



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Performance Panel – Service Improvement & Finance**

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Monday, 20 January 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor J W Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P Downing
M H Jones
R C Stewart

Councillor(s)

P R Hood-Williams
P K Jones
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

L James
B J Rowlands

Other Attendees

Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member - Economy & Strategy (Leader)

Officer(s)

Michelle Roberts
Richard Rowlands
Ben Smith

Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager
Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): C A Holley and I E Mann

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

2 Minutes and Letters

The letters and minutes were received by the Panel.

3 Public Questions

None

4 Sustainable Swansea - Fit for the Future: Budget Proposals 2020/21 – 2023/24

The Panel thanked the Cabinet Member Economy and Strategy and Chief Finance Officer for attending the meeting to discuss the Budget Proposals report. The following points were noted from the discussion:

- Due to the General Election held on 12th December, the Welsh Government delayed its announcements on the budget and provisional settlement until 16th December 2019. This made the budget process extremely challenging and uncertain.

- The now known scale of funding increase for local government for 2020-21 is the best in over a decade and extremely helpful because it is of a different magnitude to recent settlements it enables much greater choice to be exercised over relative priorities, funding commitments and local taxation levels for 2020-21. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy said it is hoped that this change of emphasis and funding can now be sustained over the medium to longer term to allow the Council to not only maintain, but also develop, and extend vital services to the public.
- The final figures for 2020/21 and any potential announcements on future year implications are expected from Welsh Government on 25 February.
- Education continues to be biggest area of funding within the council's revenue budget and will continue to be a key priority for the council. It is intended that there will be a proposed 6.5% (9.7 million pounds) cash increase in schools core funding. This is predominantly to fund teachers' pay and pension costs.
- The Panel heard that the decision about this year Council Tax increase has not yet been made. The Panel heard that the Council Tax planning assumption was up to 5% but the overall yield was higher still, which was due to no longer having discount on empty homes, the 100% premia on long term empty homes and growth in the tax base. In addition, that Council Tax forms just over 25% of income the council received which equated last year to 122 million pounds, with the Revenue Support Grant from Welsh Government being 242 million and Business Rates raising 80m. It was also highlighted that we have to fund the council tax reduction scheme of 22 million pounds that is targeted at lower income groups and which is not fully funded by Welsh Government. . The Convener raised that a number of residents had relayed concerns to him about the present affordability of Council Tax and the impact another rise would have on them. He asked whether the Local Authority carries out an appraisal of affordability, the Cabinet Member said that an equality impact assessment is completed and consultation is carried out before a decision is made on any increase.
- The Cabinet Member was asked whether Environmental Groups had been contacted with regard to the budget consultation exercise and he replied saying he would follow up on this to ensure it is the case.
- Increase in fees and charges relating to Bereavement services was raised, they heard that the council charges in this area are small compared to the overall costs of a funeral. Swansea is mindful of its position in relation to other councils.
- The Panel heard about the impact of the savings proposals on jobs in 20/21. Hearing that the reduction in numbers is a fraction of what it has been in past years and every effort is being made to minimise this figure given in the report.
- The Panel asked about the ¼ million saving proposed for Home to School Transport. They heard that the council is continuing to look to get the best value we can for our transport services, that HTS transport cost is significant, Council has and is continuing to renegotiate contracts and ensuring a more joined up approach to transport across the council.
- The Panel heard that Swansea would ensure that any grants opportunities that come via regional working would cover our costs and provide the maximum benefit to Swansea.

- The Panel wanted to find out more about the savings proposals line under Social Service Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families first.
- Continuing to take monies out of insurance reserves was raised. The Panel heard that the Section 151 Officer has allowed monies to be taken out of the insurance reserves where appropriate, that he does take professional advice about our insurance reserves. That we effectively cover the council currently for 9 out of every 10 years of possible claims and this was considered to still be very prudent.
- Around (20%) of this year's original savings have not been achieved as originally expected but most directorates have made significant savings in other ways. The Director of Education was still working on further savings proposals to help reduce forecast over spending in that Directorate. The Panel heard that the 3rd Quarter budget monitoring report was expected to show big inroads into reducing the overall service in year overspending figure.

