

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 3 meetings between July and October. This has involved speaking to a range of Cabinet Members (3) and has resulted in 3 convener's letters being sent to Cabinet Members and 2 letters sent to external organisations

In their September meeting the Panel agreed to change their meeting times from 1.30 to 11.00, this came into effect from the October meeting onwards.

The main issues covered were as follows:

12 August

- Q & A session with Cllr Mark Child, Cabinet Member for Well Being & Healthy City to discuss the implementation and impact of budget decisions within his portfolio.
- Q & A session with Cllr Clive Lloyd, Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance to discuss the implementation and impact of budget decisions within his portfolio.

16 September

- A Cabinet Member session about performance indicator GTC4 and the City Centre Regeneration Programme.
- The end of the Year Budget Report and the 1st Quarter Budget Monitoring Report including Budget Savings

14 October

- The end of year performance monitoring report 2014-15 and the 1st quarter performance monitoring report.

4. Achievements / Impact

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

- **Cabinet Member for Well Being & Healthy City** - The Panel noted that the Parks service is currently helping to establish Friends groups to run parks across the authority. We raised a number of questions about this, the self-management of sports clubs and activities and why participation in sports is in decline since the 2012 Olympics. The Panel also requested clarification round some aspects of the forthcoming Cultural Services review which includes Leisure services.
- **Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance** – The Panel discussed the wider aspects of this portfolio which includes; Sustainable Swansea and a thorough overview of the context of budget savings and commissioning reviews. We raised concerns about the new performance review process being undertaken across the authority and the need to access timely, pertinent and accurate financial and performance information especially for decision making. The Panel recommended that Sustainable Swansea documents available to the public contain a glossary or summary that is ‘public-friendly’.
- **Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration** – The Panel raised concerns about the decline in performance relating to visits to the Grand Theatre. We decided to further explore and focus on the following topics and questions for further scrutiny of the Grand Theatre and the arts in Swansea:

Are the catering facilities at the Grand Theatre cost effective and value for money ?

Staff and pay conditions within the public sector in comparison with cultural and leisure industry rates ?

Investigate the number of WNO performances in Swansea.

The funding does the WNO receive from the Arts Council Wales ?

How does the Arts Council Wales ensure that there is a balance in the funding subsidies given out across Wales.

The Panel has written to and received replies from both the WNO and Arts Council Wales. Representatives from both organisations will attend future meetings. We have also requested an update on the tender documents and proposals regarding the redevelopment of the Civic Centre and St David sites later in the year.

- **Budget Monitoring** – We have discussed issues around:
 - the financial outlook for the next two years
 - job evaluation and equal pay.
 - VAT rebate and school reserves.

- **Performance Monitoring** – The Panel has raised questions around local and national performance indicators in terms of matching CCOS performance against other authorities. We noted that the authority is aiming to move performance information onto an online management information system. This will enable officers to present performance information live, identify trends in a more accessible format. The Panel also discussed the Balance Scorecard, member training for understanding and interpreting performance data and inviting external organisation such as; BIDS to attend future meetings.

5. Future Work Programme

- The Panel's work plan for 2015/16 will be updated to reflect the additional topics as a result of the Work Planning Conference and the external organisations that the Panel would like to attend future meetings.
- The Panel will continue to send letters to external organisations as a result of their attendance at meetings and to further explore topics on their work plan.
- The Panel will also to discuss performance with external organisations and plan to do some work around this.
- The Panel will continue with the Q & A sessions with Cabinet Members and to monitor the budget at key points throughout the year.
- The Panel has added an extra pre budget meeting in their work plan for 2015/16.

6. Action required by the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.