

**Annual Report of Denbighshire County Council's Scrutiny  
Committees 2014/15**



**Summary Version**

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## Foreword

Denbighshire County Council's Scrutiny Committees examine the work of the Council and other public service providers across a range of topics to help ensure the delivery of quality services for the County's residents. In this Annual Report we give a summary of our Scrutiny Committees' activities during 2014/15, a year when difficult decisions had to be made on how services will be delivered in future.

Whilst councillors, Council officers and external partners contribute regularly to our activities we also welcome public attendance at our meetings. We want to encourage more members of the public to attend and contribute to our work to secure the best possible public services. This will help us make sure we are dealing with the matters that are most important to the community and that we are delivering quality services to you.

If you feel that there is a topic that we should look at, please let us know by completing the 'Scrutiny Request Form' or by contacting the Scrutiny Co-ordinator on 01824 712554 or email to [dcc\\_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:dcc_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk)

We hope that this document gives an insight into our work and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

## Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny

<b>Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Partnerships Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>Performance Scrutiny Committee</b>
		
<b>Chair Cllr. Hilditch - Roberts</b>	<b>Chair Cllr. Chamberlain-Jones</b>	<b>Chair Cllr. Simmons</b>
		
<b>Vice-Chair Cllr. Mullen-James</b>	<b>Vice-Chair Cllr. Bartley</b>	<b>Vice-Chair Cllr. Roberts</b>

This is a summary version of the Annual Report. The full report, which includes more information on committees' work and included details of all topics examined by the Committees, can be found on the Council's website on the link below:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/your-council/about-the-council/scrutiny-committees-annual-report-2014-15-en.pdf>

## What is Scrutiny?

- 🌐 The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'scrutiny' as critical observation or examination. It derives from the Latin word 'scrutinium'/'scrutari' which means 'to search'

In the context of local government Scrutiny is:

- 🌐 a key part of the Council's political structure;
- 🌐 the Council's 'critical friend' – who is there to help improve services and make sure that the concerns of the public are heard

In Denbighshire many of the Council's important decisions are taken by the Cabinet - a group of elected councillors who take decisions about policy and procedures:

Scrutiny committees:

- 🌐 give the non-Cabinet councillors an opportunity to influence policies, review decisions, make recommendations, and examine a range of matters that affect residents.
- 🌐 hold the Cabinet and other decision makers to account on the decisions they take; and
- 🌐 if they believe that an issue should be looked at in more depth before a decision is implemented, can request a review through "Calling-In" the decision. Doing this allows Scrutiny Committees to formulate alternative proposals – this option is usually the last resort

## How does scrutiny work in Denbighshire?

- 🌐 the Council's scrutiny work is undertaken by three thematic, cross-cutting scrutiny Committees:
  - Communities Scrutiny Committee;
  - Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
  - Performance Scrutiny Committee
- 🌐 that meet approximately every 6 weeks and comprise from members of all political parties/groups on the Council;
- 🌐 scrutiny committee operate on a non-political party/group basis (councillors political allegiances should be put on one side when serving on scrutiny committees);
- 🌐 In addition representatives appointed by the Church in Wales and the Catholic Church, along with representatives elected by parent governors also serve on scrutiny committees when education matters are discussed.

## What have we been up to in the last 12 months?

Despite experiencing one of the most testing economic times within living memory the Council continues to be ambitious for its residents and committed to delivering its Corporate Plan by the time of the next county council elections in 2017. To realise this ambition it has had to rethink and revise ways to deliver the Plan.

Scrutiny has continued examining plans and proposals aimed at delivering the 7 corporate priorities which makes up the Corporate Plan. The examples below and overleaf illustrate some of the work scrutiny has undertaken to support the delivery of each corporate priority during 2014/15

### Developing the local economy

- 🌱 monitoring the progress with the work to regenerate and reinvigorate Rhyl through the Rhyl Going Forward Programme;
- 🌱 examining the progress made in delivering the town and area plans for the County's market towns;
- 🌱 considering the findings of the traffic and parking review for the County's towns and making recommendations to develop a parking strategy aimed at supporting economic growth;
- 🌱 recommending that a Caravan Sites Strategy is developed for the County which will ensure that the area maximises the economic benefits from tourism by caravan sites operating as holiday sites and not residential sites;
- 🌱 assessing the impact of central government and European Government funding cuts on both the urban and rural economies and major regeneration projects, and exploring other potential funding sources for community projects e.g. windfarm community funding opportunities



