

**Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update
Councillor Mary Jones, Convener**

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. Key Activities

The Panel has held 6 meetings between November and February. This has involved speaking to a range of Cabinet Members (5) and has resulted in 7 convener's letters.

The main issues covered were as follows:

12 November

The Panel received the mid-year budget statement from the Head of Finance & Delivery.

4 December

The Panel held an additional meeting in December in order to accommodate the availability of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation. We looked at Recycling and Landfill – Annual Performance Monitoring in order to monitor and challenge performance and action plan for meeting statutory targets.

10 December

The Panel looked at the provisional outcomes of the budget engagement exercise.

We discussed Welsh Public Library Standards – Annual Performance Report with the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Regeneration & Development and the Head of Libraries in order to monitor and challenge performance.

We also carried out pre-decision scrutiny of (EXEMPT) Cabinet Report – Everyone's IT: The Move to an In-House Managed ICT Service and discussed a number of issues with the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance and the Head of IT.

7 January

The Panel held an additional meeting in order to consider the draft Budget Proposals 2015/16-2017/18. We discussed the proposals in detail with the Leader and the Head of Finance and Delivery.

14 January

The Panel continued with its usual work of regularly scrutinising quarterly performance and budget monitoring reports. We looked at the 2nd Quarter Performance Monitoring Report, including Policy Commitments Tracker and the 2nd Quarter Budget Monitoring Report, including Budget Savings Tracker

We also held a Q&A session with Cllr Jennifer Raynor, Cabinet Member for Education, to discuss the implementation and impact of budget decisions within her portfolio.

5 February

The Panel considered the Special Cabinet Budget reports ahead of the Cabinet Meeting on 10 February and the Council meeting on 24 February. We discussed

the budget reports in detail with the Leader and the Head of Finance and Delivery.

3. Achievements / Impact

The Panel has met with 5 Cabinet Members since November, holding them to account on a range of issues. This has included:

- **Leader/Cabinet Member for Finance & Strategy** on the budget proposals 2015/16 (see below for further details)
- **Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance** to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Cabinet Report which outlined plans to move to an in-house managed ICT service. A specific recommendation of the Panel has been agreed with by the Cabinet Member, which is to establish an on-going User Forum to consult with during the development of the in-house service. Due to the essential nature of IT services for the effective running of the Council, the Panel has identified a need for on-going scrutiny involvement in the procurement process and the development of the in-house service. This will form part of the Panel's work plan for 2015/16.
- **Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation** to monitor and challenge performance on statutory targets for recycling and landfill. We particularly noted that the Council is on course to achieve the Welsh Government recycling and composting target of 58% in 2015/16, and that the current target of 52% has been exceeded.
- **Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration** to monitor and challenge performance on the Annual Performance Report of the Welsh Public Library Standards. Overall we were satisfied that the Council is maintaining its performance in relation to the standards, with 5 fully complied with and 4 partially achieved.
- **Cabinet Member for Education** to discuss the impact of savings targets. In particular the Panel was concerned that not all schools governors and school finance committees may be aware of the budget proposals for 2015/16. We have recommended that the School Governors Unit is asked to email any relevant correspondence to all school governors, in addition to letters being sent to head teachers and chairs of governors.

We also shared the concerns of the Cabinet Member for Education about the level of in-year education grant cuts that the Council is facing. The Panel agreed that the Convener will write to the Chief Executive of Education through Regional Working (ERW) Partnership in order to request an explanation of the recently implemented cuts in key education grants in order to support the concerns raised by the Cabinet Member for Education. The letter and response will be reported to the Scrutiny Programme Committee once received.

- **Budget scrutiny**

The Panel held an additional meeting in early January to consider the draft budget proposals and discussed them in detail with the Leader and the Head of Finance.

A further meeting was held on 5 February in order to look at the final proposals in advance of the Cabinet meeting on 10 February and the Council meeting on 24 February.

A press release was issued to inform the public that a scrutiny meeting was taking place to look the Budget prior to Cabinet and to invite questions for the Leader on the Budget. 8 members of the public attended the meeting and 6 questions were received, which the Leader responded to at the meeting.

The Panel raised a number of issues which the Convener verbally presented at the Cabinet meeting, along with the issues raised by the public. A formal letter from the Convener will also be sent to the Leader, following the Cabinet meeting, capturing all relevant points.

4. Future Work Programme

The panel's work plan for the remainder of the year is detailed below.

<p>Meeting 13 11th March</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd Quarter Budget Monitoring Report, including Budget Savings Tracker Mike Hawes, Head of Finance & Performance • Identify a Cabinet Member to attend to monitor the implementation and impact of budget decisions.
<p>Meeting 14 15th April</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd Quarter 2014-15 Performance Monitoring Report, including Policy Commitments Tracker (reporting to Cabinet 17 March) Richard Rowlands, Corporate Improvement Manager • Annual work plan review

5. Action required by the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None