# Review of scrutiny in Flintshire County Council

June 2026

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# Audit snapshot

## What we looked at

1 We looked at whether the Council has arrangements in place to support effective scrutiny.

## Why this is important

2 Effective scrutiny is a key part of the Council's governance arrangements. Scrutiny committees can provide a check and balance to decision makers, help to ensure that decision making is transparent, and to improve Council services.

3 Scrutiny committees can also have an important role in contributing to policy development, monitoring performance and helping to ensure the voice of the public is heard.

## What we have found

4 The Council's scrutiny function is not well planned, and as a result is often ineffective. This is in part because the Council lacks a shared understanding of the role and purpose of scrutiny.

5 While officer support for councillors is well regarded, there are weaknesses in training provision for scrutiny committee members. The Council also does not evaluate the value for money, including the effectiveness, of its scrutiny function.

## What we recommend

6 We make one recommendation to the Council, to review its scrutiny function to ensure it effectively delivers its role as outlined in the Council's Constitution. This should include:

- ensuring that the role and purpose of scrutiny are understood;

- reviewing the work programming and training provision to ensure it supports efficient scrutiny; and
- evaluating the value for money and effectiveness of the scrutiny function.

# Our findings

## Scrutiny activity is not always well planned and as a result is often ineffective

7 Whilst the Council's scrutiny function undertakes a significant amount of activity, it is not always well planned, and as result often does not result in clear outcomes. The Council has decided to conduct most of its scrutiny activity through formal meetings of its five scrutiny committees. During 2025-26, they met a total of 61 times. However, committees often receive reports 'for noting' with no obvious reason why they are considering them. Reports presented to committees often do not clearly explain why committees are considering them, and what role the committee is expected to play.

8 By not being clear why committees are considering reports, the Council significantly increases the likelihood that scrutiny activity will not be effective.

9 The Council's scrutiny committee agendas also often have many items and report packs that are lengthy. This can also be a barrier to effective scrutiny. Some councillors feel that the length of reports presented to committees can make it difficult to identify key issues to scrutinise. Whilst we accept there should not be a specific limit on the size of agendas or minutes that is applicable to all meetings, it is important that sufficient time is provided for proper consideration of items by committees.

10 Most of the Council's scrutiny activity takes place through formal committee meetings. However, the examples we saw where scrutiny activity appeared to be having a positive impact were through task and finish groups, which are smaller groups operating outside of formal committee meetings. This suggests that the scrutiny committee does not usually consider the most effective way to approach topics.

11 By not prioritising and planning scrutiny activity effectively, the Council risks using resources in a way that does not help it to achieve its outcomes and therefore value for money.

12 The Council has arrangements to ensure that scrutiny committee agenda items are relevant to the work of committees but does not always apply them. We heard examples where committees accepted reports onto their forward work programme without assessing their relevance. This resulted in officers presenting reports to scrutiny committees with limited relevance to the remit of the relevant committee.

13 This also means that committee consideration of reports relating to high-profile services and financial pressures has been delayed. For example, committee consideration of a report covering the social services department's action plan and budget pressures was delayed for three months. This was because the forward work programme was 'too full'. Making sure that scrutiny activity is prioritised is important to help scrutiny committees focus on the most significant topics where they can have the most impact.

14 Being clear on the purpose of scrutiny activity and then selecting the most appropriate way of working is also important to ensure that scrutiny is both efficient and effective.

## Councillors have a limited understanding of the role of, and procedure rules for scrutiny

15 Scrutiny committee members do not always demonstrate they fully understand their roles and responsibilities in scrutiny committees, or the role of scrutiny within the Council. Roles and responsibilities of scrutiny committees are set out in the Council's constitution, but our observations above about planning scrutiny activity and lack of obvious outcomes from it suggest that the Council lacks a shared understanding of the role of scrutiny.

