

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

This document is available in Welsh



Introduction by Scrutiny Champion



Welcome to the 2019/2020 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 third 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 2019/20. We started the year with each Scrutiny Committee holding informal workshop sessions with Lead Members and Senior Officers in June/July to review their work programmes to align them with the Council's priorities for 2019/20 and underpinning activities. This saw a number of existing scrutiny topics being removed and new ones added.

The work of scrutiny was, like most of the Country, disrupted by the outbreak of Covid - 19. Due to the limitations that were placed on gatherings and the need to social distance meetings were cancelled from mid-March 2020. During this time informal scrutiny was undertaken and Chairs forwarded concerns raised by their committee members to Officers for response and reassurance. Examples of this related to safeguarding and the health and safety of staff working during the response to Covid -19.

In line with Welsh Government guidelines meetings began again in September. These guidelines relaxed existing requirements as to physical attendance at meetings and allowed for Members to participate remotely. Again in line with these guidelines the business that will be transacted from this time will be primarily focussed on the response to and impacts of Covid - 19.

Meetings were also disrupted during the period under review by the General Election of 2019 due to the imposition of a pre-election period, which did not allow for the consideration of items that could be thought to allow for party political statements to be made.

This did not mean that scrutiny has not taken place of both Council services and our partners during this reporting period. Some examples of outcomes from scrutiny activity by the individual scrutiny committees are included later in this report and include the improvement and development of our Wrexham Town Centre indoor markets, monitoring of PCSO's and reviewing day work opportunities for vulnerable people.

When reviewing this report it should be acknowledged that scrutiny is an active process that does not exist in isolation of the operation of the Council. As stated in our last annual report we would hope that our processes are participatory and investigatory and we adopt a flexible approach so that scrutiny delivers positive outcomes. Scrutiny and its processes are continually reviewed and amended with the aim of improving outcomes. For example, this year we have replaced a number of our formal Committee meetings with smaller more informal Scrutiny Task & Finish Groups. A major piece of work was concluded by Town Centre Markets Task and Finish Group and this is reported in greater detail later in this annual report.

As part of this on-going process of change a review of “How the Council Does Business” has been carried out during the year. This was supplemented by a number of WLGA scrutiny training sessions for all Members and Chief Officers including questioning skills and how to do effective scrutiny. There have been a number of outcomes identified in relation to scrutiny and these have been guided by the principle of the form of scrutiny representing the function being fulfilled. These included more informal briefing sessions to build Members’ understanding of issues, shorter scrutiny reporting formats, more use of smaller informal Task & Finish Groups. These changes have not been fully developed and implemented due to the impact of Covid 19 but they have been adapted over this period with some informal scrutiny taking place and via other formats and used to gather evidence and information for scrutiny members. The use of new technology to attend and participate in meetings will also drive changes in how we carry out scrutiny.

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.

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 most of our meetings and you can view these live or from our archives via 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!** [Get involved - Scrutiny in Wrexham](#)

GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

You can contact the **Scrutiny Support Team** by email: scrutiny@wrexham.gov.uk or telephone: 292253/ 292258 or via **your local councillor**.

OUR SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Council Plan 2018-2022 has four strategic themes:

ECONOMY – Supporting a sustainable and thriving economy.

PEOPLE - Supporting active and self-reliant communities whilst safeguarding those in need

PLACE – Supporting a sustainable and 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 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wrexham Town Centre Markets

This year the main focus of the Committee has been on the work of the Town Centre Markets Task & Finish Group which was established to consider and make recommendations on future development opportunities for the Council's two indoor Grade II listed markets (Butcher's and General) and the outdoor Monday market.

The Group involved market traders, three appraisal reports from three Glyndŵr students, and undertook a paper and online public survey on how the public would like to see the markets developed. The Group also visited other successful markets in Altrincham and Chester, as well as visiting other markets individually.

Based on the feedback, the Group recommended a new vision for the regeneration of the two indoor Grade II listed markets to act as a catalyst to the development of a market quarter in the Henblas Street area of the town centre, utilising a range of funding streams (lottery, Welsh Government and the Council). The Group also recommended some critical points for managing this change, based on the experience of other markets which had gone through the same process.

The recommendations were approved by the Executive Board in March 2020 and a delivery plan will be submitted to a future meeting.

