

Tracey Burke  
Director General – Education and Public Services  
Group  
Welsh Government

9 April 2019

**The Auditor General for Wales’ ‘Fit for the Future’ discussion paper**

Dear Tracey,

The Auditor General for Wales recently published a discussion paper on six themes to help make scrutiny ‘Fit for the Future’ and an accompanying checklist on six steps to help make scrutiny ‘fit for the future’.

The Discussion Paper and Checklist were prepared following the Auditor General’s review of each of the 22 councils in Wales that examined how ‘fit for the future’ their scrutiny functions were. The reviews of individual councils took place during 2017–18.

The Auditor General considered how councils were responding to current challenges, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the WFG Act) in relation to their scrutiny activity, as well as how councils were beginning to undertake scrutiny of Public Service Boards (PSBs). The study also examined how well placed councils were to respond to future challenges such as continued pressure on public finances and the possible move towards more regional working between local authorities.

The Discussion Paper identifies some key themes emerging from this work that councils can usefully reflect on to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their scrutiny functions. It is suggested that the Welsh Government as well as councils should consider the final theme. The six themes are summarised under the following headings:



- Clarifying roles and responsibilities is still necessary in some councils and is a pre-requisite to successful scrutiny.
- Many councils continue to recognise a need to improve public engagement in scrutiny but in many councils this will require a step change in scrutiny practice.
- Councils should reflect on the rigour with which they prioritise and then plan scrutiny activity to improve its impact.
- Responding to current and future challenges may need a different approach to supporting scrutiny committee members.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of scrutiny.
- Welsh Government and councils should consider the implications of the above themes for councils' and partnership governance arrangements.

A six-point Checklist has also been produced to accompany the discussion paper, aimed at members of local authority scrutiny committees to consider. The Checklist contains the following headings:

- **Know your role** – what you 'should' be doing, what you 'can' do and what you 'can't' do.
- **Know your powers and what's 'possible' in scrutiny** – what options, tools and ways of working are available to you?
- **Know what you are trying to achieve** – be clear about the aims for the scrutiny function overall, but **crucially** the specific aims and purpose of scrutinising **every** topic you choose to examine.
- **Plan your scrutiny work to achieve your aims** – appropriate topics and methods for **every** scrutiny item.
- **Design support arrangements to achieve your aims** – the right knowledge, skills, experience and appropriate training provision.
- **Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of scrutiny activity, and make changes based on feedback.**

The Public Accounts Committee agreed at our meeting on 25 March, to ask the Welsh Government for a response to the final theme around considering the implications of the identified themes for councils' and partnership governance arrangements. In particular:

- the extent to which Welsh Government can place reliance on local authority scrutiny functions in their current form; and



- what this might mean for the expectations placed on scrutiny functions both within Councils' own governance and management arrangements and any associated guidance.

I would welcome your views on these points.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Ramsay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

**Nick Ramsay AM**  
**Chair**

