



City and County of Swansea

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

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Wednesday, 19 February 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P Downing
M H Jones
I E Mann

Councillor(s)

P R Hood-Williams
P K Jones
R C Stewart

Councillor(s)

L James
J W Jones
D W W Thomas

Other Attendees

Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member - Economy & Strategy (Leader)

Officer(s)

Jeffrey Dong

Deputy Chief Finance Officer / Deputy Section 151 Officer.

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): B J Rowlands

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

Cllr Chris Holley declared a personal interest in Item 6.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

None

3 Letters and Minutes

Letters and notes were received by the Panel.

4 Public Questions

None

5 Scrutiny of the Annual Budget

The Panel completed pre-decision scrutiny on the Annual Budget papers that are due for decision at Cabinet on the 20 February. The Panel thanked the Cllr Rob Stewart the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy (Leader) and Jeff Dong from Finance for attending the Panel and answering questions.

The Panel looked at the:

1. Medium Term Financial Plan
2. Revenue Budget
3. Capital Budget
4. Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Budget
5. Feedback from the other scrutiny panels

6 Summarising Views and Making Recommendations

The following points were highlighted for inclusion in the Conveners letter to Cabinet on the 20 February:

- 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?

The Panel will request a response to 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 be 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?

The meeting ended at 11.35 am

Chair