Tŷ Pawb

We have been monitoring the performance of the Council's new Arts, Culture and Market Hall which opened in April 2019. We considered information which showed that it was in line with predictions contained in the business plan. We also received information on the programme of events and footfall which demonstrated how Tŷ Pawb was catering for a diverse range of people (eg physical needs, school children, entrepreneurs, Coleg Cambria). It has also raised the profile of Wrexham with some prestigious exhibitions (eg Grayson Perry Exhibition). In view of this, we recommended to the Executive Board that any underspend be reinvested back into Tŷ Pawb in order to support its continued contribution to the arts, culture and local economy. This was agreed by the Executive Board at its meeting held in January 2020.

Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2018-19

We monitor the delivery of the Council's Tackling Poverty Action Plan. Previously, we have asked for more focus on employment. This has been achieved by bringing employers and industries into Wrexham working with the European Social Fund and other Welsh funding streams. In last reporting period, 291 jobs had been created, 95 participants in the communities for work scheme had gone on to employment and 374 children in receipt of the Flying Start scheme had been offered free childcare places. We have asked for more defined measures of poverty in the next report, in particular, data regarding in work poverty.

CUSTOMERS, PERFORMANCE, RESOURCES & GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Health and Safety Annual Report

The development of the Health and Safety Governance Framework (H&SGF) and its ongoing effectiveness is a key control which helps to mitigate the Council's Principal Risk 1: "There is a risk that those to whom the Council owes a duty of care suffer a preventable death, serious injury or serious abuse." We had previously considered a report on this issue and requested an update on the development of the governance framework and its ongoing effectiveness with an emphasis on the progress of the Corporate Health and Safety Action Plan (points 1-3 only) in response to the summary of actions detailing the Corporate Health & Safety Action Plan (CH&SAP) 2019/20 and related performance against these.

We were informed by the Chief Executive of good progress in respect of CH&SAP actions 1-3, approval in September 2019 of the Health, Safety & Fire Policy, the Safety Management System and the full training programme for all staff and elected Members. He further added assurance that the progress demonstrated improved awareness and compliance and focus across the organisation would be sustained. He referred to the improved leadership focus and robust monitoring arrangements which had been put in place to ensure that the CH&SAP was implemented effectively. He also highlighted the increase in the level of near miss reporting which evidenced an increase in staff awareness and a culture change across the authority.

On this basis we were assured that the actions 1, 2 and 3 in the Corporate Health & Safety Action Plan and the Health and Safety Governance Framework were progressing well and acknowledged the commitment by the Chief Executive that all actions would be implemented by 30 June 2020.

PSB

We considered Wrexham Public Services Board's (PSB) Annual Report and, in discussion with Lyndsey Rawlinson (Chair of the PSB), reviewed our role in relation to the PSB and our future focus. In order to do so we discussed the long term vision of the PSB and the work being undertaken by partners together with the 15 priorities contained in the 5 year Wellbeing Plan and the areas of initial focus, the importance of sustainability, committed partnership working and embedding the 5 ways of working across partner organisations.

We agreed PSB Annual Reports should include work undertaken that year, updates on concerns and issues from the previous year and an indication of the costs as a quantifiable input, that measurable outcomes be developed and their success and impact be included, that the PSB improve links with Community Councils to support them in the delivery of their priorities and recommended that the PSB review its membership to ensure that the appropriate Council Lead Members are invited. The PSB was asked to review its communication on how their

work is being fed back to its partner organisations and raise the difficulties caused by the Welsh Government grant funding conditions with the Welsh Government representatives on the PSB.

HOMES & ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Waste Strategy Review

Wrexham has an excellent recycling performance and is amongst the very highest performers in Wales, but work is still required to meet the Welsh Government target for recycling 70% waste, by 2025. A major component of the recycling operation in Wrexham is the facility operated by Flintshire County Council. We toured the facility and met with representatives of the company and Council Officers to help fully understand how the recycling process is undertaken and what targets will need to be hit in the future. We then considered a report on current performance of the service, scenario modelling to deliver further improvements in recycling rates, future projections of population growth, waste arising's based on this, waste processing and current targets and related fines expected if not met. These matters were all considered in light of the carbon footprint generated by the service. It was apparent that the existing targets could also be revised upwards and that the Welsh Government were carrying out a related consultation on this matter.

