

## **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**

The Panel is focused on contributing to the budget process and annual improvement process by providing a critical friend for the Cabinet, 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. Key Activities**

The Panel held 5 meetings between March and February. This has involved speaking to a range of Cabinet Members (3) and has resulted in 6 convener's letters being sent to Cabinet Members.

Cllr Mary Jones stepped down as Convener of the Panel in April and Cllr Chris Holley agreed to become Convener of the Panel from May onwards.

The main issues covered were as follows:

#### **11 March**

- Q & A session with Cllr Will Evans, Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty to discuss the implementation and impact of budget decisions within his portfolio.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Budget Monitoring Report including the Budget Savings Tracker.

#### **15 April**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2014-15 Performance Monitoring Report including the Policy Commitments Tracker.

#### **13 May**

- Progress Update on Procurement Framework for Oracle Support
- Q & A session with Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing to discuss the implementation and impact of budget decisions within his portfolio.

#### **10 June**

- Overview of the new performance framework and indicators. The new model being developed is a Balanced Scorecard.

#### 4. Achievements / Impact

The Panel has met with 3 Cabinet Members since March, holding them to account on a range of issues. This has included:

- **Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty** - The Panel has explored wider aspects of this portfolio and discussed the wider definition of poverty. The long term and generational nature of anti poverty work was stressed by the Cabinet Member. The Panel will be looking closely at the objectives and indicators within the Council's Anti Poverty Strategy.
- **Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing** - The Panel has raised issues around direct payments & rent arrears, affordable housing and voids with the Cabinet Member. We also discussed the work being carried out around the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, which has to be met by 2020, especially in relation to available payment options for leaseholders and a procurement framework in place that includes quality as well as cost.
- **Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration** – We have raised concern about the decline in performance relating to visits to the Grand Theatre.
- **Performance** – A number of key issues/questions have been raised regarding 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2014-15 Performance Monitoring Report including the Policy Commitments Tracker. The Panel questioned whether the document and presentation style of the Policy Commitments Tracker is sufficient for robust scrutiny and to monitor progress. We also expressed concern about the length of time taken to work through the document. The Panel were pleased to note that the new Balanced Scorecard addressed this issue, but have raised a number of questions regarding the customer experience and engagement section of the Balanced Scorecard in a letter to the Cabinet Member.
- **Budget Monitoring** – We have discussed issues around:
  - the unusual volatility in the budget
  - the effect of grant changes being made with short notice
  - the volatility of external costs (e.g. fuel)
- **ICT Procurement Framework for Oracle Support** – The Panel has raised questions about future ICT provision and tendering processes. We will be looking at information and costs in relation to the support contract. The Panel is reviewing its engagement in looking at this issue, and involvement at key stages, to ensure we can have an impact on the decision-making process. Further reports on future ICT provision will be programmed.

## **5. Future Work Programme**

- The Panel will continue to meet on a monthly basis.
- The Panel's work plan for 2015/16 has been drafted and will be updated to include some of the topics/issues raised in the Scrutiny Work Plan Conference.
- The Panel will continue with the Q & A sessions with Cabinet Members and to monitor the budget at key points throughout the year.

## **6. Action required by the Scrutiny Programme Committee**

None.