## Improving performance in education and the quality of school buildings

- regularly monitoring the results of pupils' internal and external examinations;
- monitoring the performance of individual schools through the School Standards Monitoring Group (SSMG);
- examining the statistics and the reasons behind the numbers for those students identified as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) to ensure that every effort is made to offer them the support they need to gain the necessary skills to realise their potential;
- monitoring the delivery of the 'Modernising Education Programme' which aims to provide high quality fit for purpose facilities to deliver education to 21<sup>st</sup> Century students;
- looking at whether all of our schools are delivering the curriculum in line with their language delivery designation i.e. Welsh medium, English medium or bilingual. This work identified a handful of anomalies which scrutiny will be involved with examining further in the forthcoming year;
- budget cuts identified inconsistencies with the interpretation of the Council's 'Home to School Transport Eligibility Policy', this resulted in the policy being reviewed making it clearer who would in future be eligible for free transport to their 'nearest suitable' school. Scrutiny supported the revised policy but requested that all current free transport undertakings are honoured until those pupils have completed their compulsory education.



## Improving our roads

- 🌱 scrutiny acknowledges that a good, well-maintained road network is vital if we are to develop and grow our local economy, therefore it has examined the Highways Service's maintenance prioritisation process and recommended that a clear strategy is developed for the County's road network;
- 🌱 road safety is of the utmost importance, that's why scrutiny has been looking closely at the proliferation of unauthorised signs on roadsides and their potential dangers to road users and pedestrians. To deal with this problem scrutiny supported the implementation of a policy to remove unauthorised signs while at the same time working with businesses and community groups to permit certain types of signs to be erected;
- 🌱 the Highways Service, like all services, has been affected by budget cuts. Scrutiny examined and supported the Service's proposals to reduce the number of routes which will be precautionary gritted during the winter of 2015/16 – these routes will still be gritted when snow is forecast or falls.



## Ensuring that vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible

- 🌱 Denbighshire has an ageing population and the Welsh Government has a vision that in future vulnerable people, both young and old, should wherever possible be supported to live their lives as independently as possible. This vision has necessitated that the Council has had to redesign its social care services ready for the future. Scrutiny has been heavily involved with this work, particularly how adult social care services will be delivered. A Task and Finish Group was established to develop proposals on how these services can be delivered in future ;
- 🌱 In order for people to safely live an independent life the Council has to work closely with partner organisations, such as the Health Service. Scrutiny

meets periodically with representative from Health to ensure that the services both the Council and the Health Service provide support and complement each other e.g. the Single Point of Access for Health and Social Care Services;

- 🌍 Work to safeguard both adults and children has been monitored during the year as has the plan to establish a North Wales Regional Advocacy Service for Children and Young People;
- 🌍 Proposals to extend the licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation in Rhyl were also examined and supported in a bid to ensure that people have decent homes to live in;
- 🌍 Vulnerability is defined as being at risk of emotional or physical harm, this means that every citizen of the County is potentially at risk of some type of harm i.e. flooding, anti-social behaviour or even food poisoning. Scrutiny therefore has looked at the County's Flood Risk Management Strategy, the work of the Community Safety Partnership, CCTV and compliance work in relation to food safety;



## Making sure our streets are clean and tidy

- 🌍 Clean and tidy streets make life more pleasant for residents and visitors, that's why we have been monitoring the Council's performance in delivering its 'Streetscene Strategy' – making sure that enforcement action is taken against those who continually flout the rules on dog fouling, fly-tipping, littering etc.;
- 🌍 we have considered and supported a policy on the removal of unauthorised signs on the county's highways to make sure that they do not compromise road safety or make Denbighshire look untidy. However, we also want to make sure that people know that 'Denbighshire is open for business' therefore we recommended that a 'common sense' approach is taken with signs that do not pose a risk to road users' safety, signs immediately outside businesses

advertising what they offer as long as they do not obstruct users' thoroughfare, and temporary signs advertising community events.



