



# SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18



[www.wrexham.gov.uk](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk) | [www.wrecsam.gov.uk](http://www.wrecsam.gov.uk)

# Introduction by Scrutiny Champion



## Welcome to the 2017/18 Scrutiny Annual Report by the Scrutiny Champion.

My name is Councillor Sonia Benbow-Jones and I am a Councillor for the Cefn Ward. I am also the Council's Scrutiny Champion. My role requires me to guide and promote the scrutiny function both inside and outside the Council. The year under review was my first year in this role. Hopefully this report will give you a better understanding of the important role that scrutiny members play. We oversee the operations of the Council and our partners to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for the people of the County Borough.

The work of scrutiny continues to evolve to help the Council address the "big issues" it faces. This report details how we have accomplished this during 2017/18.

Increased public and partner participation has been a goal for all scrutiny committees for a number of years and during this year members of the public, school governors and teachers, health partners, Senedd yr Ifanc, North Wales Police, Council tenants, the Town Centre Forum and representatives of other public bodies have all been involved in the scrutiny process.

Webcasting of Council Scrutiny Committees was introduced in 2016/17 and 6 meetings have benefitted from this during the year 2017/18. Viewing figures for these meetings have been comparable with other webcast Council meetings. Webcasting meetings will continue into 2018/19 and allow for the wider and easier access by the public to the proceedings.

During the year the Wales Audit Office has undertaken a national review of how 'fit for the future' Council's scrutiny functions are. The report on the scrutiny function in Wrexham found "that the Council has strengthened its overview and scrutiny function but there is scope to consider more fundamental changes to meet future challenges." This conclusion has been welcomed as recognising the focus and work that has been undertaken to improve the scrutiny function. With regard to "fundamental changes to meet future challenges" work is already underway to review the current operation of scrutiny and to develop better ways for us to address these challenges.

When reviewing this report it is clear that scrutiny is an active process that does not exist in isolation of the operation of the Council, or the people of Wrexham or the wider national stage – the next page gives a pictorial representation, a 'word-cloud', which highlights the participatory, investigatory and flexible approach that scrutiny takes to deliver outcomes.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those that have been involved in scrutiny during the year for their contributions in helping scrutiny deliver for the people of Wrexham.



# YOU SAID, WE DID

Scrutiny committees are made up of local councillors, who represent you, the public. While there will be times when they have to undertake statutory work, for example undertaking scrutiny required by Welsh Government, or responding to regulatory reports, scrutiny committees want to use their time to be responsive to issues which are of interest to you, the public. Generally scrutiny has no powers to scrutinise the work of outside bodies, but many scrutiny committees engage with other public service providers and challenge them on your behalf.

Here are some examples of this kind of work we have undertaken this year...

Our **budget** situation – by now we are all familiar with the budget situation in Wrexham and all other local authorities. The Council had a really great response to our budget consultation – over 3,700 of you told us your views – and we have used this as an important indication about the services and issues that are important to you that we need to keep a close eye on. Using what you told us, we will continue to scrutinise issues including Police Community Support Officers, changes to day and work opportunities in Social Services and the future delivery of school music services.

Our **town centre** is important to us all. There's always a lot of publicity...whether it's about the markets, how many shops we've got, or street cleanliness. So we followed up on work we undertook last year which made recommendations on better co-ordination of our services in the town centre – and we were pleased to note a lot of really positive work as part of the Town Centre Masterplan. We webcast this meeting, and were also the subject of lots of local and regional media coverage.

Our **Health Board**...we work in partnership with BCUHB in co-ordinating health and social care services in Wrexham – so we have a lot to talk about! But we also invite them in regularly to discuss other issues. This year we have met with them twice, challenging them on their plans to increase the availability of GPs in Wrexham, on remodelling primary care in Wrexham and on the development of community resource teams. We also decided to webcast these meetings as we knew they would be of as much interest to you as they are to us.

# GET INVOLVED!

## How, When and Where?

Committees tend to meet monthly. We invite decision-makers, interested parties and experts to help us with our discussions. We usually meet in the Guildhall but we're flexible on this. Generally our meetings are open to the public, and our papers available on the Council's website. We also webcast some of our meetings and you can view these live or from our archives, on the Council's website. We would like to know what you think.

