



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via MS Teams

Wednesday, 15 December 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P M Black
D W W Thomas

Councillor(s)

P R Hood-Williams

Councillor(s)

L James

Other Attendees

Rob Stewart
Mark Thomas

Cabinet Member - Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)
Cabinet Member - Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Officer(s)

Matthew Perkins
Emily Davies
Ben Smith

Group Leader Waste Management
Scrutiny Officer
Chief Finance Officer and S.151 Officer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): P Downing, M H Jones, P K Jones, J W Jones, I E Mann and B J Rowlands

46 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

47 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

48 Minutes of Previous Meeting(s)

The minutes of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel meeting, held on 16 November 2021, were agreed as an accurate record.

49 Public Questions

There were no public questions

50 Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Report 2020-21

Cllr Mark Thomas presented the report to the Panel, outlining the main focus areas. Matthew Perkins, Group Leader Waste Management, also attended to aid discussions and answer questions. It was noted that:

- Recycling target of 64% achieved last year, despite height of the Pandemic. Noted as an incredible effort by all staff and crews.
- Public maintained recycling effort throughout the Pandemic; slight increase in residual black bag waste, possibly due to working from home routines.
- On course this year to reach target, although potential to dip slightly from 64.4% to 64%.
- Swansea Council ranked 17th out of 22 local authorities in Wales – noted that most other authorities send to Energy From Waste schemes.
- Noted some distortion of these figures, comparing urban and rural authorities.
- Swansea Council will move away from landfill, towards an Energy From Waste facility. More details will follow in the new year, following finalisation of contracts.
- Panel Members queried the Energy From Waste scheme and if there will be large savings in landfill costs. Officers explained that Energy From Waste is a more costly process, however, by closing the landfill site the operational costs are reduced thereby being more cost efficient going forward.
- Members questioned whether the range of items collected for recycling would be expanded. Officers explained that there are numerous materials, such as textiles and electricals, that could potentially be collected. Officers did highlight that the new Welsh Government Strategy will roll out in 2025 to target new material.
- New 'Extended Producer Responsibility' and 'Deposit Return Schemes' are set to be implemented over coming years.
- Officers discussed the possibility of collecting batteries and taking these out of the waste stream.
- Cardboard collections have increased during lockdown, as home deliveries increased. Swansea Council collection vehicles were able to cope with this change in waste composition.
- Practical considerations in relation to housing type / flats and storage of numerous bin containers.
- Para 3.3 APR – Deposit Return Scheme (DRS): Members queried the link between possible drop in recycling rate. DRS system will target high quality recyclable materials, and therefore out of the Council collection service.
- Energy from Waste (EfW) – Members queried if this would add to carbon footprint in terms of vehicles travelling out of county. Officers explained that there are no such facilities within county and therefore added transport costs, however, cost would counter-balance with the cessation of our creation of landfill waste.
- New Welsh Government guidelines will require a move away from landfill by 2025.
- Currently no zero-cost ways of waste disposal.

- Carbon metrics will help monitor operations and processes.
- The Panel noted the fantastic operation of the plant(s) during the Pandemic, complementing all involved in this planning and operation.
- Members queried whether stocks of green bags were low. The Panel heard that although levels did become low, the Council is now fully stocked and going forward will order half-yearly supplies to avoid any future shipping delays. Deliveries will also be made more frequently to outlets.
- Members raised concerns over fly tipping in relation to collection of wood.
- Officers explained that regarding hazardous wood, NRW have provided guidance about sorting wood, including separate outlet requirements for hazardous wood (painted or treated). Officers undertook to clarify further information regarding hazardous wood.
- The Panel discussed the possibility of moving the Tip Treasures recycling shop, although understood that storage issues may prevent re-location into the City Centre.

51 Pothole & Carriageway Work Progress (verbal update)

- Cllr Thomas praised the workforce and staff involved in this area.
- Despite the Pandemic, work has continued to progress
- Approximately 3500 potholes filled this year to date.
- Swansea Council has a 48 hour pledge to remedy potholes reported.
- Between 95% and 100% of reported potholes are filled each month within the 48 hour period.
- Highways maintenance budget (approximately) £5.3M to include some Welsh Government grant funding.
- The PATCH (Priority Action Team for Community Highways) initiative – usually runs from March to November, however has been extended to a 12 month period this year, with two teams working October to March.
- All wards previously had 5 days attendance allocated under the PATCH initiative. This allocation has now extended for two and three-member wards.
- 200,00sq/m of highway resurfaced this year to date.
- 30,000sq/m of anti-skid road surface has been installed across Swansea.
- Regardless of extra investment, projects need to be prioritised on a risk basis depending on condition of road and other factors such as network importance.
- Members queried whether the cost of materials has increased in line with the petroleum industry. The Panel will request further information regarding this point.

52 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring 2nd Quarter 2021/22

Cllr Rob Stewart attended to present the report and answer questions. Ben Smith, Chief Finance Officer, also attended to aid discussions.

- Advance sight of recommendations to Cabinet.
- S2.3 – emphasises that although overspend on services, even bigger spend due to COVID.
- S2.7 – monthly claims against additional COVID expenditure (April to September), and first and second quarter claim for loss of income as a result of

COVID in relation to the services, have been submitted to Welsh Government (WG).

- S2.9 – £1m was set aside in the budget for the potential costs relating to the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy, and, £3.25m was set aside to meet any specific and significant inflationary increases arising in year.
- S3 – Contingency Fund Provision for 2021/22 - increased figure from previous year, reflecting additional mitigation against any repeated overspending as a result of the Pandemic.
- S4 - The position reported reflects the best-known current position and shows a net £15.9m of shortfall in service revenue budgets, almost entirely in relation to anticipated costs/loss of income because of the Pandemic.
- S5 – Capital Budget - Expenditure to 30th September 2021 is £69.3m
- S6 - Housing Revenue Account - The economic impact of the Covid pandemic on rent collection rates is being closely monitored.
- Appendix A summarises overall position, main concerns over level of Council Tax not collected.
- The Leader outlined positive position at Q2, noting positive trajectory and, despite risks such as inflation and COVID, hopeful that Council will remain in a positive position come Outturn.
- The Leader highlighted some risks of pay awards and extra measures in terms of recruitment.
- Members queried the contingency fund £35,000 on Welsh Translation costs. Officers explained that this was not outsourcing, but an indicative allocation for an additional member of staff.
- Possible that Council Tax losses will be met by future WG grant support, but this is yet to be assured.
- Further mitigation is anticipated from the Apprenticeship/Inflation provision of £3.25m and Contingency fund of £12.2m.
- Net forecast underspend for the Council of circa £4.7m.
- Noted that the whole of the contingency fund, including the base £3.6m and the one off £10m brought forward, was being used to fund the short fall in the service budgets and ultimately create the resultant net underspend and headroom of £4.7m.
- Panel members noted that the one off carry forward sum was thus not available in future years as it stood, and thus could reasonably conclude that if the budget performance were repeated next, would otherwise be overspent by £5.3m if the contingency fund was not otherwise carried forward.

53 Work Programme

The Panel noted the Work Plan.

54 Letters

The meeting ended at 3.15 am