16 We also heard evidence of committees using call-ins and notices of motion where more appropriate and less resource-intensive methods could have achieved the same results. Deciding how they approach topics is a matter for scrutiny committees. But making sure that scrutiny members understand their roles and different ways to consider scrutiny topics is important to help ensure the scrutiny function is effective.

## Officer support for scrutiny committee members is well regarded but there are weaknesses in training provision

17 We heard positive feedback from councillors on the support they receive from democratic services officers and scrutiny facilitators. This support includes administrative support outside of, and during, scrutiny committee meetings and task and finish groups, for both committee chairs and committee members.

18 However, there are weaknesses in the training provided for scrutiny members. For example, the Council does not have a planned training programme to support scrutiny committee members. The Council has delivered some training for councillors, including, for example, training to members of scrutiny committees to ensure they understand their role and their committee's role. But this was not part of a planned, comprehensive training programme.

19 The Council reported to its Constitution and Democratic Services Committee in September 2025 that it would consult councillors on their training requirements, but it has not done this yet. Some scrutiny committee members feel they have not received any training since taking up their roles on scrutiny committees. The Council also does not record which councillors have attended training sessions and has not evaluated the effectiveness of the training provided.

20 By not ensuring that scrutiny committee members have the training they need to understand and conduct their roles, the Council increases the risk that scrutiny activity will be both inefficient and ineffective.

## The Council does not evaluate the effectiveness of its scrutiny function

21 The Council does not regularly review the effectiveness of its scrutiny function. The Council's Constitution requires its scrutiny committees to report each year to Council on "their workings with recommendations for their future work programme and amended working methods if appropriate". This has not happened since 2021. The Council does not have other arrangements to formally review its scrutiny function on a regular basis.

22 This means that the Council does not know if its scrutiny function is effective and providing value for money. It also risks missing opportunities for improvement.

# Recommendations

In addressing the recommendation below, the Council may find it helpful to refer to the Audit Wales Discussion Paper Six steps to better scrutiny in Wales and accompanying checklist Checklist: Six steps to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future'.

**R1** The Council should review its scrutiny function to ensure it effectively delivers the roles set out for it in the Council's constitution and in relevant legislation. As part of this, the Council should:

**1.1** build a shared understanding of the role and purpose of scrutiny amongst all councillors and senior officers; (**paragraphs 15 and 16**)

**1.2** support scrutiny committee members to strengthen their approach to work programming to help make sure that scrutiny activity is well planned, and to help them achieve their desired impact; (**paragraphs 7 to 14**)

**1.3** identify the training needs of scrutiny committee members and put in place appropriate training and development to meet them; (**paragraphs 18 to 20**)

**1.4** put in place arrangements to regularly review the value for money of its scrutiny arrangements, including their effectiveness. (**paragraphs 21 and 22**)

# Appendices

# 1 About our work

## Scope of the audit

The audit reviewed the Council's arrangements to support its scrutiny function. It also looked at the Council's progress in addressing the proposals for improvement and recommendations set out in our 2018 report.

The audit did not cover other review functions of the Council, such as those undertaken by the Governance and Audit Committee.

We undertook the audit between February and April 2026.

## Audit questions and criteria

### Questions

The audit sought to answer the following questions:

- Has the Council clearly set out the roles and responsibilities for those involved in its overview and scrutiny arrangements?
- Does the Council have arrangements to support its scrutiny committee members and officers?
- Does the scrutiny function prioritise and plan its activities to achieve the intended impact?
- Does the Council have arrangements to ensure scrutiny committee meetings operate effectively?
- Are the Council's scrutiny arrangements working effectively to enable scrutiny to fulfil their role and achieve their intended impact?
- Does the Council have arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of scrutiny?

## Criteria

To help us assess the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements, we have developed criteria based on the Auditor General's 'Discussion Paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future'' and the checklist of Six steps to help make scrutiny fit for the future as reference documents.

# Methods

The audit used the following methods:

- document review, for example, of committee papers, guidance for councillors, and training materials;
- observations of a sample of scrutiny committee meetings; and
- interviews with key officers and councillors.

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