

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Business and Management Studies (17)		
Title of case study: Improving public services through a new joint scrutiny handbook		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Rachel Ashworth James Downe	Professor Professor	01/10/1995 – present 01/09/2003 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/01/2014 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Joint scrutiny involves two or more councils working together to hold public partnerships accountable for their performance and addresses the 'accountability gap' created when partnership bodies do not report to a single organisation. Cardiff researchers identified the challenges associated with joint scrutiny, alongside the benefits of enabling organisations to trial joint scrutiny approaches. The research influenced Welsh Government's decision to continue financial support for scrutiny activity, via its Scrutiny Development Fund, and led to a Joint Scrutiny Handbook for local governments. This widely adopted Handbook informed legislative proposals for a new system of joint working in Wales, underpinned training delivered by the Welsh Local Government Association and the UK-wide Centre for Public Scrutiny, and enhanced local authority practice in Wales and England.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Local government scrutiny systems are formal mechanisms for holding councils and related organisations to account for the effectiveness of public services. This in turn improves transparency, provides a forum for debate, and can reduce duplication and associated costs. However, new and more complex forms of public service collaborations, such as regional economic partnerships involving multiple actors, have disrupted traditional lines of accountability and associated scrutiny mechanisms. This creates an 'accountability gap', with no checks and balances on decision-making.</p> <p>Joint scrutiny – arrangements between scrutiny teams in different authorities – can plug this gap by implementing a 'joined-up' model of accountability. However, the Cardiff team determined through extensive research that scrutiny teams currently lack clear guidance around how to deliver joint scrutiny effectively, limiting the public service performance benefits that can be delivered from joint partnerships.</p> <p>2.1 Understanding joint scrutiny</p> <p>The Cardiff team's initial research [3.1] – an 'audit' of local government scrutiny based upon the first years of the new joint scrutiny system for England and Wales between 2000-2004 revealed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scrutiny was - in some authorities - making a valuable contribution in terms of policy review but it was not holding the executive to account effectively; • scrutiny of external organisations constituted a marginal activity for most authorities. <p>Subsequent research raised concerns about the lack of accountability created by the proliferation of partnership structures at the regional level in England [3.2]. Ashworth determined that increased support (including funding, training and guidance) would be critical for politicians with responsibility for scrutinising large, financially significant organisations with wide-ranging remits. Augmenting this research, Downe's evaluation of executive and scrutiny arrangements in Wales [G3.1] revealed that effectiveness was driven by each council's specific context and the extent to which council leaders valued scrutiny. Finding that joint</p>		

scrutiny was poorly developed, he identified a critical need for councils to consider working with other councils to generate 'added value' by pooling resources [3.3].

2.2. Addressing the challenges of joint scrutiny

Entities delivering joint scrutiny have to navigate a complex system of governance with little in the way of resources, support or best practice to help them do so effectively. This lack of information underpinned some of the challenges identified within the research. In a literature review of accountability mechanisms, the Cardiff team concluded that governments need to provide adequate guidance to those delivering scrutiny to support and enable evidence-gathering processes [3.4]. This finding was emphasised in commissioned work for the Welsh Government [G3.2] where the researchers recommended providing a blueprint for collaborative scrutiny that would help address practical challenges associated with joint scrutiny including [3.5]:

- the need for urgent attention to structures, cultures and sharing of practices;
- the difficulties presented by the complexity of contemporary public services and configurational differences across the system;
- a lack of expertise to interrogate services on a thematic basis, e.g. in public health;
- limitations to the capacity required to undertake effective scrutiny at times of austerity.

The Cardiff researchers were further commissioned (2012-2013) [G3.3] to independently evaluate the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Scrutiny Development Fund. They found that, although good practice across local authorities remained inconsistent, this funding was making a positive difference through providing opportunities for scrutiny teams to trial new ways of working. For example, a number of teams reported that 'buddying' with or shadowing teams from other areas improved scrutiny cultures, while in another case jointly commissioning development support enabled councils to procure better quality training which they subsequently ran in-house [3.6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Ashworth, R., and Snape, S. (2004) An Overview of Scrutiny: A Triumph of Context over Structure, *Local Government Studies*, 30 (4), 538-556. doi.org/10.1080/0300393042000318987

[3.2] Ashworth, R., Snape, S., and Aulakh, S. (2007) Plugging the Accountability Gap: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Regional Scrutiny, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 25 (2), 194-211. doi.org/10.1068/c55m

[3.3] Downe, J., Bottrill, I., and Wardle, L. (2015) *An Evaluation of Welsh Local Government Executive and Scrutiny Arrangements*, Welsh Government, Cardiff. <https://gov.wales/evaluation-welsh-local-governments-executive-and-scrutiny-arrangements>

[3.4] Ashworth, R., and Downe, J. (2019) Collaborative Governance and Scrutiny: Challenges, Cultures and Ethics, *Handbook of the Public Servant*, (eds. Sullivan H. and H. Dickinson), London: Palgrave. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03008-7_64-1

[3.5] Downe, J., and Ashworth, R. (2013) *Developing a culture of collaborative scrutiny: An evaluation of practice and potential*, Welsh Government: Cardiff. Available from HEI on request.