### Ensuring access to good quality housing

- as part of monitoring progress of the Rhyl Going Forward Programme scrutiny has monitored the delivery of the West Rhyl Housing Regeneration Scheme – which aims to renovate and bring back into use former houses in multiple occupation, as an appropriate mix of single person and family housing with adequate green spaces;
- proposals to extend the licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation in Rhyl have also been considered and supported by scrutiny. This should ensure that people are not living in sub-standard accommodation;
- we have examined the work of contractors who undertook the refurbishment work on the Council's housing stock to bring it up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) to ensure that they complied with their contract specifications. As a result we have recommended measures to improve contract award and monitoring processes for future large scale contracts;
- affordable housing to suit residents' needs is crucial if we are to develop our economy and retain our young people. Scrutiny members and other councillors have been working on developing proposals in this area during the year. The proposals should be available in the spring of 2015.

### Modernising the Council to deliver efficiencies and improve services to customers

- delivering the Corporate Plan with ever decreasing financial resources is a particularly difficult task. To achieve this the Council has had to withdraw some services, redesign others, change long established working practices and sell some of its assets to enable it to deliver the services it is required by law to provide and those that will deliver the Corporate Plan. Scrutiny has

been actively involved with developing these through its work in budget workshops and various working groups;

- one of the budget cuts which has received particular attention is the withdrawal of the free green waste service and the introduction of the 'paid green waste' service. Prior to the new service's introduction scrutiny examined the initial take-up figures for the service, its potential for income generation and the estimated staffing reductions. As a result they have asked that the tonnage of residual (black bin) waste is monitored closely in case there is a marked increase which could incur extra landfill tax costs for the Council;
- throughout the year scrutiny members have been monitoring the delivery of the Agricultural Estate's Strategy for 2010-14 and the development of a future strategy for the Estate. This work culminated in a working group presenting a future management plan for the Estate to Scrutiny. The management plan, which scrutiny supported, will see Council owned farms sold over time as agricultural holdings, with the monies from the sales being invested in Council services and into delivering the Corporate Plan;
- through regular monitoring of the number and nature of complaints (and compliments) received by the Council, scrutiny is able to identify any problem areas and recommend changes that will improve services to residents



## What else have we done?

Councillors who serve on scrutiny committees regularly sit on other groups or participate in a variety of other events such as the following

-  **Service Challenge Groups** (there is one of these for each Council service and a representative from each of the scrutiny committees serve on these groups where the heads of service and relevant officers are challenged about their performance and future plans for their services);
-  **Budget Workshops** (where future service provision within the money available to deliver them is discussed in detail)
-  **Strategic Investment Group** (where projects submitted for capital funding are discussed in detail, risk assessed, challenged and recommended for approval or refusal)
-  **School Standards Monitoring Group** (where individual schools' performance is monitored and challenged in the presence of the headteacher and chair of governors)
-  **Economic and Community Ambition Board** (at which proposals for delivering economic and community ambitions for Denbighshire are developed and the progress with their delivery is monitored);
-  **Corporate Equalities Group** (this Group oversees the Council's duties with respect to all types of equality matters)
-  **Other Task and Finish or Working Groups** (as and when Scrutiny or other Council bodies establish them. These groups exist for a limited period of time or for the duration of a review of a certain service or topic area)

Scrutiny members report back to their committees on the activities of the above groups and on other groups on which they serve.

## Improving what we do

Across Wales there is a drive to improve scrutiny and get the public more involved with local authority scrutiny committees.

During the last year a number of national reports have been written which emphasise the need to strengthen scrutiny's role across local government and public services in general. They also highlight the benefits of using scrutiny as a means for engaging with residents and service-users.

If you are interested in reading these documents they can be found by following the links below:

-  Wales Audit Office (WAO) national study on scrutiny - *Good Scrutiny? Good Question!* <http://www.wao.gov.uk/publication/good-scrutiny-good-question-auditor-general-wales-improvement-study-scrutiny-local>
-  The Welsh Government's White Paper *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People*. (the link below should take you to the document on the Welsh Government's website, Chapter 8 *Strengthening the Role of Review*, sets out the vision for scrutiny:  
<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?lang=en>

Here in Denbighshire, in an attempt to balance national and local priorities and ensure that scrutiny works for the benefit of residents, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group which co-ordinates scrutiny committees' work has asked the Council's scrutiny committees to focus on four key areas when setting their work programmes. These areas are:

- the corporate priorities and delivering the Corporate Plan;
- budget savings and their impact on Denbighshire and its residents;
- other high priority areas which scrutiny can influence and effect change; and
- other urgent or unforeseen areas of high priority

For this to work as effectively as possible we need the County's citizens to get involved with our work. We will be focussing on this aspect during the forthcoming year through our detailed work in evaluating the impact of the budget cuts, work which will be undertaken by the 'Cutting Our Cloth Task and Finish Group'.

