

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 10TH APRIL, 2025

REFERENCE FROM DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE: 21ST MARCH, 2025

“ RESHAPING SCRUTINY (REF) –

The Head of Democratic Services presented an overview of proposals to review scrutiny arrangements, including changes to ways of working, meeting frequency and the number of overall Scrutiny Committees. They advised they were seeking input from the Committee surrounding how this impacted Member development needs and resources within the Democratic Services team, with comments being used to shape any final proposals.

Councillor Dr. Johnson shared that they were concerned about the reduction from 5 Committees to 4 Committees, and had asked for “dummy” agendas to see what type of things would be on the agendas in the future. He also indicated that there needed to be considerations of scrutiny of partnership work, the call-in process and emphasised how Scrutiny was often an opportunity for Councillors to discuss topics in a public forum.

Councillor Bruce sought further information surrounding the potential benefits, and how Councillors would be informed of next steps. Benefits such as responding to Member feedback, public feedback, regulatory reports, the Performance Panel Assessment were shared, alongside the opportunity for Scrutiny Committees to drive policy and improving public participation in the work of the Council.

Councillor Carroll agreed around the need to review the Scrutiny function, and cited examples of where they felt the Council had not performed where Scrutiny could have played a role. They welcomed the opportunity to improve, but reflected the changes could have the opposite effect in terms of accountability, with a reduction in the number of Committees being regressive and not fitting with the principles of good governance and accountability. They noted that presentations should be a brief outline, with the focus upon asking questions, rather than Scrutiny being an information dissemination exercise.

Councillor Bruce welcomed the proposed moved to a shorter agenda and queried if meetings held on a six-weekly basis, instead of the proposed change from monthly to bi-monthly, could be an option for the future.

Councillor Thomas agreed with previous comments surrounding presentations, and that Councillors should read reports ahead of meetings, which would make the meetings themselves more effective. He also welcomed proposals to look at alternative means for information only/noting items, which could be circulated by e-mail, with the opportunity for feedback to be provided if they wanted to. He reflected

that proposals would hopefully improve the depth and quality of Scrutiny, and particularly welcomed the move to Task and Finish, but stated that this would need concentrated effort and a focused mind from Members. He also felt that the reduction in potential topics coming to Committees could support the proposed move to 4 Committees, but there needed to be careful consideration of topics which could fall within multiple Committees and how the cross-Committee working would happen in practice.

Councillor Perkes queried around what other Councils in Wales were doing, and how many pieces of Task and Finish work had been undertaken during this Administration. They were advised models of Scrutiny were different, with nearly all Councils in Wales having a different number of Committees, themes and meeting frequencies, and that it was local discretion as to how the statutory guidance was applied. Alongside this, Task and Finish work was currently sparse due to capacity within Democratic Services, with the procurement work being the only significant topic in recent years, with the proposals seeking to release capacity for this to be undertaken more systematically.

Councillor Hanks agreed with the need to change Scrutiny, but was in favour of remaining as 5 Committees, as this would impact public perceptions. They also sought clarity surrounding Chairing of Task and Finish work, where they advised this would be at the Scrutiny Committees' discretion to appoint.

Councillor Dr. Johnson noted that the ability to opt out of participating in Task and Finish could lead to only a few Members participating in this work, but there was clearly a need to review arrangements, as there was a common agreement to improve Scrutiny's effectiveness.

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the Reshaping Scrutiny proposals be noted
- (2) T H A T Members' comments surrounding the proposed changes to Scrutiny arrangements be fed to Cabinet back accordingly.

Reason for decisions

(1&2) To ensure that Members of Democratic Services Committee had had opportunity to share their viewpoints surrounding any proposed changes."