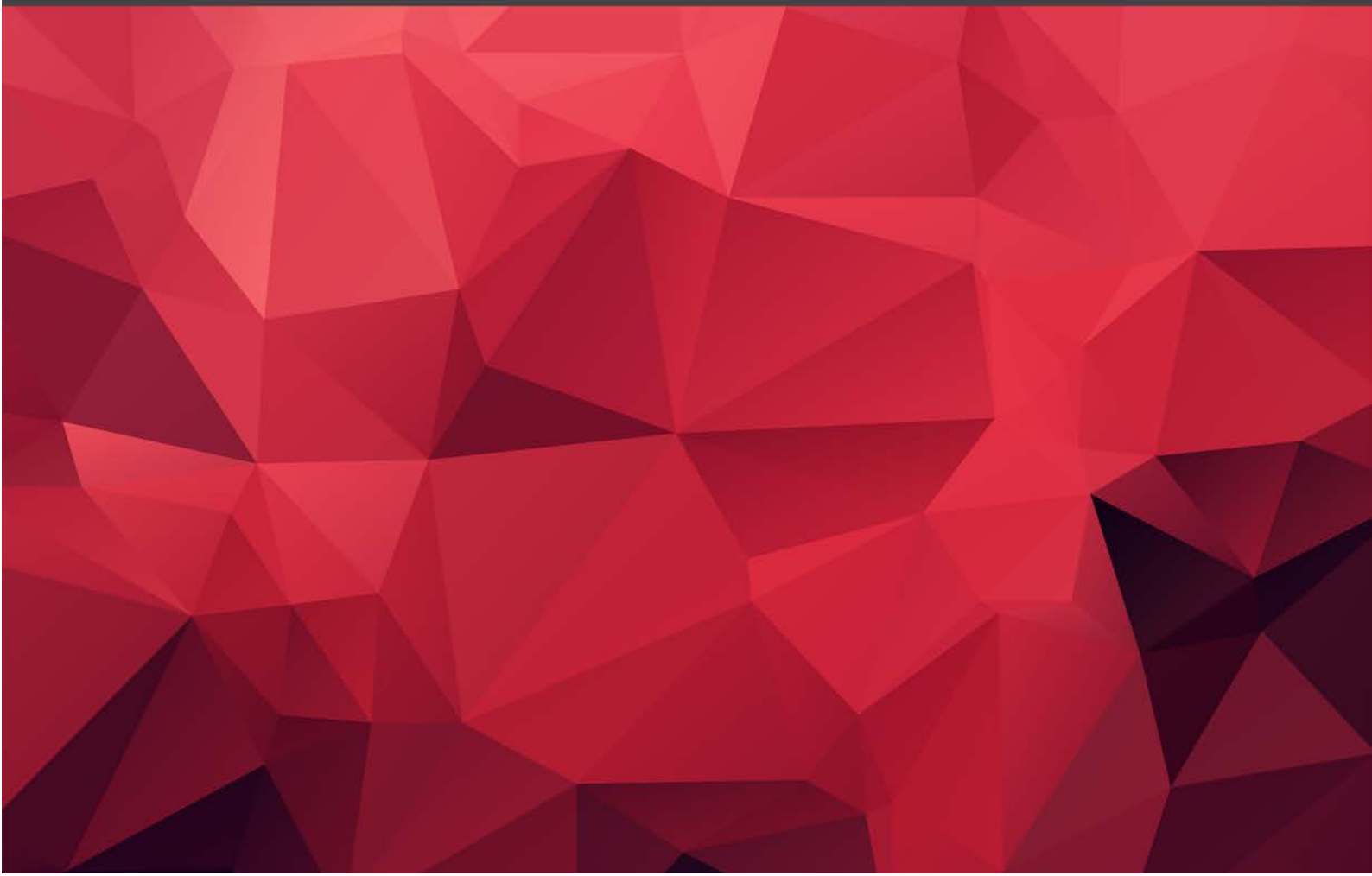
Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Overview and Scrutiny – Fit For the Future? **Carmarthenshire County Council**

