



City and County of Swansea

## Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Service Improvement & Finance**

**Multi-Location Meeting - Gloucester Room, Guildhall / MS**

**Teams**

**Tuesday, 4 October 2022 at 10.00 am**

**Present:** Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

P M Black  
J W Jones

**Councillor(s)**

P R Hood-Williams  
M W Locke

**Councillor(s)**

L James  
B J Rowlands

**Cabinet Member(s)**

Cllr David Hopkins  
Cllr Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance  
Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy  
(Leader)

**Officer(s)**

Ben Smith  
Richard Rowlands  
Rachel Percival  
Liz Jordan

Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer  
Corporate Performance Manager  
Scrutiny Officer  
Scrutiny Officer

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): None

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**9 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were no disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

**10 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips**

None

**11 Minutes**

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed.

**12 Public Questions**

There were no public questions received

### **13 Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring Report - 2022/23**

The Panel invited the Leader and Ben Smith the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer to give an overview of the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring Report. They talked through the following issues:

- Four recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 29 September which Cabinet endorsed. One of these was giving instruction to all Directors to minimise spending given the ongoing in year difficulties.
- The current forecast is an overspend of £3m therefore this deficit will be drawn from contingency funds.
- Currently two Directorates are overspent, two are underspent and one is break even. This is before the pay award therefore once this is taken into account it is likely that all 5 directorates will be overspent due to shortfalls in base funding for the pay award.
- Budget was set on assumption of a 3% pay award. The actual award currently in discussions will exceed the budgeted sum by around £12m.
- Rising energy costs will affect us all and are being closely monitored.
- All responsible officers were told they may not overspend otherwise they would not be in compliance with financial procedure rules.
- The budget and forecast outturn position is currently expecting £26 million to be drawn from Reserves. This is not a sustainable position. This year will balance due to the draw on reserves but this leaves uncertainty for future years.
- Every other council will be experiencing similar financial pressures.

The following issues were also raised and discussed:

- The schools pay award, similarly to the local government pay award has no assurance of being covered by Welsh Government.
- Council tax has a deficit of £2m.
- The Council are grateful for financial support given from National and Welsh Governments during the pandemic however the current cost of living crisis is putting households under financial pressure.
- Although some materials have gone up in price, the council have benefited from fixed price deals and early borrowing in some cases.
- Swansea Council has the second best reserves position in Wales however with the scale of issue faced by all local councils, there is not enough for every eventuality.

### **14 Annual Performance Monitoring Report for 2021/22**

The Panel invited Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance and Richard Rowlands Corporate Performance Manager to give an overview of the Annual Performance Monitoring Report. They talked through the following issues:

- The pandemic has had a significant impact on all performance areas.

- Half of comparable indicators improved or stayed the same compared to 20/21.
- 18 new safeguarding indicators were introduced as a result of new national Social Services Performance Framework.
- Education and skills – 5 out of 8 indicators improving or staying the same. Continued disruption to schools due to Covid in particular exams, assessments and attendance.
- Progress has been made with ALN priorities which is a key priority along with wellbeing, mental health and the impact of poverty.
- There has been a rise in fixed term exclusions, a 6% rise in NEETS and fewer apprenticeship opportunities, Covid has been a major factor in this.
- Economy and infrastructure – 7 out of 8 indicators saw a decline compared to 20/21.
- Tackling Poverty – 5 out of 13 indicators improved or stayed same. Processing times for council tax and benefits has increased.
- Additional Council housing units improved but numbers from other sources declined.
- The number of welfare appeals and tribunals has reduced and families in temporary accommodation has increased.
- There is an increased number of those gaining employment through employability support and accredited qualifications through local authority support.
- Transformation of Future Council - 3 out of 5 indicators improving. Those declining are staff sickness and drop in number of forms completed online. There was a fall in requests for services like recycling bags as a result of lockdown. Payments made online has increased by 17%.
- Nature and Biodiversity - 3 out of 4 indicators improving, recycling has a slight drop, more black bags were generated. Carbon reduction and trees planted up to 121% increase.
- Sickness needs to be in context to the job roles. The Panel requested that future absence breakdown better define and categorise absence and take into account enforced absences.

## **15 Work Plan 2022/23**

No comments were made on the Work Plan.

The meeting ended at 11.09 am

**Chair**