



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart
Cabinet Member for Economy and
Strategy**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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19 February 2020

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy. The Panel met on 19th February 2020. This letter relates to the Annual Budget 2020/21.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 19 February, the Panel met to discuss the Annual Budget 2020/21. The Panel are grateful to Cabinet Members and officers who attended all the Panels meetings to provide information and answer questions.

Each Panel had the opportunity to scrutinise the Budget in relation to their performance Panels. Each Panel was then asked to produce the points they wish the raise.

Please find below the comments from each Performance Panel:

Adult Services

- Panel noted the change of Chancellor could lead to a delay in the announcement of the national budget, which may in turn affect the Welsh Government's budget and therefore the Council's budget.
- Adult Services budget increased by 3.5% and inflationary pressures are 7%, so the Council needs to make the proposed savings next year to stay where it is. This is a concern as not all of the proposed savings will be achieved in this financial year and the Panel felt therefore the savings target next financial year seems to be ambitious.
- Panel was concerned about the £500k proposed savings next year from review of senior staff structure across adults, children and poverty and prevention services. Panel felt satisfied that the plan is to flatten out the structure at every level of the directorate not just at senior staff level and that there will still be at least two Heads of Service, which is essential given the size of the budget and issues the Directorate face going forward.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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- The Panel were concerned about the review of opportunities for outdoor centres, the effect this could have on schools and the lack of confidence that this can be delivered. Adult Services, and Child and Family Services Panels would like to see a copy of the consultation for this.
- With £750k proposed savings from review of mental health and learning disability packages next financial year, there was concern in the Panel that this will be an issue as there is a shortfall of resource to undertake the review of the Health side. The Panel felt that this needs to be resolved as soon as possible if we are to keep to budget for 2020-21.
- Regarding the £100k projected income from Local Area Coordination, the Cabinet Member stated he would like to see a committed funding stream so the scheme can be expanded and is sustainable. The Panel would like to see this introduced.
- The Panel acknowledged that the budget for Social Services is person driven and it would be misleading to focus on the number of people supported.
- Panel was concerned about the areas where savings are proposed and felt savings are being made which could be detriment to the service.
- The Panel will be revisiting the budget again in October so we can more closely monitor the outcomes of the planned efficiency savings.

Education

- We are pleased that Education continues to be one of the top priorities for Swansea Council, because we feel it as vitally important if we are to make the most of the City Deal as we build for future generations.
- We were pleased to hear that the budget will see an increase in monies going to education and schools and will cover Teachers pay grant, Teachers pension costs and the pay increase for non-teaching staff. We were also pleased to hear about the grant of £4 million from Welsh Government for Capital Maintenance Repairs to our schools.
- We agreed with the Cabinet Member that the aspiration of a three-year budget settlement for education is important and believe that we must continue to push for this at every opportunity. The benefit to schools (and education more widely) of being able to plan over three years cannot be underestimated.
- We were pleased to hear about the work carried out with and between primary schools, secondary schools and the budget forum following the budget settlement. We felt that schools should be congratulated for their culture of working together not only in this but also in supporting each other to succeed.
- We would like to thank Schools, Governors and the Education Improvement Service for their excellent work over the past year. Particularly how they have been able to grasp the challenges and move forward delivering good quality education here in Swansea.
- We are pleased about the new cycle / walkways that are being developed across Swansea. However, there was concern that it was being proposed to remove free school transport for some pupils because:
 - a. Lighting and safety of walking routes in winter because of our role in safeguarding pupils.

- b. Possible increase in traffic around those schools concerned, as parents may start to drive children to school when school buses are no longer available.
- c. We were concerned that the estimated potential savings from stopping the provision of school buses, in these three areas, has already be taken out of budget.

Child and Family Services

- Panel expressed concern about the risks associated with grants, in particular the increased risk as the Council relies more and more on grant funding.
- Panel was happy with the overall focus in the budget on the priorities of this Council.
- Panel noted the effective reduction of £1.35m of core funding for Poverty and Prevention next financial year (the majority of which is in Children's Services), and an increase of £1.6m in Child and Family Services, which will basically result in an increase of just £0.25m in an overall budget of £42m. This is a very small increase compared to Adult Services and a very small increase relative to the increase in the RSG.