Due to the implications that service changes could have on meeting targets and reducing carbon emissions the Committee agreed that this should be a focus for future work to be considered by a Task and Finish group. The Group will report back its recommendations in the next municipal year.

Biodiversity

Section 6 of the Environment Act Wales Section 6 requires that the consideration of biodiversity becomes an integral part of the decisions and actions that public authorities take. The declaration of a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency by Wrexham County Borough Council highlights how seriously the Authority takes its responsibilities in regard to this global crisis.

We had previously considered a number of reports in respect of grass cutting, weed killer use and grounds maintenance. With their inter-relationship and the ability to maximise biodiversity directly we asked for information on these to be combined and a more holistic approach to be adopted. We held a workshop informed by the Biodiversity Officer and Plantlife, a leading UK organisation which encourages approaches to land management that increase biodiversity. This resultant report highlighted that a significant budget had been committed towards tackling carbon reduction issues to result in an improvement in service performance. Herbicide use had reduced due to a targeted approach to spraying, a Foamstream machine had been purchased to treat and manage weed in areas that could not be sprayed i.e. outside schools and play areas. Planned grounds maintenance, cyclic grass cutting and management of verges were to trial approaches that would increase biodiversity, annual wildflower seeding and reduce herbicide use.

We will consider a further report on this issue outlining further developments in 2021.

LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Estyn PIAP – response to report and the future scrutiny of the PIAP

Wrexham Local Government Education Services (LGES) was inspected by Estyn from 14-18 October 2019. The outcome of the inspection was that “The implications of weak outcomes in secondary schools in Wrexham are significant for young people’s wellbeing and their future education, training and employment. The legacy of ineffective intervention and support over many years has resulted in only limited improvement in many secondary schools. The scale of the challenge to improve outcomes in secondary schools means that Wrexham is an authority that is causing significant concern.”

The inspection realised four recommendations for the Council to address: R1 Urgently improve outcomes for learners, particularly at key stage 4 : R2 Improve attendance, wellbeing and behaviour of secondary school pupils: R3 Strengthen joint working across service areas relating to all aspects of wellbeing: R4 Improve the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning across all education services.

We considered these recommendations together with a related Post Inspection Action Plan. We agreed that we should focus our resources on ensuring that improvements are made to address the recommendations and scheduled scrutiny of the action plan to take place on 3 occasions during the forthcoming year. This will be our priority through 2020/21.

In addition and to allow for better collaboration with secondary head-teachers, who will be key in delivering improvement, we recommended that a Wrexham Association of Head-teachers Lead feed into developing responses to recommendations 1,2 and 3. We also asked to be advised of any requirement identified for additional resource to meet these aims.

Health and Wellbeing Support to schools

In 2017, Welsh Government introduced the School Health Research Network to collate data every two years that will assess the health and wellbeing of young people across Wales, the findings of which can then be used to inform the allocation of resources at a local and regional level.

We considered a report which, backed by this data, outlined the programmes that had been developed by the Authority to address and support health and wellbeing in schools. We highlighted concerns with regard to not all secondary schools in Wrexham partaking in the survey 2017/18 and to levels of obesity and sleep deprivation recorded amongst Wrexham pupils. A future report focussing on advice provided to schools to address pupil obesity and sleep deprivation and their related action plans to address these issues was requested.

The committee also noted the pressure on the school counselling service and they expressed their concern at the current length of waiting lists and the pressure on resources that were currently available in this area.

SAFEGUARDING, COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Review of Day and Employment Services, Disability Services

We previously scrutinised the plans for and implementation of Phases 1 & 2 of the Review of Day and Employment Services Review. We requested the opportunity to review proposals for Phase 3 of the Review prior to formal consultation processes with stakeholders and service users are commenced. In line with this we considered details about the current service provision at Erlas Garden project and Cunliffe Enablement Centre, together with findings of various engagement and co-production activities undertaken between July 2018 and September 2019, which informed the development of the draft service delivery model for the Disability Service going forward.

