



City and County of Swansea

Notice of Meeting

You are invited to attend a Meeting of the

Scrutiny Performance Panel - Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance

At: Multi-Location Meeting - Gloucester Room, Guildhall / MS Teams

On: Tuesday, 13 February 2024

Time: 9.00 am

Convenor: Councillor Chris Holley OBE

Membership:

Councillors: P M Black, C M J Evans, E W Fitzgerald, T J Hennegan, P R Hood-Williams, L James, D H Jenkins, M H Jones, M Jones, S M Jones, J W Jones, M W Locke, B J Rowlands, W G Thomas, M S Tribe and T M White

Agenda

Page No.

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

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3 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

4 Minutes

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting(s) and agree as an accurate record.

1 - 3

5 Public Questions

Questions can be submitted in writing to Scrutiny scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk up until noon on the working day prior to the meeting. Written questions take precedence. Public may attend and ask questions in person if time allows. Questions must relate to items on the open part of the agenda and will be dealt with in a 10 minute period.

6 Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget

Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy
Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer

Link to [Cabinet Papers](#) for 15 February 2024 containing the budget papers.

7	Work Plan	4 - 6
8	Letters	7 - 20
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10	Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget	

Next Meeting: Tuesday, 12 March 2024 at 10.00 am

Huw Evans

Huw Evans
Head of Democratic Services
Tuesday, 6 February 2024

Contact: Scrutiny Officer - 01792 636292

Agenda Item 4



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel - Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance**

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

Tuesday, 16 January 2024 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P M Black
P R Hood-Williams
M Jones
M W Locke
T M White

Councillor(s)

C M J Evans
L James
S M Jones
B J Rowlands

Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald
M H Jones
J W Jones
M S Tribe

Cabinet Member(s)

Cllr Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member for Economy Finance and Strategy

Officer(s)

Ben Smith
Richard Rowlands
Steve Hopkins
Geraldine Williams
Steve Hopkins

Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Strategic Delivery and Performance Manager
Tourism and Marketing Manager
Tourism Development Officer
Tourism and Marketing Manager

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): D H Jenkins

49 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were no disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

50 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None.

51 Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

52 Public Questions

There were no public questions received.

53 Budget Proposals

Cllr Rob Stewart and Ben Smith attended. The following was discussed.

- Overall, the budget demonstrates financial challenges in 2024/25 and into the medium term financial plan.
- Whilst there is a focus on savings, an £80m of additional finance is being added to the budget over the next four years.
- The Council does not have control over local authority and teachers pay awards therefore estimates are included in the budget.
- Officer advice is that current borrowing rates are not advantageous and to delay borrowing till the end of the medium term financial plan.
- Previous years have resulted in an underspend in capital spending. Officer advice is to draw down on this in 2024/25.
- The budget includes drawing over £8m in reserves for 2024/25. This breaks down into just over £1m from the Capital Equalisation Reserve and £7m originally earmarked for school IT upgrades. This £7m will be used for Schools only and will be used fully in 2024/25.
- The contingency fund will be reduced from £5m to £3m to allow for an additional £2m to go towards services.
- The Council is in a strong position as regards to reserves, however long-term drawing on reserves is not sustainable.
- No decisions on Council Tax rates have been made yet.
- A UK Government budget is due in March however if there are any additional gains from this, they would be too late for the 2024/25 budget setting.
- The fire Service levy is likely to be over £1m. This is paid for out of council budgets.

54 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2nd Quarter 2023/24

Cllr Rob Stewart and Ben Smith attended. The following was discussed.

- The second quarter demonstrates an overspend of around £7.5m.
- There is a commitment within directorates to achieve a balanced position by year end.
- Some earmarked reserves have been effectively reclassified as a provision. This still allows it to be available in the short term for cash usage should this be required by Council but there is an important accounting distinction between the two classifications.
- Various avenues are being explored to deliver school transport in more cost-effective ways.

55 Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24

Richard Rowlands attended, and the following was discussed.

- The officer took Panel members through the new layout of the report.
- The Panel praised the new format and highlighted areas of improvement within Social Services.

56 Tourism Destination Management Plan Update

Steve Hopkins attended, and the following was discussed.