Development and Regeneration

- Panel had concerns about the overall borrowing requirement, as it was not clear how much we are going to borrow. The Panel needs clarity on (i) how much we are going to borrow, (ii) what the costs will be of this borrowing and (iii) how we will fund the additional cost of the borrowing.
- The Panel felt there was no certainty about how much money the Council will be getting in or how much it will have to pay out.
- Panel expressed concern regarding the 15-year draw down of money from the City Deal. The amount of money we will receive from this is very small and does not even cover the interest payments.
- The Panel would like clarity in terms of the £200k costs for our contribution to regional City Deal arrangements. What is this for and over what timescale?
- Panel expressed concern about future pressures resulting from capital finance charges and also use of MRP and capital equalisation reserve to pay for these charges.
- The Panel would like more clarity in what is reported to the Panel on how Development and Regeneration schemes are costed out and what they entail.

Service Improvement and Finance

Medium Term Financial Plan

- We recognise that the Medium Term Financial Plan is a moving feast and reliant on what we get on specific grant uplift. Can we ask that the narrative associated with these be included in the report?
- We would like more clarity on what will be included in the savings proposal relating to increased parking fees.
- We asked you about the line that indicates reductions to the Library Service and possible reduction of opening hours in the longer term. You told us about the move to introduce community hubs across parts of Swansea, which will

include libraries but also other services forming one-stop shops for local people. Can you tell us more about these including the locations and services that they will include and how this will affect library provision across Swansea?

- We heard about efforts to ensure that with the Councils fees and charges we will look for full cost recovery where possible. Can you tell how confident you are that these will be realised?
- We were pleased to hear about the new technologies that are being introduced that will provide more efficient ICT and back office systems.
- We asked about changes to the current collection of nappies. We were pleased to hear that the Welsh Government will be making a proposal in relation to this and other clinical type waste, which will ultimately result in an enhanced service.
- We were also keen to hear about the proposal to develop more cost effective ways of collection and disposal of plastics.

Revenue Budget

- Whilst we have a good explanation of the net budget, it would be advantageous in future to have a summary of expected gross income added to each of the corporate departmental information that is provided.
- We would in the future ask that a glossary of terms be included in with the budget papers to give details of the acronyms used.
- We welcome the creation of a resource to coordinate and progress delivery of all climate emergency and natural environment obligations (including section 6 obligations).
- We asked about the cost to the authority of pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs, who are placed in Swansea from outside of the County. We wanted to find who pays the bill for those learners, is it the originating Local Authority or us?
- We also want to raise the issue of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the proposals to increase the licencing fee. We discussed the lack of council tax income from HMO properties and how property owners of HMO's are not required to pay business rates. We recognise that we receive an income from Welsh Government based on the Barnett Formula that includes students but we were interested to find out the impact on our budget of the services used by students such as waste collection etc. Can you tell us how much the licence fee will be increased, also, what the deficit to the Council is in relation to loss of council tax and business rates?

I will present these points at the meeting on 20 February 2020.

We would welcome comments on any aspect of this letter but would like answers on the following points:

1. How sure are you that the savings projected in relation to the three new safe walking routes to school will be realised and if they are not, what impact will this have on the overall education budget?

2. Can you provide us with a copy of the consultation for the review of opportunities for outdoor centres?
3. Can you provide clarity on the overall borrowing requirement, (i) How much we are going to borrow? (ii) What the costs will be of this borrowing? And (iii) How we will fund the additional cost of the borrowing?
4. Can you provide clarity on the £200k costs for our contribution to regional City Deal arrangements? What is this for and over what timescale?
5. We would like more clarity on what will be included in the savings proposal relating to increased parking fees.
6. Can you tell us more about the community hubs including the locations and services that they will include, and how these will affect library provision across Swansea?
7. Can you tell us how confident you are that full cost recovery in relation to fees and charges will be realised?
8. Can a summary of the expected gross income be put alongside each of the corporate department figures in future budget papers?
9. Can you provide a glossary of terms with the budget papers in the future that give details of the acronyms used?
10. Can you tell us who pays for those pupils in our schools that are from out of county i.e. is it the originating Local Authority or us?
11. Can you tell us how much the HMO licence fee will increased over the next year and what the deficit to the Council budget might be in relation to loss of council tax and business rates for HMO properties and services used by students?

I would be grateful if you could provide a written response to this letter by 12 March 2020.

Yours sincerely,



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