



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Monday, 21 September 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
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

L James
J W Jones

Officer(s)

Emily-Jayne Davies
Jeffrey Dong
Adam Hill
Michelle Roberts
Richard Rowlands
Ben Smith

Scrutiny Officer
Deputy Chief Finance
Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources
Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager
Chief Finance Officer / Section 151 Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): B J Rowlands, A H Stevens and R C Stewart

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips.

None

3 Minutes.

The Minutes were agreed by the Panel.

4 Public Questions.

No public questions were received.

5 Corporate Performance and Financial Monitoring - Discussion on COVID-19 Impacts / Issues.

a) Budget Monitoring (verbal report) Ben Smith

It was noted that:

- The audit of the statement of accounts for last year has been completed, which is important because it gives the bedrock of the reserves position moving forward. It is now official as to what level of reserves we have going into a challenging period. The overall assumptions and parameters we are working to, have been made clear to Cabinet and Council.
- The budgets are being flexed by about 25%. Reflecting in the revenue budget by over 100 million pounds and a flex of the capital budget by over 20 million pounds.
- The 1st Quarter Report will not be submitted to Panel today pending submission to Cabinet in October.
- It has been difficult to achieve certainty over the forecasts given the uncertain and unprecedented times of Covid-19.
- We are awaiting clarity over recent funding announcements from Welsh Government. Since 23rd March 2020, there have been numerous amendments to funding from Welsh and UK Governments with many new and continuously changing announcements throughout the Pandemic.
- The national funding streams have ebbed and flowed continuously throughout the pandemic and has therefore added uncertainty to the forecast.
- We are expecting all services to be over spent in year given the current circumstances; however, we are recouping some spending and will continue to apply for funding to recoup spending as and when this becomes available.
- We do not yet know the full effect of the furlough scheme ending and the impact upon abilities of businesses and individuals to keep up with payment of bills such as Non Domestic Rates and Council Tax.
- A question arose as to whether extra money has been spent and not claimed back. Chief Finance Officer (CFO) replied that we would expect to spend more than we receive, however we have no certainty of what our final share of the funding allocation will be yet. There is a burden of costs to be shared across the public sector and local choices will have to be met locally by Councils.
- The Panel queried the amount of Council tax arrears this year to which CFO confirms the figure is currently £4.7M for 2019/20 alone. CFO subsequently advised arrears of council tax were cumulatively 31/3/19 £7.7m and at 31/3/20 £9.0m. The vast majority of the arrears relate to the previous 3 years tax liability, although arrears are pursued for all years.
- The Panel asked whether we are likely to need to have an emergency budget, to which CFO replied that £19M was added to reserves last year to strengthen our position during the pandemic. The Reports to Cabinet and Council will set out the need to draw from reserves reasonably and proportionally in the circumstances. CFO reiterates there are challenging numbers to balance. However, currently he is happy overall that the budget will be managed for the rest of the year through normal budget reporting mechanisms.

b) Corporate Performance Monitoring Annual Report 2019/2020

Richard Rowlands, the Councils Corporate Performance Manager outlined those indicators within the report that are showing a less positive trend.

Overall, the Corporate Performance indicators for 2019/20 show that 43 out of 78 (55%) Corporate Plan performance indicators (that had targets and where there was data) met their targets. 41 out of 66 (62%) comparable Corporate Plan performance indicators also showed improvement or stayed the same compared to 2018/19.

The Panel went through each Corporate Priority individually discussing those indicators that are identified as Red where the figures are showing a decline.

Safeguarding

- *AS11 - Rate of adults aged 65+ receiving care and support to meet their well-being needs per 1,000 population.* It was noted that more individuals are being supported through short-term reablement and other enabling interventions in keeping with the Council's strategic objectives.
- *AS13a – Number of carers (aged 18+) who received a carer's assessment in their own right during the financial year.* It was noted that work is being undertaken with carers groups on a regional basis to try and better understand the above-expected number of carers declining an assessment. The Panel raised a query over the Adult Carer Assessments and the concerning trend in the data. The Panel also raised concerns over the quality of such services after initial assessment. **Further written information sought regarding this point.**
- *Measure 19 (PAM025) The rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 or over.* It was noted that we are continuing to work with NHS to reduce Delayed Transfers with the Rapid Discharge project commencing.
- *CFS2 – The number of Looked After Children (LAC) at end of the period.* It was noted that the focus has been on reducing numbers of children cared for in residential settings. Next phase is focus on legal security, which is part of safe lac strategy and will reduce numbers to 475 by March 2021 - below 100 per 10,000.
- *Measure 24 - The percentage of assessments completed for children within statutory timescales.* It was noted that improvement in this area has been challenging to achieve for a number of years. A focused piece of work has been completed and the monthly report is evidencing improvement in the 1st quarter of this new financial year.