- The Destination Management Plan 2023-26 was agreed by Cabinet in October 2023.
- The Panel praised the report and overall were pleased with the outcomes.
- There is a growing confidence in tourism that the industry is recovering from the effects of the Pandemic.
- The officer talked through several findings through research carried out in advance of the Destination Management Plan including a visitor survey, a local business survey and a hotel demand study.
- In 2022 4.2m visitors visited Swansea.
- Strategic priorities are, quality, creating an all-year-round destination, encouraging sustainability, and working in partnership.
- Hotel room occupancy in Swansea exceeds the Wales average. The hotel demand study indicated that Swansea needs a further 3 hotels to meet demand.
- Visitor survey responses overall demonstrated high satisfaction.
- Visitors placed the highest importance and lowest satisfaction on the availability and cleanliness of public toilets. Signposting of public toilets was also discussed.
- The site visitswanseabay.com exists to promote events to tourists and residents and a new website is also in development.

57 Work Plan

The work plan was noted, and reference was made to next months meeting which will be pre scrutiny of the annual budget on 13 February prior to it going for Cabinet approval on 15 February.

The meeting ended at 12.14 pm

Chair

Agenda Item 7

Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Work Plan 2023/24

<p>Meeting 1 Tuesday 10am 27 Jun 2023</p>	<p>Last meeting of Service Improvement and Finance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road Repairs Cllr Andrew Stevens – Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure Stuart Davies – Head of Highways and Transportation Bob Fenwick – Group Leader Highways Maintenance
<p>Meeting 2 Tuesday 10am 11 July 2023</p>	<p>Last meeting of Development and Regeneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focussed Topic: Project Review - Swansea Arena Cllr Rob Stewart – Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Cllr Robert Francis-Davies - Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism Lee Richards – City Centre Team Leader /Lisa Mart – Venue Director • Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration Huw Mowbray - Development and Physical Regeneration Strategic Manager
<p>Meeting 3 Tuesday 10am 5 Sept 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revenue Financial Outturn 22-23 and Revenue Outturn 22-23 (Housing Revenue Account) Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Annual Performance Monitoring Report 2022/2023 Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager • Annual Review of Performance 2022/2023 Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager
<p>Meeting 4 Tuesday 10am 26 Sept 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Outturn and Financing 2022/23 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Quarter 1 2023/24 Performance Monitoring Report Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager
<p>Meeting 5 Tuesday 10am 17 Oct 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Wales Report – Setting of Wellbeing Objectives Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager • Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report Cllr Elliott King – Cabinet Member Culture, Human Rights and Equalities Karen Gibbins – Library Services Manager Bethan Lee – Principal Librarian
<p>Meeting 6 Tuesday 10am 14 Nov 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Q1 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – 2023/24 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Regeneration Project(s) Update – Skyline/Copr Bay Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration
<p>Meeting 7 Tuesday 10am 12 Dec 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid Term Budget Statement 2023/24 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Review of Revenue Reserves Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy

	<p>Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling and Landfill - Annual Performance Monitoring Report Cllr Cyril Anderson– Cabinet Member Community Services Chris Howell – Head of Waste Management and Parks Matthew Perkins – Group Leader, Waste • Audit Wales Report – Digital Strategy Review Andrea Lewis – Cabinet Member for Service Transformation Sarah Lackenby – Head of Digital and Customer Services
<p>Meeting 8 Tuesday 10am 16 Jan 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Proposals 2024/25 – 2027/28 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24 Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager • Tourism Destination Management Plan Update Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Steve Hopkins – Tourism and Marketing Manager
<p>Meeting 9 Tuesday 10am 13 Feb 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer • Q3 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer
<p>Meeting 10 Tuesday 10am 12 Mar 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit Wales Report – “Cracks in the Foundations” Building Safety in Wales Cllr David Hopkins- Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Peter Richards - Building Control, Bereavement and Registration Services Manager • Regeneration Project(s) Update 71-72 The Kingsway Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration • Achievement against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments for Development and Regeneration Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration
<p>Meeting 11 Tuesday 10am 9 Apr 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review of Wellbeing Objectives Cllr David Hopkins - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager • Q3 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24 Cllr David Hopkins - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager • Audit Wales Report – Use of Performance Information Cllr David Hopkins - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager

<p>Meeting 12 Tuesday 10am 7 May 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Annual Performance Report Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration Ian Davies - Development Manager Tom Evans – Place making and Strategic Planning Manager • City Centre Retail Councillor Rob Stewart – Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance & Strategy Cllr Robert Francis-Davies – Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism Paul Relf – Economic Development and External Funding Manager • Audit Wales report “Springing Forward - Workforce Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance Rachael Davies – Head of HR and Service Centre
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Welsh Housing Quality Standards Annual Update – WHQS has now been achieved therefore there is no update for 23/24 however new WHQS standards are due end of 2024 therefore update on new standards can be given in 24/25.