**“What issues are important to you and the people in your neighbourhood?”**

**“Did you know that the public can suggest issues for scrutiny committees to look at?”**

**“What issues do you think the Council and its partners should be tackling?”**

Use the following link to help you to **GET INVOLVED!** <http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english./faq/scrutiny.htm>

## GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

You can contact the **Scrutiny Support Team** by email: [scrutiny@wrexham.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@wrexham.gov.uk) or telephone: 01978 292179/ 292253/ 292258 or via **your local councillor**.

# OUR SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Council Plan 2018-2022 has four strategic themes:

**ECONOMY** – Supporting a sustainable, thriving and more equal economy.

**PEOPLE** - Supporting sustainable, active, and self-reliant communities whilst safeguarding those at risk.

**PLACE** – Supporting a sustainable and bio-diverse environment.

**ORGANISATION** – Building an efficient and effective organisation that can best support local wellbeing.

The work of the Council's five Scrutiny Committees is focussed on supporting the objectives of these wellbeing themes. Their focus and the issues you would expect them to discuss are listed below:-

- **Employment, Business and Investment** - To focus on Wrexham as a place where people want to live, work, learn, visit and invest; that businesses are supported to locate and grow here and that people are able to prosper as individuals in their communities. This Committee would discuss economic development and business support services, tourism and culture, regeneration and rural & urban development;
- **Safeguarding, Communities and Wellbeing** - To focus on the people of Wrexham feeling safe and secure with sustainable, attractive settlements, neighbourhoods, buildings and spaces. To ensure that vulnerable children and adults are safeguarded and have good health and well-being. This Committee would discuss children and adult social services, health, public protection services, leisure services and community centres, and crime & disorder and community cohesion matters;
- **Homes and Environment** - To focus on the delivery of homes that meet people's needs and aspirations in well connected communities. To ensure that we are an environmentally responsible County Borough. This Committee would discuss homes (affordable housing, the council's housing stock and social housing, homelessness, other housing such as Travellers' sites), waste management, energy efficiency, Streetscene services and the road transport network/highway maintenance;
- **Customers, Performance, Resources and Governance** - To ensure we are customer focussed and innovative, soundly organised, resourced and governed, in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for the people of Wrexham. This Committee would discuss performance management, Human Resources, equality issues, health & safety, customer contact (including the Contact Centre), the Council's finances and asset management arrangements, partnership and collaboration arrangements and the Council's democratic services; and
- **Lifelong Learning** - To focus on areas that ensure that people have positive aspirations, education and potential. This Committee would discuss education issues (children and adult) and libraries.

# EMPLOYMENT, BUSINESS & INVESTMENT

Our priorities in the Council Plan:

**Priority** – Encouraging people to live, work, learn, visit and invest here

**Priority** – Supporting businesses to locate and grow here

**Priority** – Helping tackle poverty



Some examples of what we did

## **Wrexham Town Centre Masterplan**

We considered a report on progress made against the Wrexham Town Centre Masterplan, following a previous review by a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group on how services in the town centre were coordinated. We noted that a Strategic Group, chaired by the Executive Director for Place and Economy, and a Town Centre Masterplan Delivery Group were now working alongside each other to ensure a more integrated approach to the delivery of the Town Centre Masterplan. We recognised the importance of culture, food, drink, entertainment and housing to the future success of the town centre. At the time of reporting, weekly average footfall in Wrexham town centre was 72,723. Council capital funding of £75k was allocated to fund the purchase of Christmas lights in 2017/18 and £270k for town centre improvements including CCTV camera enhancement.

## **Tracking of Young People**

In June 2017, we considered an update on the work of the Council's Keeping In Touch Group and recommended that Council's Lead Member For People – Youth Services And Anti-Poverty, write to the local AMs and MPs regarding the problems with sharing of data for 18-24 year olds for some agencies and the impact of universal credit in this respect. As a result of this work, Regulations have now been amended which will now allow the Department for Work and Pensions to provide information on people aged between 18-25 who are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit to Careers Wales and to allow Careers Wales to hold such information to allow them to provide advice, assistance and support to such persons. This will enable better monitoring and tracking of 18-24 year olds who are not in education, training or employment and provide more targeted services which would meet their needs. We will continue to monitor this area of work.