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Project brief

Purpose and focus of the review

- 1 We will explore with councils how 'fit for the future' their scrutiny functions are. This will include considering how they are responding to current challenges, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act), in relation to their scrutiny activity, as well as how councils are beginning to undertake scrutiny of public service boards. We will examine how well placed councils are to respond to future challenges including continued pressure on public finances and the possible move towards more regional working between local authorities.
- 2 As part of this review we will also review the progress councils have made in addressing the recommendations of our earlier National Improvement Study **Good Scrutiny? Good Question**.¹ We will also follow up on any proposals for improvement relevant to scrutiny that we have issued in any subsequent local reports including those issued to councils as part of our 2016-17 thematic reviews of Savings Planning and Governance Arrangements for Determining Significant Service Changes.

Intended benefits

- 3 The intended benefits of undertaking this project are:
 - identification of approaches to embedding the sustainable development principle into scrutiny processes and practices to inform practice sharing and future work of the Auditor General in relation to the WFG Act;
 - providing assurance that scrutiny functions are well placed to respond to current and future challenges and expectations;
 - helping to embed effective scrutiny by elected members from the start of this new electoral cycle; and
 - providing insight into how well councils have responded to the findings of our previous Scrutiny Improvement Study.

Method

- 4 To inform our findings we will base our methodology around the Outcomes and Characteristics for Effective Local Government Overview and Scrutiny that were developed and agreed by scrutiny stakeholders in Wales following our previous Scrutiny Improvement Study.
- 5 We will initially undertake document reviews, interview a small number of key officers and run focus groups with key councillors to understand their views on Carmarthenshire County Council's (the Council) current scrutiny arrangements and

¹ **Good Scrutiny? Good Question! – Auditor General for Wales improvement study: Scrutiny in Local Government** (May 2014) available at www.audit.wales

in particular how the Council intends to respond to the challenges identified above. We will also explore councils' approaches to PSB scrutiny as part of the interviews.

- 6 We will select scrutiny committee meetings to observe and review relevant documentation provided to members to support their scrutiny role, such as reports and presentations.
- 7 After we have reported our findings to each council we will consider how we can best work with other scrutiny stakeholders to share learning, for example through regional seminars.

Main review questions

Exhibit 1: main review questions

Is the Council's overview and scrutiny function well placed to respond to current and future challenges?
Level 2
Scrutiny environment: Is the Council creating a supportive environment to enable scrutiny to operate effectively?
Scrutiny practice: Is the operation of the scrutiny function well planned, efficient, objective and based on evidence from a range of sources?
Scrutiny impact Is overview and scrutiny activity contributing to improvements in performance and decision-making?

Timetable

- 8 The table below sets out the proposed timeline for the review although timescales may vary depending on circumstances in individual councils. The specific timetable for undertaking the work will be discussed with our Council contacts as part of project set arrangements.

Exhibit 2: proposed timetable

Proposed timetable	
Project set-up meeting	To be discussed at the local liaison meeting with the Council's key contact – September 2017
Fieldwork including meeting observations	September – December 2017
Local report issued	By end of March 2018
Regional seminars	April/May 2018 (exact date to be confirmed).

Interview and observation list

Exhibit 3: who we would like to interview as part of the review

Interview/Focus Group/Observation	Who
Interview	Chief Executive.
Interview	Monitoring Officer.
Interview	Scrutiny Manager or Head of Democratic Services.
Interview	PSB Co-ordinator or equivalent.
Focus Group	Chairs of scrutiny committees.
Focus Group	Cabinet.
Focus Group	Scrutiny committee members newly elected as members of the Council in 2017
Focus Group	Scrutiny committee members who were also elected members of the Council prior to the 2017 elections.
Observation	Relevant overview and scrutiny committee meetings (between two and four meetings).