We supported the decommissioning of the service to do something different. Though causing significant change and disruption for individuals it was thought this would lead to support being developed to deliver a person centred approach that was flexible and proportionate and focused on achieving individual outcomes, linked to the National Outcomes Framework. The focus on promoting the independence of individuals within their own homes and communities wherever possible and enabling people to make full use of the recovery of their abilities and capacities was highlighted. This places emphasis on preventing the need for services and developing more support in the community by the community. This will then hopefully provide a resource to meet the individuals with most complex needs.

In relation to the Erlas Garden Project, following the proposed work to be done in moving from one service model to another we require a further report including information on what partnership working will be available, prior to full implementation. With the proposed closure of the Cunliffe Enablement Centre, we required a further comprehensive report on what are the specific “range of community settings” referenced and how the staffing of these settings will be arranged and managed. We did not support the Centres closure until new provision is open in Crown Buildings, Wrexham.

Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's)

Wrexham County Borough Council provides funding towards the 44 PCSO's in Wrexham who are employed by North Wales Police (NWP). Although this funding has reduced over the years, scrutiny has continued to monitor this arrangement. We have previously considered and supported a new arrangement whereby we support the continued funding of 4 of these PCSOs but on a more flexible deployment arrangement. The Council's Community Safety Team and NWP work in partnership to deploy these PCSO's where there is greatest demand. The recent monitoring report received this year stated that this has resulted in giving local areas access to appropriately qualified Officers where needed. We also noted from some Members that there had been recent changes in the deployment of PCSO's in rural wards and this will be taken up for further discussion with NWP. We have asked for wider consultation on future PCSO deployment prior to the decisions

being made. We have also asked for further clarification about means of contacting PCSOs which will further improve communication and partnership working in the future.

SCRUTINY COORDINATING GROUP

The Scrutiny Coordinating Group (Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each of the 5 Scrutiny Committees) has had a busy year. We met seven times and included a review of the scrutiny procedures section of the Council's constitution, scrutiny work programme planning to align work programmes more closely with the Council's in-year priorities and underpinning activities, review of the Audit and Scrutiny Protocol, and ways of promoting webcast scrutiny meetings. In addition, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs also attended a Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Scrutiny Chairing Skills Session in May 2019.

We also developed a process for the review of 'How we do business', which involved All Member Workshops and a training session for Senior Leadership Team to consider executive and scrutiny arrangements and ways of engaging the public. The workshops and training session were facilitated by Sarah Titcombe from the WLGA. Unfortunately, this review was overtaken with the new working arrangements which had to be introduced due to the impact of Covid-19 (eg all Council meetings were suspended from mid-March and only business critical virtual meetings were reintroduced in the summer months). We will continue to consider and inform new ways of working for scrutiny during the recovery phase of the pandemic.

YOU SAID, WE DID

The surveys and scrutiny report on the regeneration of the town centre indoor markets received local and national media attention. The highest number of comments from the public survey were about having more variety and better quality of stalls and a food court. The new vision for the indoor markets includes a rebranding which takes into account the responses to the public survey. The Council has also given a commitment to continue to consult with the market traders on the development of the delivery plan.

The Council commissioned the North Wales Advice and Advocacy Association (NWAAA), an independent advocacy service, to undertake work for us. NWAAA carried out a number of talking sessions with people who use ErLas Garden project and the Cunliffe Enablement Centre. The sessions were designed to promote conversation about peoples experiences of the service, what they valued about it and any ideas for development or change. The information gathered was presented in reports to scrutiny considering this issue and at an All Member Workshop on October 15th

CONCLUSION

Despite the disruption to Scrutiny Committee meetings during this reporting period due to the General Election and COVID 19, Scrutiny in Wrexham is, and will continue to be, an evolving process of support and challenge to Council and outside organisations to ensure that the people who live, work, or visit here get the best possible services within the resources available. This annual report demonstrates the diverse range of services which have been scrutinised during the 2019/2020 period, from the improvement and development of our Wrexham Town Centre indoor markets, to reviewing day work opportunities for vulnerable people. We have done this using a range of methods; formal Scrutiny Committee meetings (which the public are now able to view on the live webcast); site visits; informal Task & Finish Groups; public surveys . We will continue to be guided by the 'Six Steps to Better Scrutiny' by the Wales Audit Office in order to continue to modernise the way we undertake scrutiny here in Wrexham in meeting the future challenges of Local Government and the people of Wrexham. This will be particularly important in adapting to the impact of COVID 19.