## **Site Visit to Redwither Tower, Wrexham Industrial Estate**

We went on a tour of the building, then received a presentation on the future plans and opportunities for the Redwither Site. This visit was part of raising newly elected members' awareness of one of the key sites identified within the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) for the Council's industrial units, offices and development sites as having 'optimum development potential to deliver significant outputs in terms of jobs and income'. This will help inform our future scrutiny of progress against the SAMP.

# SAFEGUARDING, COMMUNITIES & WELLBEING

Our priorities in the Council Plan:

**Priority** – Supporting people to have positive aspirations, learn and achieve their potential

**Priority** – Supporting people to live active, independent lives within their community

**Priority** – Safeguarding those who are vulnerable

**Priority** – Working with our partners to make Wrexham a safe place where people feel included

**Priority** – Enabling access to leisure and cultural activities.



Some examples of what we did

## Scrutiny of 2018/20 budget proposals

We scrutinised these proposals in December, prior to them being submitted to the Executive Board and Council. During discussions about the proposal to cease payments (£4 per day) to service users attending day and work opportunities, it became apparent that service users were already being paid inequitably. The committee recommended, and the Executive Board agreed, that not only should the proposal be rejected, but that all service users be paid equally going forward. In addition, the committee identified several issues it felt should monitor to ascertain any negative effects arising from implementation, and has included these on its future work programme – these include PCSOs, ending WCBC funding of childcare training, and proposals to re-model the Day and Work Opportunities Service.

## Crime and Disorder

We carry out scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership, which has responsibility for formulating and implementing strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder. During this period, we met with the statutory members of the Partnership, including North Wales Police and the Council's representative on the North Wales Safer Communities Board, to review progress against the Delivery Plans and discuss how the issues in Wrexham are being tackled and understand the new priorities that are emerging in Wrexham and North Wales – including Child Sexual Exploitation, Modern Slavery, Organised Crime and Counter-terrorism. We now receive data that allows us to analyse trends of different crime categories going back a number of years, so we can set information in context.

## 'Play' in Wrexham

This year we continued to follow up on the recommendations we first made in May 2016 in relation to securing sufficient play opportunities within the county borough. In January we were pleased to be able to support revised proposals we had requested be prepared for the council's endorsement of a 'Play Pledge' as a low cost means of ensuring greater consideration of children's access to time and space for play across all council departments. The Lead Member is supportive of the proposals and will take the 'Play Pledge' to the Executive Board early in the new municipal year for approval. This committee will consider the 2019 Play Sufficiency Assessment, progress with the Play Pledge and the work of the Play Sufficiency Partnership in supporting its implementation, in spring 2019.



# HOMES AND ENVIRONMENT

Our priorities in the Council Plan:

**Priority** – Promoting good quality homes and regeneration

**Priority** – Pride in our environment

**Priority** – Communities with sustainable, attractive settlements, neighbourhoods, buildings and spaces

**Priority** – Well-connected and sustainable communities



Some examples of what we did

## Local Speed Limits

Speed limits play a fundamental role in effective speed management designed to encourage, help and require drivers to adopt appropriate and safe speeds. They are a key indicator of the nature and risks posed by the road environment to both motorised and non-motorised road users. Wrexham Council takes a proactive approach in addressing local concerns through the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at reducing the negative impact of vehicle speed on local communities. We considered a new policy for setting speed limits in Wrexham which reflected on work undertaken to introduce 20mph speed limits and associated speed control measures outside all schools in the County Borough and a review and implementation of speed limits across the 'A' and 'B' road network. We supported the policy. It was suggested that where appropriate, Section 106 Obligations, be used as a financial resource to fund work in this area. Related planning permissions which could contribute to increased use of highways which would need to be reflected in amendment of local speed limits.

## The Use of Herbicide to Manage Weed Growth on Highways and Open Spaces in Wrexham

Glyphosate-based herbicides are used by to manage weed growth on highways and open spaces. Their use is an issue that has had increasing publicity. We considered views that the use of such substances be discontinued; alternative approaches adopted by other Authorities to manage weed growth and relevant information relating to the licensing and usage of glyphosate herbicides. We agreed that the amount of herbicide used generally be minimised and specifically in areas as identified in the relevant European Directive, that the purchase of lances which minimise herbicide usage be explored and costed and we monitor continue to monitor details of best practice and staff training in this area.