Annual Complaints Report – Moved to SPC

Welsh Language Standards Annual Report – Moved to SPC

Agenda Item 8



To:
**Councillor Andrea Lewis,
Cabinet Member for Service
Transformation**

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch
am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrochol:*

01792 636292

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

*Date
Dyddiad:*

18 January 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation concerning the meeting held on 12 December 2023 and the Council's response to the Audit Wales Report regarding the Digital Strategy Review. This letter does not require a response.

Dear Councillor Lewis,

On the 12 December, the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Council's response to the Audit Wales Report regarding the Digital Strategy Review. The Panel are grateful to Sarah Lackenby for attending to discuss and answer questions.

The officer explained to us that Audit Wales reviewed all the digital strategies across Councils in Wales with the aim of seeking assurance that the digital strategies are delivering well-being objectives and are in accordance with the sustainable development principles of the Future Generations Act. We heard that there was one recommendation which was to formally bring review findings to relevant committees. This is the normal process, however this was not achieved due to the pandemic and the officer assured us that this will be carried out now that normal process has resumed.

We asked whether there will be any interim reviews during the life span of the current strategy and heard that the digital transformation plan includes an annual review, the next is scheduled for March 2024 with one to be carried out at the end of each financial year. The officer has agreed to our request to share the review findings with Panel Members.

We also highlighted that the Audit Wales report references the Council has identified performance measures to support its digital strategy but currently these measures are not supported with baseline data, targets or timescales. We asked for an update on this and heard that some of these are included as part of the corporate plan with further work to do in future years as not all parts of the strategy start this year, some of them

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are starting during the five year term. The officer also offered to update the Panel on progress with this and any Oracle developments at the end of the year.

We also asked about digital exclusion and heard that the Council has a digital inclusion strategy as well as work that is carried out by the Tackling Poverty Teams, customer charters, service standards and the new customer contact strategy. This will also be reported on as part of the Customer Contact Scrutiny Working Group in January.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response. We welcome a further update after the interim annual review has taken place at the end of the financial year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Holley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk



To:
Councillor Cyril Anderson
Cabinet Member for Community
Services

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:
Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:
e-Mail
e-Bost:

Overview & Scrutiny
01792 636292
scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

Date
Dyddiad:

18 January 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Community Services. The letter concerns the meeting held on 12 December 2023 and the Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring Report. A response is required by 8 February 2024

Dear Councillor Anderson,

On the 12 December, the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring Report. The Panel are grateful to you and Chris Howell Head of Waste, Parks and Cleansing, for attending to discuss and answer questions.

The update we received included information on the 2022 Waste Strategy which sets out to achieve statutory recycling targets by 2024/25. We heard that in 2022/23 the Council exceeded the current statutory recycling target of 64% by achieving 71.8% which was principally due to switching from black bag disposal from landfill to energy from waste. This has resulted in Swansea Council being first in the Welsh league table for recycling performance. We passed on gratitude in the meeting for the work gone into achieving this.

You highlighted areas of development including a review of commercial waste operations in line with new legislation and also future direction of Welsh Government, including the introduction of a deposit return scheme, workplace recycling legislation and extended producer responsibility. We asked further about the compulsory workplace recycling legislation that is due to be introduced in April 2024 and if the Council were responsible for any additional containers for commercial companies and whether this would impact revenue and in higher costs for customers. The officer stated that is difficult to judge impact to revenue at this point, the code of practice has only recently been released however it will require some changes. There may also be some waste costing more than others but there should be less residual waste. We asked about the processes in place to consult with businesses and you told us that the service area has been advising commercial customers of the forthcoming legislation changes by email, verbally and through the website. Welsh Government

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have a communications strategy to ensure all workplaces in Wales are aware of the legislative changes. In addition, the Council will use the Welsh Governments Communication Toolkit to help and to engage with local community commercial waste customers.

