

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 10TH APRIL, 2025

REFERENCE FROM GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 24TH MARCH, 2025

“ RESHAPING SCRUTINY (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 6th March, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Operational Manager Democratic Services.

Councillor M. Hooper stated that a core issue was those members on Scrutiny who did not actively engage or participate, and it was important to find ways to improve that. There was also a concern regarding Scrutiny driving policy changes in a situation when there was one political group that led the Council as well as the Welsh and UK's Governments, so that would be challenging for opposition Members.

Councillor E. Goodjohn queried the splitting the responsibility of Social Services over to two separate Scrutiny Committees, with the Start Well Scrutiny Committee potentially being accountable for over half of the Council's budget. In addition, Councillor Goodjohn queried whether responding to the climate emergency sat best under the Place Scrutiny Committee as that impacted a range of policy areas and needed to be considered among other areas such as financial management and procurement.

Councillor Goodjohn also queried whether there could be cross Committee working on Task and Finish reviews. In reply, the Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that cross working would be reflected in the proposals.

Councillor J. Protheroe commented that it was logical to align the Scrutiny Committees to the objectives within the new Corporate Plan which would be understandable to residents. It was recognised that a significant number of reports to Scrutiny had been for noting which had meant that many Committee Members had not been able to fully focus on tasks at hand and the ability to provide ideas and recommendations of practical use. Therefore, removing reports for noting would free up time and help refocus Committee Members. Councillor Protheroe added that she hoped that all Committee Members would do what was best for residents and work in a constructive and co-operative way.

M. Evans referred to paragraph 2.11 of the report and feedback received from a range of Members to date that had led to a multitude of opinions, and he stated that it would have been useful to see the feedback and other alternative options considered. In response, the Director advised that the approach that had been adopted had been to involve and engage with Elected Members early on in the process. That began in the Autumn of 2024 when there had been initial discussions around developing the performance management framework and that had led to a

wider set of proposed changes. During each briefing session there had been opportunity to reflect on previous points raised and discussed and then refine on those points, such as the frequency of meetings, different combinations of meetings and the capacity of the officer core. That could be made clearer.

It was agreed that information regarding the number of Call-Ins to Scrutiny would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Goodjohn queried how the proposal to create a performance forum had come about and how would meetings be structured. In response, the Director clarified that performance forums were used by other Local Authorities and the idea was based on refining the level performance information scrutinised by Members and moving to more investigative task and finish review work. As the new Corporate Plan (Vale 2030) was cross cutting, the idea of the forum was to bring Members together twice a year so that they could look at performance from a variety of perspectives. It would also assist Members to identify areas that required further consideration by their specific Scrutiny Committee. The actual logistical elements of the forum were due to be considered once all the feedback of the current phase had been collated. The first meeting of the forum was planned to take place by September.

Councillor Hooper queried the make-up and Member selection process for Task and Finish Review groups. The Director stated that in terms of political balance there had been consideration about the Chair and Vice-Chair of each Scrutiny Committee discussing with Committee Members at the start of each year, their skills, experiences and areas of interest, and also potential topics for Task and Finish. That would allow opportunity to consider the best blend of skills required. It was also important to ensure that all Members had opportunities to contribute and participate. The Operational Manager added that there was an aim to formally record the skills and expertise of all Elected Members to better understand the make-up of Councillors. In terms of Task and Finish Groups, they would range from 4 to 8 Members, with 6 being the ideal number, appointed on the basis of political balance if possible, but the Scrutiny Committee would have discretion in terms of size and membership.

Councillor Hooper queried how would the Task and Finish Groups be managed. The Operational Manager stated that the process would be facilitated and managed by Democratic Officers in conjunction with the Chair. The aim was to have a structured review underpinned by a clear and well-defined scope and framework that would assist short and sharp Task and Finish reviews. Appropriate training around researching and scoping had been earmarked for Democratic Officers.

G. Chapman (Chair) referred to paragraph 2.29 and feedback and queried whether proposals in 2.8 were illustrative and not fixed and were they over optimistic given that they would be implemented by June. Therefore, to have meaningful engagement all Members needed to be consulted. In response, the Director confirmed that there had already been briefing and engagement sessions on the 12th and 13th March with Members, so all had had an opportunity to hear proposals and provide feedback. As it was recognised that all Members would be able to attend, a series of day time drop-in sessions had been held by Democratic Services

to either brief Members on proposals or respond to queries that other Members may have. In addition, the proposals had been reported to the Council's Democratic Services and were also to be presented to the Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. The aim was to provide a further report to Cabinet on 3rd April based on feedback received, with any proposals agreed by Cabinet to then be referred to Full Council towards the end of April. Implementation of the new Scrutiny arrangements would then take place in May following the Annual Meeting.

Councillor Goodjohn commented that the changes to Scrutiny should be welcomed and he added that the pace of reporting as seen during these proposals should be the norm.

G. Chapman stated that there were a number of key points to report back to Cabinet:

- For those Members that sat on a Scrutiny Committee they needed to fully understand the role of Scrutiny and how they could participate within the Scrutiny function;
- Adequate training should be provided to Members on Scrutiny and the development of a quick training programme for Members prior to implementation of the new Scrutiny function would be endorsed;
- Questioning skills for Members was an important part of any training programme;
- It was important to ensure that there was a budget to facilitate the use of expert witnesses;
- The Governance and Audit Committee should have sight of the outcome of any review undertaken following the introduction of the new Scrutiny function which should also be presented to Cabinet; and
- It was important for the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes to also have regard to possible referrals from the Governance and Audit Committee that requested Scrutiny to look at some service aspect in more detail.

Subsequently it was

RESOLVED – T H A T the comments of the Governance and Audit Committee be reported to Cabinet. The comments relating to the following:

- For those Members that sat on a Scrutiny Committee they needed to fully understand the role of Scrutiny and how they could participate within the Scrutiny function;
- It was important to ensure that adequate training was provided to Members on Scrutiny and the development of a quick training programme for Members prior to implementation of the new Scrutiny function would be endorsed;
- An important element of the training programme was questioning skills;
- With regard to the use of expert witnesses at Scrutiny Committees, it was important to ensure that there was a budget to facilitate that;
- The Governance and Audit Committee to have sight of the outcome of any review undertaken following the introduction of the new Scrutiny function which should also be presented to Cabinet; and

- It was important for the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes to also have regard to possible referrals from the Governance and Audit Committee that requested Scrutiny to look at some service aspect in more detail.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.”