## Empty Properties

Houses that have been empty for at least six months are defined as "empty properties". These are predominantly held in the private sector and bringing them back in to use has benefits to communities and helps address issues around social housing waiting lists and homelessness. Using a variety of available resources the Council supports owners to bring these properties back into use. We supported the work being undertaken and highlighted the need for this work to be continued and if possible expanded to allow the initiatives that are underway to bring back into the housing stock the maximum number of properties.

# CUSTOMERS, PERFORMANCE, RESOURCES AND GOVERNANCE

Our priorities in the Council Plan:

**Priority –** Continuing to modernise our services

**Priority –** Supporting a resilient Council



Some examples of what we did

## **Welsh Audit Office (WAO) – Good Governance when Determining Significant Service Changes**

We are the scrutiny committee that deal with the “organisation” of the Council. As part of this remit we consider reports issued by the WAO relating to the organisation of the Council. Their aim is “to ensure that the people of Wales know whether public money is being managed wisely and that public bodies in Wales understand how to improve outcomes.” A WAO report was considered by the committee in relation to how the Council’s scrutiny function operates when determining significant service change. We highlighted the need for work in this area to allow for greater awareness of proposed change for Members This has resulted in all Members now receiving a quarterly project management update report, increasing their awareness of any proposed service changes.

## **Contracts which have exceeded the agreed contract sum by more than 5%**

We have considered two reports during the year that monitor contracts on which expenditure has exceeded set criteria. We have highlighted issues around the recording of costs in relation to housing voids, to give a better expression of works where costs are directly attributable to works undertaken and raised concerns around expenditure in this area. Since these concerns were made a new framework for dealing with voids and a voids commissioning team has been established, which has been welcomed and will improve performance in this area.

## **Wrexham Public Services Board (PSB) well-being assessment and draft well-being plan**

We have received reports into work undertaken to establish the PSB and its related well-being plan. As the scrutiny committee that has dealt with a number of partnership issues and has scrutinised the predecessor Local Service Board we are aware of the valuable role that partner organisations play in the delivery of objectives. With the well-being assessment requiring specific tasks from Community Councils we have highlighted the role of support for them in allowing them to fulfil their tasks.

# LIFELONG LEARNING

Our priorities in the Council Plan:

**Priority** – Supporting people to have positive aspirations, learn and achieve their potential;



Some examples of what we did

## **GwE (Regional School Improvement Service) / Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) Business Plans**

We have supported the priorities for action identified in the Education Effectiveness Level 3 Business Plan and a revised process for schools causing concern (see also paragraph below). We have also shadowed some GwE Officers during the Spring Term 2018 to develop our understanding of how GwE support schools to improve. We will continue to monitor education standards in Wrexham to ascertain whether the actions in the business plans are delivering the significant improvements required in Wrexham schools.

## **School Performance Monitoring Working Group**

As part of the revised process for schools causing concern (referred to above) we have established a small group of 6 Councillors and two co-opted lay members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, who meet once per school term with staff and governors of schools who are either in an Estyn category of 'requiring significant improvement', or in a national category of requiring red or amber support. The meetings have been held at the schools and the Chair and Vice-Chair visit the school beforehand to meet with the Headteacher and to discuss the arrangements for the meeting. During 2017/18, meetings have been held at Ysgol Rhiwabon, Ysgol y Grango and Acton Park Primary School. The feedback from both members of the Group and the schools involved has been extremely positive and improvements in those schools have been evident. The Group will report back to Committee in October each year as part of the annual report on Education Standards.

## **Site Visits to Coleg Cambria (Yale site and Bersham Road)**

As newly elected Members, we visited the Yale and Bersham Road sites of Coleg Cambria in November and January to observe one of their School Links days as part of their enrichment and entitlement provision. This helped to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the type and quality of collaborative work which is being undertaken between schools and Coleg Cambria to improve the transition to post-16 learning. It also provides the most disengaged learners with a bespoke enrichment programme which encourages them to stay on in education and helps them develop employability skills. We are pleased to note that Wrexham has one of the lowest rates of Year 11 pupils (15/16 year olds) not in education, training or employment (1.1% compared to the national average of 1.6%, as at October 2017).