We requested more information on the extended producer responsibility. We heard that this is complex but that the roll out across the UK will be coordinated. The producer of waste will pay for disposal which aims to encourage current producers to use different recyclable materials or reduce the wrapping which will therefore be less costly.

We asked for an update on the trial being undertaken in St Thomas and were informed that reusable containers for cans, glass, paper and card are being trialled with an overall positive response so far. We asked if storage for these containers was raised as an issue, so far officers reported this had not been a major concern however all feedback would be reviewed at the end of the trial. We asked about feedback from collection crews and heard that engagement was taking place to find appropriate ways of working. We also asked about cost and were informed of the plans to seek a Welsh Government grant for the initial purchase of reusable containers, and overall would be cost neutral. We asked if there were any plans for doorstep Tetra Pak recycling for domestic customers, however, were informed that the focus is on reusable containers at the moment.

We queried the status of collection vehicles and heard that Swansea does have an aging fleet with 12-15 new vehicles to lease on order with funding in place. Leases are for 5-7 years with flexibility to extend or buy. Regarding electric vehicles, Swansea owns one with no plans to increase this until there is more evidence of the benefits of switching the fleet over to electric. The leasing period will give time to gather more information on the costs and benefits of electric vehicles. You also mentioned the Councils plans to purchase 14 new green hydrogen buses.

We felt that litter is an issue, with external bins being used for domestic waste, single use gloves from garages and the increase of fly tipping, these are challenging issues. As these are part of the cleansing team's responsibility, we will invite this team to scrutiny in due course.

We asked if single use food waste bags were also being considered for replacement and heard that there are few viable alternatives to these at the moment and advice from food disposal contractors is that the plastic bags are stripped out then the food waste is composted through aerobic digestion. Compostable bags are less robust than a plastic bag therefore harder to strip out and it's the preference of the food waste contractor to use the plastic bags. Compostable bags would also increase costs. We asked about the level of certainty that all the elements of plastic from the bags are stripped out and would be interested to hear from the contractor on the evidence for this to provide reassurance. Since the meeting we have received a comprehensive response from the contractor in which the screening process was explained to us and that PAS110 Certificates of Analysis show their digestate tests zero for plastics under 2mm.

We also discussed home composting and the benefits of encouraging this with free compost kits, however, less can be composted at home than through food waste collection and the Council are not currently providing subsidised composting kits.

We would also be interested in a breakdown of the £8.1m income generated primarily through commercial contracts or the sale of certain recyclables which is referenced in the report. We understand that this may need to be circulated confidentially and can be sent separately to the letter response if required.

Your Response

We welcome your comments on any of the issues raised and request a formal response by 8 February to the following –

- A breakdown of the £8.1m income.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk



To:
Councillor Rob Stewart,
Cabinet Member for Economy,
Finance and Strategy

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch
am:

Scrutiny

Direct Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrochol:

01792 636292

e-Mail
e-Bost:

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

Date
Dyddiad:

18 January 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy concerning the meeting held on 12 December 2023 and the Review of Revenue Reserves and the Mid Term Budget Statement 2023/24. This letter does not require a response.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 12 December, the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24. The Panel are grateful to you and Ben Smith for attending to discuss and answer questions.

Review of Revenue Reserves

As this item was discussed at length at the recent Council meeting, we had no further questions regarding the Review of Revenue Reserves.

Mid Term Budget Statement 2023/24

The officer highlighted that there are several concerns and pressures in current year with regards to budget monitoring which will require discussions on deployment of reserves in the future.

We asked if the additional £305m which has been awarded to Wales will all go to the health service, you are expecting some of this to flow to local government but that this is complex, and the Council continues to lobby the WLGA to ensure the voice of local governments are heard in Welsh Government. We await further developments on budget proposals in the new year when available.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

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Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ clr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk



To:
**Councillor David Hopkins,
Cabinet Member for Corporate
Services and Performance**

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch
am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrochol:*

01792 636292

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

*Date
Dyddiad:*

1 February 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance concerning the meeting held on 16 January 2024 and the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24. This letter does not require a response.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On the 16 January, the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24. The Panel are grateful to Richard Rowlands for attending to discuss and answer questions.

The officer took us through the new lay out of the report and explained how it links to the key priorities of the corporate plan, brings in qualitative and quantitative information and better describes the progress on meeting well-being objectives. We felt the new layout was clearer whilst giving a lot of information in a constructive way.