[3.6] Downe, J., and Ashworth, R. (2012) *Evaluation of the Scrutiny Development Fund in Wales*, Welsh Government: Cardiff. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2018-12/120620developmentfunden.pdf>

Selected grants:

[G3.1] Downe, J. *An Evaluation of Executive Arrangements in Local Government*, 09/06/14-31/12/14, Welsh Government, £23,980

[G3.2] Downe, J., Ashworth, R. *Developing a Culture of Collaborative Scrutiny: an Evaluation of Practice and Potential*, 01/09/12-30/04/13, Welsh Government, £14,000

[G3.3] Downe, J., Ashworth, A. *Evaluation of the Scrutiny Development Fund in Wales*, 26/04/11-25/02/2012, Welsh Government, £24,864

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cardiff's research identifying challenges to effective joint scrutiny has been instrumental in the Welsh Government decision to continue to fund joint scrutiny and improved policy and practice in the UK, via the creation of a *Joint Scrutiny Handbook* and informed new legislation on joint working in Wales.

4.1 Influencing decision making on financial support for scrutiny activity

The outcomes from Cardiff's research provided the evidence base for the deployment of additional Welsh Government resource to strengthen joint scrutiny activity. Their evaluation of the Scrutiny Development Fund (up to £100,000 per annum) **[3.6]** and conclusion that the pump-priming grants were effective in improving scrutiny informed the decision to continue financial investment in this area. In 2014, Lesley Griffiths, then-Minister for Local Government and Government Business, stated in the Welsh Assembly that "*Cardiff Business School undertook an evaluation of the initial Scrutiny Development Fund and concluded that it did deliver excellent value for money...it is something that I am very happy to continue to support*" **[5.1]**.

4.2 Creation of the *Joint Scrutiny Handbook*

One of the projects funded by the Scrutiny Development Fund was the *Joint Scrutiny Handbook* **[5.2]**. The Cardiff researchers – implementing their recommendations on more support for scrutiny teams – were commissioned to co-design (with local government managers from three councils) the *Handbook*. Input also came from all 22 scrutiny teams in Wales, as well as the Welsh Local Government Association, Welsh Government, Wales Audit Office, and regulatory partners (such as the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and Estyn, the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales).

Ashworth and Downe's research on collaboration **[3.4, 3.5]** underpinned the *Handbook* with practical guidance on selecting the right model, designing terms of reference, appointing scrutineers, setting-up officer support, managing a joint scrutiny review, co-ordinating evidence gathering, and reporting arrangements. It also emphasised the importance of capturing learning points for ongoing improvements.

The *Handbook* – widely disseminated across the public sector in Wales from 2015 and England from 2016 – is designed to be a 'living' resource to keep pace with public policy developments. Ashworth and Downe produced a second edition in 2017, with ESRC Impact Accelerator funding, using the same co-creation principles and including new case studies.

4.3 Impact of the *Joint Scrutiny Handbook* on policy in Wales

The Welsh Government's endorsement of the *Handbook* includes:

- [Text redacted] **[5.3]**;
- signposting it as the main resource available to councillors conducting joint scrutiny as "*part of the fundamental toolkit councillors need to undertake their roles*" **[5.4]**.

In addition, Welsh Government's Local Government Democracy Division confirmed that "*the good practice identified in the handbook*" was used in "*supporting the development of proposals for new regional working arrangements between principal councils*" **[5.4]**. The proposals, set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill currently being considered by the Senedd Cymru – Welsh Parliament, will establish a new system of Corporate Joint Committees for Wales. These will put effective scrutiny arrangements in place and "*the handbook will provide a sound basis for establishing these arrangements going forward*" **[5.4]**.

4.4 Impact of the *Joint Scrutiny Handbook* on practice

The *Handbook* has been described by a consultant for the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the UK-wide body providing training for those involved in scrutiny, as “*instrumental in promoting the legitimacy and status of local government scrutiny amongst public service leaders who might otherwise have impeded its development*” [5.5]. It has influenced practice in the following two main ways:

a. Sector-wide training and development

In 2016, the *Handbook* was launched at a major scrutiny event with 25 East of England local authorities [5.6]. Cardiff researchers were invited to provide a keynote presentation on the handbook and facilitated a workshop highlighting good practice examples from Wales. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) stated that the *Handbook* exceeded any equivalent development from English local government and used it to “*share lessons from...work in Wales with colleagues across English local government, helping to develop a common understanding of challenges and solutions*” [5.7].

Ed Hammond, Director of Research and Campaigns at the CfPS confirmed that the Centre has used the *Handbook* “*to inform training, development and support work to councils in England*”, as well as in training sessions delivered across Wales [5.7, 5.5]. For example, it was used in training two newly established Joint Public Scrutiny Board (PSB) Scrutiny Panels in Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Councils in July 2019. The councils subsequently reference the *Handbook* in their first joint scrutiny meeting (September 2019) and cited it in annual scrutiny reports [5.5].