Document request

Exhibit 4: documents we would like to request from the Council

Document title
Sample of Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Reports, Minutes and Agendas (we will source these via the Council's website).
Sample of reports or materials provided to members at informal 'scrutiny' meetings eg member seminars/workshops or task and finish groups (where applicable).
Minutes, reports and agendas of PSB Scrutiny Committee (or equivalent).
Forward work programmes for overview and scrutiny committee for 2017-18.
Staff support structure for the overview and scrutiny function.
Any Council reports evaluating the effectiveness or impact of the overview and scrutiny function (if applicable).
Any improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study (if applicable).
Any report which shows if the Council has adopted Participation Cymru's 10 Principles of Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders (if applicable).
We will also access documents that councils have already shared with us in relation to the WFG Act, including documents obtained as part of our 'Year One Commentary' work.

Wales Audit Office contacts

Exhibit 5: Wales Audit Office contacts

Name	Contact details
Performance Audit Director	Huw Rees huw.rees@audit.wales 02920 320599
Performance Audit Manager (nationally for this thematic study)	Non Jenkins non.jenkins@audit.wales 02920 320595
Performance Audit Manager (local)	Jeremy Evans jeremy.evans@audit.wales 07825 052861
Performance Audit Lead	Alison Lewis alison.lewis@audit.wales 02920 829314
Performance Auditor	Gareth Lewis gareth.lewis2@audit.wales 02920 829325

Appendix 1

Recommendations from Good Scrutiny? Good Question? Scrutiny Improvement Study

Exhibit 6: recommendations from **Good Scrutiny? Good Question? Scrutiny Improvement Study**

Recommendation	Responsible Partners
R1 Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
R2 Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
R3 Further develop scrutiny forward work programing to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide a clear rationale for topic selection;• be more outcome focussed• ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and• align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councils
R4 Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councils, Staff of the Wales Audit Office, CSSIW, Estyn
R5 Ensure that external review bodies take account of scrutiny work programmes and the outputs of scrutiny activity, where appropriate, in planning and delivering their work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff of the Wales Audit Office, CSSIW, Estyn

Recommendation	Responsible Partners
<p>R6 Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
<p>R7 Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Overview & Scrutiny Officers' Network.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council
<p>R8 Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils
<p>R9 Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils

Appendix 2

Outcomes and characteristics for effective local government overview and scrutiny

Exhibit 7: outcomes and characteristics for effective local government overview and scrutiny

Outcomes	Characteristics
<p>What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?</p>	<p>What would it look like? How could we recognise it?</p>
<p>1. Democratic accountability drives improvement in public services. 'Better Services'</p>	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement arrangements. ii) Scrutiny has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provide Scrutiny members with high-quality analysis, advice and training. <p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) Overview and Scrutiny inquiries are non-political, methodologically sound and incorporate a wide range of evidence and perspectives. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv) Overview and scrutiny regularly engages in evidence based challenge of decision makers and service providers. v) Scrutiny provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems.
<p>2. Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust. 'Better decisions'</p>	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Scrutiny councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively. ii) The process receives effective support from the Council's Corporate Management Team which ensures that information provided to scrutiny is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner. <p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) Scrutiny is Member led and has 'ownership' of its work programme taking into account the views of the public, partners and regulators whilst balancing between prioritising community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. iv) Stakeholders have the ability to contribute to the development and delivery of scrutiny forward work programmes. v) Overview and scrutiny meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> vi) Non-executive Members provide an evidence based check and balance to Executive decision making. vii) Decision makers give public account for themselves at scrutiny committees for their portfolio responsibilities.

Outcomes	Characteristics
<p>What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?</p>	<p>What would it look like? How could we recognise it?</p>
<p>3. The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.</p>	<p>Environment</p> <p>i) Scrutiny is recognised by the Executive and Corporate Management team as an important council mechanism for community engagement.</p> <p>Practice</p> <p>ii) Scrutiny is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability.</p> <p>iii) Scrutiny operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict.</p> <p>iv) Scrutiny builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders.</p> <p>Impact</p> <p>v) Overview and scrutiny enables the ‘voice’ of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.</p>

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