We had some queries regarding the Social Services performance indicators and are aware there have been some data entry issues on WCCIS. We will raise these separately with the relevant department.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Holley'.

Councillor Chris Holley

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Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk



To:
Cllr Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration, Events & Tourism

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Overview & Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 636292

BY EMAIL

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

CC: Cabinet Members

*Date
Dyddiad:*

1 February 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events and Tourism, following the meeting of the Panel on 16 January 2024. It covers the Tourism Destination Management Plan. A response is required not required.

Dear Cllr Francis-Davies,

On the 16 January, the Panel met to consider the Tourism Destination and Management Plan. We are grateful to Steve Hopkins, Tourism Marketing Manager for their attendance and contributions.

The officer gave us an update on the new tourism destination management plan for Swansea, covering the period 2023 to 2026 which was approved by Cabinet in October 2023. He highlighted several areas of research which has fed into the plan including a visitor survey, a survey of businesses and a hotel demand study. We found the layout of the report excellent, readable, and easy to understand and overall were pleased with the progress of tourism in Swansea.

The officer felt the results demonstrate a positive increase in tourism with 4.2m visitors reported for 2022 with high satisfaction. Although the numbers are high, the plan will look to encourage those visitors to spend more through partnerships with business. New developments may also increase footfall and spending. He also highlighted the high performance in hotel room occupancy which exceeds the Wales average and that an additional three hotels would be needed in Swansea to meet demand.

We noted that the numbers for visitors from the Midlands seemed low with a much greater number coming from within Wales. We asked about the level of marketing in the area and heard that it is carried out in and around Birmingham and it continues to be a core market.

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The visitor survey notes the low satisfaction with public toilets, we queried what was being done to improve this and heard about the work of the Public Toilet Strategy Working Group and the challenges around maintaining cleanliness and anti-social behaviour. We felt one of the main challenges with public toilets is signposting.

We were interested to hear if there is a facility to publicise smaller local events. The officer explained that the “what’s on” guide used to fulfil this but has ceased publication however online, visitswanseabay.com provides event information. He informed us the Council are in the early stages of procurement to develop a new website which will have a greater events presence, with an estimated launch date of Autumn 2024, as well as opportunities for posters or local advertising.

We asked if Blue Flag beaches and green flag parks are included in marketing and heard that they are with particular focus on some blue flag beaches featuring centrally in advertisements. Maintaining blue flag status is important due to the tourism pull these beaches have. We reported the rising number of absent or damaged street signs and the increase in litter around Swansea which the officer noted.

We were surprised to see hotel accommodation was more popular than caravan stays. The officer noted the desire to attract larger hotel brands to Swansea, in addition to this we felt that Swansea lacks smaller boutique hotels and offering a range of different hotel styles is also important.

Your Response

We welcome your comments on any of the issues raised and in this instance a formal response is not required.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Performance Panel

✉ cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk

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To:
Councillor Rob Stewart,
Cabinet Member for Economy,
Finance and Strategy

Please ask for:
Gofynnwch
am:

Scrutiny

Direct Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrchol:

01792 636292

e-Mail
e-Bost:

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

Date
Dyddiad:

1 February 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy concerning the meeting held on 16 January 2024 and the Budget Proposals for 2024/25 – 2027/28 and the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 for Quarter 2. This letter does not require a response.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 16 January, the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Budget Proposals for 2024/25 – 2027/28 and the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 for Quarter 2. The Panel are grateful to you and Ben Smith Director of Finance / Section 151 Officer for attending to discuss and answer questions.

Budget Proposals for 2024/25 – 2027/28

The officer took us through the report and explained the budget has been challenging with £135m forecast to be required for services and whilst there is a focus on savings, an £80m of additional finance is being added to the budget over the next four years. In addition, there are substantial budget pressures on pay awards including local government pay, teachers' pay awards, national living wage and the real living wage.

It was stressed that every authority in the UK is struggling with the level of funding and Swansea maintain a strong balance sheet position with strong earmarked reserves with plans to draw down just over £1m from the capital equalisation reserve in 2024/25. We asked about plans to draw on the capital equalisation reverse over the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and heard that external borrowing for additional capital expenditure of up to £50m will be deferred to 2027/28 until interest rates are more advantageous so the MTFP has neutralized the interest by a draw from the capital equalisation reserve in 2027/28.

