

Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the panel is to ensure that the Council's budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient.

2. Introduction

Scrutiny can make an important contribution to the budget process and annual improvement process by providing a critical friend for the Cabinet, engaging non executive councillors and helping to ensure accountability. This is particularly important when the Council is experiencing one of the most difficult budget settlements it has ever faced, with cuts to the Local Government Settlement increasing from an anticipated 1.5% to a potential 4.5% in 2015/16.

3. Progress so far

The Panel has held three meetings since the start of the municipal year and commenced a productive, on-going discussion with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, which has led to an increase in the Panel's involvement in the budget process for 2015/16. The Panel is continuing with its usual work of regularly scrutinising quarterly performance and budget monitoring reports, which also include the Policy Commitment Tracker and Budget Savings Tracker. The Panel has so far produced 3 Convener's letters to various Cabinet Members providing its views and comments on a range of performance and finance issues.

4. Future Work Programme

The Panel is currently meeting on a monthly basis. It has a full work programme for the year. Discussions with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources have identified key points for the Panel to be involved with the Budget process, including:

- Review of the Cabinet report and strategic programme – August 2014
- Review of budget engagement strategy – September 2014
- Consideration of the mid year budget statement – Oct/Nov 2014
- Consideration of public engagement outcomes – December 2014
- Review of budget proposals – February 2015

In addition to engaging with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources the Panel is also increasing its contact with other Cabinet Members. This is in line with the Scrutiny Programme Committee's previous instruction to the Panel to hold question sessions with a range of Cabinet Members to monitor the implementation and impact of budget decisions within their portfolios. The first Cabinet Member to attend the Panel to discuss these issues will be the Cabinet Member for Learning & Skills at the September meeting. The Cabinet Member for Children & Young People has also been invited to attend due to the overlaps between their portfolios (confirmation awaited).

The Panel has also identified the new ICT Contract as a key piece of work that would benefit from scrutiny involvement. Therefore this item will be added to the work plan. The Panel also feels that Flying Start performance would benefit from closer scrutiny and will work this into its timetable.

Finally, the Panel has also included some key service performance reports within its work plan, including Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report and the Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring.

5. Action required by the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.