The *Handbook* has been “*integrated into training and development provided to every local councillor in Wales*” [5.4 – Welsh Government] (1,254 councillors across 22 local councils). This training is delivered by the Welsh Local Government Association, which confirmed it has “*used the definitions of joint scrutiny, benefits and methodology to inform recent training for members*” [5.8].

Rebecca David-Knight, a freelance consultant, “*drew on content of the first edition of the Handbook*” when commissioned by the CfPS to develop a good practice paper on local government scrutiny in 2016 for Audit Scotland. This was “*subsequently incorporated into internal guidance for Scottish auditors regarding factors influencing effective accountability practice in Scottish local government*” [5.5].

The *Handbook* has also been used regionally to shape understanding of scrutiny. For example, it was used in training and development for the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee “*to shape the Committee’s operation and function. The sharing of key lessons from the handbook has directly led to Committee Members having higher expectations regarding their strategic purpose*” [5.5]. Its good practice case studies have also been used by the Wales Audit Office for its annual peer review exercise with each Welsh local authority scrutiny team. In summarising the *Handbook*’s impact, Hammond, from the CfPS, confirmed: “*Without the handbook overall, there is no question that effective joint scrutiny of partnership activity in Wales would be much more difficult to achieve, risking the value for money of public services and hindering the democratic holding to account of local services*” [5.7].

b. Local authority practices

According to the Welsh Government: “*...the Handbook has been very well received on the ground in local councils across Wales and is now contributing to improvements to local practices in terms of enhanced scrutiny processes*” [5.4]. It has been used by councils in different ways: from prompting collaborations, to supporting the development of proposals and offering alternative options for joint scrutiny, to the use of checklists and case studies of good practice [5.5]. For example:

- The scrutiny teams of six North Welsh authorities used the *Handbook* to develop joint scrutiny arrangements for the £1B North Wales Economic Ambition Board programme [5.5];

- The Welsh Scrutiny Officers Network reports that the case studies have been “*effective in obtaining organisational permission to progress joint scrutiny across Wales*” [5.5];
- Pembrokeshire Council’s Chief Audit, Risk & Information Officer stated that “*The Handbook has proved to be an excellent resource for the Internal Audit team when undertaking reviews*” and “*The enhanced understandings, new networks and enthusiasm to implement positive change within our council would not have come to fruition without Cardiff Business School’s influence*” [5.9]. The Chair of the Council’s Policy and Pre-Decision Overview and Scrutiny Committee used the *Handbook* to “*guide the setting up of the Task & Finish group...the impact of this has resulted in more focused scrutiny and improved accountability which was lacking*” [5.9];
- The *Handbook* helped councillors to navigate a complex governance system, as confirmed by a councillor from the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Scrutiny Committee: “*Joint scrutiny can be a bit like finding the Tesco trolley you’ve just got hold of is the one with a dodgy front wheel...Thankfully, there is now a really helpful reference manual which provides a stage by stage guide to the scrutiny process*” [5.6];
- The *Handbook* improved scrutiny of education policies and decisions implemented by Welsh regional educational consortia, resulting in a more efficient scrutiny model which avoids duplication across authorities. For example, a senior manager from the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service in Wales reported that the research was used to drive a structured process for collaborative scrutiny, and that: “*the model is now up and running, our development of it and discussions about how to proceed were very much influenced by your paper*” [5.10].

In England, the *Handbook* has been used to improve accountability and scrutiny of Local Enterprise Partnerships and of health services [5.7]. For the latter, the creation of integrated care systems (bringing together local authorities, the third sector and the NHS) requires the establishment of joint scrutiny committees. Ed Hammond, Director of Research and Campaigns for the CfPS, confirmed that “*practical elements from the handbook have been used as the basis for support provided to councils*” in scrutinising health and social care provision during a time of radical service transformation [5.7].

To summarise, Cardiff research not only convinced the Welsh Government to continue supporting joint scrutiny activity through its Scrutiny Development Fund, it also led to a practical *Handbook* for scrutiny teams to develop robust public service collaboration. This provided essential guidance for practitioners and local authorities getting to grips with an extremely important, but complex area of governance. This enabled better accountability across Wales and England, and supported the development of new legislation on joint working in Wales. The *Handbook* is now “*recognised by the scrutiny community as the definitive guide on joint scrutiny in local government*” (Cardiff Council’s Chief Scrutiny Officer) [5.6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [5.1] Lesley Griffith’s speech in the Welsh Assembly (2014)
- [5.2] Ashworth, R. and Downe, J. (2015 and 2019) Joint Scrutiny Handbook
- [5.3] [Text redacted]
- [5.4] Testimonial from Local Government Democracy Division, Welsh Government
- [5.5] Testimonials from freelance consultants undertaking work for the CfPS: Rebecca David-Knight and Dave McKenna
- [5.6] Testimonials from Steering Group members (Monmouthshire County Council, Cardiff City Council and Caerphilly Council)
- [5.7] Testimonials from Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)
- [5.8] Testimonial from Welsh Local Government Association
- [5.9] Testimonials from Pembrokeshire County Council
- [5.10] Testimonial from Central South Consortium Joint Education Service