We discussed the use of the School's ICT Hwb infrastructure reserve of £7m to offset Schools costs in 2024/25. We were concerned with using all this money in 2024/25 and asked if this would create a "cliff edge" in subsequent years, the officer reported

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that it will and that in fact that this is being all used in 2024/25 demonstrates the seriousness of the budget position. You anticipate Schools collectively needing to draw about £10m from their reserves of £20m in the current year therefore without deploying the £7m there would be a real risk that reserves could be significantly close to being exhausted in 2024/25. We asked for clarity on the £8m that was taken from Schools reserves in 2023/24 and now the further £7m and whether this was temporary funding for Schools. The officer clarified that Schools reserves remained at £20m (having previously been £28m prior to the £8m draw) with £10m needing to be drawn from Schools reserves in 2023/24. You explained the £7m is an addition and does not come from Schools reserves.

We discussed Council Tax and while you have not made final decisions you stated that some Councils are consulting on rates of up to 10%. You gave assurances that this level is not being considered for Swansea. We asked why Council Tax increases were being considered when other projects like Active Travel routes were going ahead. You explained that some grant funding is specifically ringfenced and cannot be used to towards revenue support. The officer also explained that there is an assumption from Welsh Government that Council Tax would need to rise across Wales to support revenue budgets.

You stressed the significant budget pressures that will be felt over the next few years and that even though a UK Government budget is due in March, if there are any additional gains from this, they would be too late for the 2024/25 budget. Regarding the fire service levy, you anticipate this will be over £1m and you continue to lobby Welsh Government ministers to remove that levy from the Council funding.

You highlighted that around 20 posts are being cut within the Local Authority and stressed that a number of those posts are already vacant with all avenues pursued before compulsory redundancies are made. We commented on the lack of detail on the saving proposals for each department, you told us this was to provide anonymity for staff as some details relate to a specific post.

We asked for an explanation of the pension costs as there is no increase for the next two years, then increases from 2026, we wondered if this related to an actuarial examination of the pension fund. We were told that this was the case, and the increased figures are the estimated increase on the next triennial revaluation. The officer also highlighted that Teachers are subject to a quadrennial revaluation with revaluation currently occurring, creating a cost pressure from the Teachers' pension contribution rate for employers of around £5m with the assumption that £5m for Schools will be given by Welsh Government in 2024/25.

We asked how energy costs to Schools are calculated in relation to older buildings which create higher costs. The officer reported that the decision on allocating funding for energy costs is delegated on a formula basis. Schools are in varying degrees of energy efficiency, condition, and age which is something that may require further debate. You added that money is allocated on the most equitable and fair basis, however it is a complex system with many challenges.

We asked about the Current and Future Capital Programme, as funding from Welsh Government has curtailed. The Officer confirmed the very curtailed sum of £61,000 uplift for capital expenditure therefore the bulk of capital is likely to be specific grant schemes or for the Council to provide from its own borrowing plans.

Quarter 2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24

The officer reported that the second quarter indicates an overspend position of around £7.5m with a commitment from Cabinet Members and Chief Officers to return to a fully balanced position by year end. You stated that this isn't an unusual position to be in at quarter two. The officer reported a substantial provision has been set aside this year and has given advice to redirect the underspend on capital financing towards this. You and the officer could not give further details on this due commercial sensitivity and therefore we will discuss this in closed session at the next Panel meeting.

We asked if there were any plans to look at value for money on school transport and strategies to make this more cost effective. You explained you are aware of these challenges and that there are a lot of factors to consider but will take opportunities like the upcoming bus bill and utilizing school minibuses. We raised concerns that using school minibuses may put additional pressure on teachers. The officer stressed that it will take time for there to be inroads to the cost pressures.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response. We would like to request that where possible; budget changes are not made immediately prior to the March Council meeting as this affects the scrutiny process.