Education and Skills

- *EDU15a - The percentage of final statements of Special Education Need (SEN) issued within 26 weeks including exceptions*
- *EDU15b - The percentage of final statements of Special Education Need (SEN) issued within 26 weeks excluding exceptions*
- It was noted that the decline on statements issued within 26 weeks has continued in 2019. Work has already taken place to address some of the issues contributing to this performance, including the introduction of new systems for statements. This is a priority area for improvement within the Directorate - a new structure and improvement programme will commence in 2020 to address current improvement requirements and changes to meet the requirements of the ALNET Act 2018. The Panel requested further

information and scrutiny surrounding SEN Statements and the target times that are being missed. **They agreed that further action was required here to explore subject, in the first instance, via written responses from relevant officers.**

Economy and Infrastructure

No issues raised

Tackling Poverty

- *HMBCT01a - Housing Benefit Speed of Processing: Average time for processing new claims.* It was noted that with reduced resources in place a reduction in performance was expected and 0.5 days is well within acceptable limits
- *POV10 - Number of people gaining employment through Employability Support.* It was noted that as part of the employability commissioning review work which is being undertaken we will be better able to capture the results of all the employability activity across the Council. The Panel would like to explore this indicator as the data suggests fewer people are gaining employment. **Further written information on this data set is required along with the indicator definition.**

Transformation and Future Council

- *CHR002 (PAM001) - The number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence.* Note from Corporate Performance Team - Data quality under review. Sickness figures impacted by COVID-19. Consultation paused on new Management of Attendance Policy due to COVID. Support continuing in service areas with high levels of sickness absence.

Data surrounding staff sickness indicates an increase of 1.85% highlighting a growing trend in sickness absence from 8% to 10% over the previous two periods. The Panel wish to look into this topic in further detail and the Deputy Chief Executive was to provide further information in the future (when this is available) regarding the impact of home working and agile arrangements on the sickness absence data. He confirmed that early indicators show that working from home during the pandemic has helped to support a reduction in sickness absence. **The Panel requested a breakdown of sickness and type across the Council departments.**

Nature and Biodiversity

- In terms of Nature and Biodiversity, the Panel questioned progress being made on development of quantitative indicators. RR explains that work has been carried out with the Nature Conservation Team. However, it has been difficult to find something to report in a robust manner. Work is ongoing on this and the Panel agreed that qualitative data given was very useful.

Public Accountability Measures

- The report also contains the provisional outturn for 2019/20 of the Council's performance against national Public Accountability Measures (PAMs). The results show that 67% of PAMs met their targets and 50% of comparable PAMs improved or stayed the same compared to 2018/19.

- PAM15 - The average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant. It was noted that decreased performance this year resulted from a number of extended staff sickness absences, an Occupational Therapist vacancy that took an extended period to fill and the Covid-19 outbreak caused supply chain delays in the last quarter from China / Italy. This all impacted on programme.
- PAM39 - Percentage of rent lost due to properties being empty. The Panel raised this indicator and asked for further information on the number of empty council properties currently. The Panel would also like see an indicator giving the number of empty council properties considered for inclusion in performance monitoring reporting data.
- *PAM45 – Number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use.* The Panel queried whether these were based upon the Empty Property Grant that had been introduced.

The Panel also discussed the process of performance monitoring and how the councillors use and review that data. Including what data is submitted to Panel and indeed collected, who the Panel speaks to either written or verbally, following up on areas of concern, the interface with other scrutiny Panels and how we avoid duplication of effort by officers and councillors. The Panel agreed to consider this matter in more detail at a future meeting.

6 Letters

The Panel reviewed the letters.

The meeting ended at 11.15 am