

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

Councillor Mary Jones
Convenor, Service Improvement & Finance
Performance Panel

Please ask for:
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Councillor Rob Stewart
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RS/SH

Date / Dyddiad:

18 July 2014

If you require this or any other information in another format e.g. Braille, audio tape or a different language, please contact me

Dear Councillor Jones

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL 11TH JUNE 2014

Thank you for your letter dated 2nd July 2014 regarding the above.

I set out below detail as requested in relation to your specific information requests:

- **Provide comparative data to compare this Authority's Council Tax collection rate with others in Wales.**

Performance data regarding Council Tax collection in 2013/14 is attached.

Council tax rates across Wales were abnormally high in 2013/14 due to the impact of late changes by the Welsh Government regarding subsidy levels allowing 100% relief for many claimants under the Council Tax Support scheme. In particular any measure of Council tax collection rates across Councils is itself dependant on the collection rates assumed when setting individual Council Tax Base calculations for the year in question.

It remains the case that CCS is very much comparable with all Authorities in Wales in terms of collection rates and that overall, over time, an average collection rate in excess of 98% is achieved.

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- **Provide feedback on how the Authority's plans to identify people claiming single person reductions who are not entitled to them are implemented and the changes this may make to Council Tax collection rates.**

In terms of Council Tax single person discount, the Council will use the services of DATATANK who collect Council Tax data on an all Wales basis under contract to the Welsh Government. By cross referencing property details against a range of databases authorised by the Information Commissioner this will highlight any properties where there is a potential for single person discount to be incorrectly claimed.

The householder claiming the discount will be contacted by letter informing them of the Councils intention to cross match data and will be asked to confirm their continued eligibility for discount. Indications from other Councils where this exercise has been undertaken would indicate that significant savings are likely to be achieved.

- **Confirm the timescales for reporting on the future management of the Authority's ICT contact and when scrutiny can input into the process.**

The estimated high level timeline was previously reported to Council on the 15th April 2014 and has been updated below. The timeline is subject to agreement of the exit plan:

Activity	Deadline	Progress
Develop project plan	April 2014	Complete
Develop first draft exit plan	May 2014	First draft produced and in negotiation
New ICT Strategy	June 2014	Revised to September 2014 following new Head of Service in post

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Establish new ICT operating model and costings	November 2014	In development
Procure specialist ICT support in line with forward strategy aspirations. Implement service migration plan	January – December 2015	Reviewing options as part of strategy process
New service commences	January 2015	

Other areas to be reflected in the timeline include:

- § Scrutiny involvement: This is important and welcomed and is estimated to be from September 2014
- § Establish a Member Reference Group, timing to be agreed
- § Dual running of the new service for as long as possible to surface any issues prior to transfer

- **Confirm the timescales for the 2015/16 budget process and where scrutiny will fit into the process.**

In terms of budget and savings tracker monitoring, it is anticipated that scrutiny review will be undertaken in the cycle following Cabinet reports. Based on Current plans this would be:-

- 1st quarter monitoring – 17th September – reported to Cabinet in August cycle
- 2nd quarter monitoring** - 10th December – Cabinet report in November cycle
- 3rd Quarter – 11th February – Cabinet in January cycle.

** See below for details of the outline budget process and proposals for a mid term review which may also be considered as part of scrutiny monitoring.

- **Provide the reporting timetable for the quarterly and annual performance and finance reports.**

The report '*Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future: Delivery Programme*' to Cabinet on 29th July 2014 sets out the outline proposals for the budget process for the 2015/16 budget round as follows:-

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Date	Milestone
29 July 2014	Cabinet report on the Programme
August	"Continuing the Conversation" – next phase of engagement commences
October	Cabinet considers the Mid-Year Budget Statement
November	Council considers the Mid-Year Budget Statement
November	"Continuing the Conversation" – outcome of engagement reported
December	Cabinet receives Financial Update with grant allocation
January 2015	Cabinet recommends draft Budget and MTFP
February	Council approves Budget and MTFP

On the assumption that the report is approved there is an obvious potential for scrutiny to be involved in:-

- Review of the Cabinet report and strategic programme – August 2014
- Review of engagement strategy – September 2014
- Consideration of the mid year budget statement – October/November 2014 – linked to quarter 2 monitoring above

- Consideration of engagement outcomes – December 2014
- Review of budget proposals – February 2015

- **Provide a response to the Convener's letter sent 6 May.**

A response to the Convener's letter sent 6th May 2014 will follow shortly.

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I trust that this response provides the information that you requested, but if you require any further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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