If residents have a matter which they think could benefit from close examination by one of the scrutiny committees they can request scrutiny to consider it. To instigate a request they need to complete a 'scrutiny request' form, a copy of which can be found on 16 of this document. If you do have a matter of concern which you think may benefit from being examined please complete the form and return it to the

Scrutiny Co-ordinator at the address shown. If you need any advice about the process, the matter's suitability for scrutiny, or have any other enquiries with regards to scrutiny please contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator. The contact details are shown below:

Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Legal, HR and Democratic Services, Denbighshire County Council, County Hall, Wynnstay Road, RUTHIN, LL15 1YN.

Tel: 01824 712554 (direct dial) e-mail: [dcc\\_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:dcc_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk)

Any request received for a matter to be examined will be considered by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, who will apply the following criteria to determine whether one of the committees should examine the matter:

- is it a matter of public interest?
- does Scrutiny have the ability to influence or change things?
- does it relate to an underperforming service?
- does the matter affect a large number of residents or a large geographical area?
- is anyone else looking at it?



### Now we really do want to hear from you - how you can participate in Scrutiny?

#### Would you like scrutiny to look at a particular matter?

You can raise a matter for consideration by one of Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committees by filling out the Scrutiny Request Form (overleaf). The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three scrutiny committees meet every 6 weeks to decide how to allocate the work of the scrutiny committees and will consider if any matter raised should be examined in detail by one of the committees, or if another course of action should be pursued. This can range from a referral to the service responsible, to full scrutiny of the matter by one of the scrutiny committees, or even the establishment of a specialist 'task and finish group' to investigate and report on a particular matter.

#### Would you like to attend a meeting of a scrutiny committee?

Denbighshire County Council's scrutiny committee meetings are generally open to the public, and residents of Denbighshire and the general public are encouraged to attend. A list of upcoming scrutiny committee meetings and the matters to be discussed are available on the 'Scrutiny' page of the Council's website.

If you wish to take part in the discussion on a particular matter you will require the permission of the Chair of the committee (further details below).

Occasionally some items being discussed by a committee will contain confidential information and cannot be discussed in the usual public forum. Any such items (referred to as 'Part Two (II)') will be clearly identified when the meeting papers are published, and the Chair of the committee meeting discussing a 'Part II' item will make it clear that the meeting should continue without the press and public in attendance in order to avoid divulging confidential information.

#### Would you like to speak to a committee on an item being discussed?

Members of the public are very welcome to attend scrutiny committee meetings but will require the permission of the Chair of the committee if they wish to speak or make representations at a committee meeting. If you wish to submit evidence to a committee, or address members on your experience in relation to a subject under discussion, please contact the Scrutiny Co-ordinator in advance of the meeting so that this can be arranged and any paperwork can be circulated to members of the committee.

Occasionally scrutiny committees may wish to 'co-opt' an individual with particular experience or expertise to become a temporary member of the committee or ask them to contribute to an inquiry as an expert witness.

#### Keeping up to speed with decisions made by Denbighshire's scrutiny committees

You can keep track of what is being discussed at each scrutiny committee meeting, as well as any other public Council meeting, by visiting the 'meetings' page of the Council's website. The latest 'work programme' for each of the scrutiny committees is available with the meeting papers for each meeting and the confirmed agenda for each meeting will usually be available 5 - 7 days before the meeting is due to take place.

The minutes of previous scrutiny meetings and a record of the decisions made are also available on the Council's website.

Further advice or information is available by contacting the Scrutiny Co-ordinator, Rhian Evans on [rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:rhian.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk) (01824 712554) or the Democratic Services Officer, Karen Evans, on [karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:karen.a.evans@denbighshire.gov.uk) (01824 712575) or e-mailing: [dcc\\_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:dcc_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk).

**SCRUTINY REQUEST FORM**

Is there something you would like scrutiny to have a look at?

Please give a brief description of the topic you would like to be considered by one of the Scrutiny Committees and why you think it should be considered

Would you like to attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee?

**YES/NO**

It would be useful if you could give us the following details so that we may respond to your request

Your name:  
Address:  
  
Postcode:  
Email:  
Telephone number:

*PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO: SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR, LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, COUNTY HALL, WYNNSTAY ROAD, RUTHIN LL15 1YN or e-mail it to [dcc\\_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:dcc_admin@denbighshire.gov.uk)*