5 Q2 2018/19 Performance Monitoring Report

The Corporate Performance Manager attending the Panel to present the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report and answer questions. The following indicators and issues were highlighted for discussion:

- 49% of indicators have meet their targets and 39% are showing improvements, this is showing a decline in performance from the corresponding quarter last year. Fewer indicators showing improvement overall compared with this time last year.
- AS13a *Number of carers (18+) who received a carer's assessment in their own right during the financial year.* 52 few carer's assessment completed compared to 2018/18. This was attributed directly to the sickness levels within the integrated hubs, these are being managed and it is hoped the next quarter will see an improvement.
- AS9 - *The percentage of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) assessments completed in 21 days or less.* Performance has dipped compared to previous quarters but this will improve with permanent staff rather than staff rotating. The panel wanted to find out more about when this will happen.
- CFS18 - *The rate of looked after children (LAC) per 10,000 of the 0-17 Swansea population at the end of the period* and CFS2 – *The number of Looked After Children (LAC) at end of period.* There has been a recent reduction in the LAC population and it is stabilising. There is a safe LAC reduction strategy in place which is monitored monthly through the strategic LAC meeting. The current pressures relate to children under 2 years of age.
- Measure 19 – *The rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over.* Staff shortages within the domiciliary care sector continues to impact on this service. However, they have recently re-rendered the service splitting the providers into geographical zones which is expected to have a positive impact on delays.
- BBMA4 – *The number of apprenticeships or trainee starts in the Council.* This indicator records new starts and is currently under review to include a wider apprentice and trainee strategy. This will include the recruitment of trainees and in work apprentices which are currently not recorded.

- EDU015b – *The percentage of final statements of Special Education Needs (SEN) issued within 26 weeks excluding exceptions.* This quarter covers school holidays when there are less staff, however, there are capacity issues within the team due to the volume of operational day to day work as well as a backlog of statements which are affecting the ability of the team to reduce the backlog and improve the PI. Secondly, the system is largely paper drive and there is not capacity to review systems to improve efficiency without compromising the LA statutory duties further.
- POV07 – *The number of training and employment person weeks created by BBM for unemployed and economically inactive.* This is 27% lower than last year. There has been a delay in the start of a number of projects, which has reduced the number of opportunities for training work. It is envisaged they will catch up on this delay in the weeks and months ahead.
- HBCT01a – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* Drop in performance, as expected, due to reduced resources and because the more complex cases remain in housing benefit and easier cases transfer to Universal Credit.
- HBCT01b – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
- HBCT02a – *Council Tax reduction speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* As expected, performance has dipped due to a process change, which increased Council Tax Reductions granted to individuals at the cost of an apparent decrease in performance stats. In reality, no worsening of the service to applicants.
- HBCT02b – *Council Tax speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
The panel wished to find out more about these for HBCT indicators asking department for component parts to this decline.
- CHR002 – *The number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence.* Data is currently under review and in a new Management of Absence Policy is under review. Proposals have also been sent to CMT for targeted objectives to reduce sickness in the longer term. The Panel would like to see at breakdown of the indicator by department and by issue.
- FINA6 – *Percentage of identified forecast General Fund Revenue savings and income for the year compared to originally approved budget.* CMT continues with the expectation that both service and overall net expenditure must be held within the relevant limits for the current year's budget as set by Council.
- The Panel also heard about the four indicators relating to the environment and biodiversity that will be reported annually. They will include: Carbon Reduction, numbers of trees planted, areas of wildflower sown and water quality. The panel would like the see the descriptors for these including how they were chosen and put together.
- The Corporate Biodiversity Working Group was raised and concerns were raised that there is currently no direct reporting mechanism for this into any Councillor meetings. The Convener of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Panel will follow up upon this in this panel.

- Scrutinising delegated decisions and the visibility of the decision-making process as a council was also raised by a panel member who also said that they believe Legal are looking into how these can be seen by scrutiny.

6 Work Plan 2019/2020

The Panel received the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am.