



To:
Councillor Andrew Stevens
Cabinet Member for Business
Improvement & Performance

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Overview & Scrutiny

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12 October 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Business Improvement & Performance. The letter concerns the meeting held on 20 September 2021 and the update regarding Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

Dear Councillor Stevens,

On the 20 September, the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the new process for Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021). The Panel are grateful to yourself, Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive, and Richard Rowlands, Strategic Delivery and Performance Manager, for attending to discuss the report. Discussions focused on the following areas:

The Panel received an overview of the guidance in Part 6 Performance and Governance provisions of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Officers explained that the essence of Part 6 is to see local Councils as 'self-improving organisations through a system based on self-assessment and panel performance assessment'.

Officers outlined to us the ways in which Swansea Council is now preparing for implementation of Part 6, having regard to the new statutory duties imposed upon the Council under the provisions. We heard that these duties are captured within five areas;

1. Duty to keep performance under review
2. Duty to consult on performance
3. Duty to report on performance
4. Duty to arrange a panel performance assessment
5. Duty to respond to a panel performance assessment report

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The Panel heard that the Council intends to merge existing reports to create one applicable report for the purposes of the Part 6 duties, seeking to build upon what already exists.

Members noted this was a substantial undertaking, alongside usual workloads and provision of services. Members queried the pressure this will place on resources and front line services. Officers acknowledged that timescales and resources did pose a challenge, however, hoped there will be a limited effect on resources; reiterating Council plans to embed this into existing process and procedure. Officers also highlighted that there will likely be a sharing of resources throughout this process.

Officers explained to us that a steering group has been established to oversee this evolving process, and that the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) will also offer assistance; focusing on the organisation and recruitment of the Performance Panel based on existing corporate peer challenge concept. Members did raise concerns over WGLA support, querying exactly what support will be available and in what form.

The Panel noted that Audit Wales will review whether sufficient arrangements are put in place by Swansea Council to discharge performance duties. Members raised concerns over the Audit process and whether an outcome-only audit was feasible, if there was to be no direct audit of process.

Members queried the timetable of work planned, as a continuous and constant process, and the measurements of strategic performance. Officers explained that this will need to be relevant and understandable.

Members commented on the nature of the process, challenging the role of Scrutiny in this, and Councillors in general. Officers explained that the Panel will be assessing the Council as a whole, via the panel performance assessment. Officers also explained that scrutiny will have a clear and important role to play in this process.

The Panel requested that a specific reference to the scrutiny function be incorporated into the process. Officers undertook to make clear and relevant references to the Scrutiny function in the context of this new guidance.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Chris Holley
Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
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