We will also be holding a closed session at our meeting on 13 February regarding the commercially sensitive provision that has been set aside. At this closed session we will also request clarity on the departmental cuts which will result in a reduction of 20 roles in the Local Authority as this was omitted from the report to protect staff anonymity.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk

Agenda Item 9



Report of the Chief Legal Officer

Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13 February 2024

Exclusion of the Public

Purpose:	To consider whether the Public should be excluded from the following items of business.		
Policy Framework:	None.		
Consultation:	Legal.		
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that:		
1)	The public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it / they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Paragraphs listed below of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007 subject to the Public Interest Test (where appropriate) being applied.		
	Item No's.	Relevant Paragraphs in Schedule 12A	
	10	14	
Report Author:	Democratic Services		
Finance Officer:	Not Applicable		
Legal Officer:	Tracey Meredith – Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer)		

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007, allows a Principal Council to pass a resolution excluding the public from a meeting during an item of business.
- 1.2 Such a resolution is dependant on whether it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the public were present during that item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972.

2. Exclusion of the Public / Public Interest Test

- 2.1 In order to comply with the above mentioned legislation, the Panel will be requested to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the item(s) of business identified in the recommendation(s) to the report on the grounds that it / they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Exclusion Paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007.
- 2.2 Information which falls within paragraphs 12 to 15, 17 and 18 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended is exempt information if and so long as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.
- 2.3 The specific Exclusion Paragraphs and the Public Interest Tests to be applied are listed in **Appendix A**.
- 2.4 Where paragraph 16 of the Schedule 12A applies there is no public interest test. Councillors are able to consider whether they wish to waive their legal privilege in the information, however, given that this may place the Council in a position of risk, it is not something that should be done as a matter of routine.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The legislative provisions are set out in the report.
- 4.2 Councillors must consider with regard to each item of business set out in paragraph 2 of this report the following matters:
- 4.2.1 Whether in relation to that item of business the information is capable of being exempt information, because it falls into one of the paragraphs set out in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended and reproduced in Appendix A to this report.
- 4.2.2 If the information does fall within one or more of paragraphs 12 to 15, 17 and 18 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended, the public interest test as set out in paragraph 2.2 of this report.
- 4.2.3 If the information falls within paragraph 16 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 in considering whether to exclude the public members are not required to apply the public interest test but must consider whether they wish to waive their privilege in relation to that item for any reason.

Background Papers: None.

Appendices: Appendix A – Public Interest Test.

Public Interest Test

No.	Relevant Paragraphs in Schedule 12A
12	Information relating to a particular individual.
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 12 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that to make this information public would disclose personal data relating to an individual in contravention of the principles of the Data Protection Act. Because of this and since there did not appear to be an overwhelming public interest in requiring the disclosure of personal data they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>
13	Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 13 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that the individual involved was entitled to privacy and that there was no overriding public interest which required the disclosure of the individual's identity. On that basis they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>
14	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 14 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Whilst they were mindful of the need to ensure the transparency and accountability of public authority for decisions taken by them in relation to the spending of public money, the right of a third party to the privacy of their financial / business affairs outweighed the need for that information to be made public; or b) Disclosure of the information would give an unfair advantage to tenderers for commercial contracts. <p>This information is not affected by any other statutory provision which requires the information to be publicly registered.</p> <p>On that basis they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>

No.	Relevant Paragraphs in Schedule 12A
15	<p>Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.</p>
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 15 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that whilst they are mindful of the need to ensure that transparency and accountability of public authority for decisions taken by them they were satisfied that in this case disclosure of the information would prejudice the discussion in relation to labour relations to the disadvantage of the authority and inhabitants of its area. On that basis they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>
16	<p>Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.</p>
	<p>No public interest test.</p>
17	<p>Information which reveals that the authority proposes:</p> <p>(a) To give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or</p> <p>(b) To make an order or direction under any enactment.</p>
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 17 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that the authority's statutory powers could be rendered ineffective or less effective were there to be advanced knowledge of its intention/the proper exercise of the Council's statutory power could be prejudiced by the public discussion or speculation on the matter to the detriment of the authority and the inhabitants of its area. On that basis they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>
18	<p>Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</p>
	<p>The Proper Officer (Monitoring Officer) has determined in preparing this report that paragraph 18 should apply. Their view on the public interest test was that the authority's statutory powers could be rendered ineffective or less effective were there to be advanced knowledge of its intention/the proper exercise of the Council's statutory power could be prejudiced by public discussion or speculation on the matter to the detriment of the authority and the inhabitants of its area. On that basis they felt that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Members are asked to consider this factor when determining the public interest test, which they must decide when considering excluding the public from this part of the meeting.</p>