



## Report of the Convener

### Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel – 6 September 2022

## Role of the Performance Panel

<b>Purpose:</b>	As it is the first meeting of the municipal year (and Council term) this report has been written to help to give clarity and ensure understanding of the role of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel. It is also designed to aid the discussion on effective working.
<b>Content:</b>	A description of the role of Performance Panels is provided, the focus of the Service Improvement and Finance Panel, and link to relevant Council Priorities / Policy Commitments.
<b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discuss the role of the Panel and effective working</li></ul>
<b>Lead Councillor:</b>	Councillor Chris Holley, Convener of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
<b>Lead Officer &amp; Report Author:</b>	Rachel Percival, Scrutiny Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:rachel.percival@swansea.gov.uk">rachel.percival@swansea.gov.uk</a>

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Within the Council's arrangements for Overview & Scrutiny, the Scrutiny Programme Committee is responsible for developing a Scrutiny Work Programme and managing the overall work of scrutiny to ensure that it is as effective as possible.
- 1.2 The broad aim of the scrutiny function is to engage non-executive councillors in activities to:
  - provide an effective challenge to the executive
  - help improve services, policies, and performance
  - engage the public in its work
- 1.3 At the same time the Committee must ensure that the work of scrutiny is:
  - manageable, realistic and achievable given resources available to support activities
  - relevant to council priorities
  - adding value and having maximum impact
  - coordinated and avoids duplication

- 1.4 In order to discharge the work of Scrutiny, the Scrutiny Programme Committee can establish informal Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.

There are two types of Panel:

- Inquiry Panels will undertake discrete in-depth inquiries into significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis.
- Performance Panels will provide ongoing in-depth monitoring and challenge to particular services / service areas

- 1.5 The Committee has established six Performance Panels, each with a specific focus:

- Service Improvement & Finance
- Education
- Adult Services
- Child & Family Services
- Development & Regeneration
- Climate Change & Nature

- 1.6 Panel meetings will typically involve consideration / assessment of service performance reports from Cabinet Members, with support from lead officers, and discussion of issues arising. Where necessary, Panels will drill down into specific matters. Panels may request relevant reports on activities, performance and information that will help it to assess progress regarding the Council's work, commitments, and implementation of agreed plans.

- 1.7 Performance Panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant Cabinet Members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, holding them to account for service performance, quality and improvement.

- 1.8 The Committee also determines the frequency of Performance Panel meetings that can be supported within the overall Scrutiny Work Programme. Performance Panels will meet on an on-going basis during the Council term until otherwise agreed by the Committee. Accordingly, Panels will develop a work plan for meetings that effectively discharge their responsibilities and Committee expectations.

- 1.9 Non-executive councillors who are not members of the Committee have the opportunity to participate in Panels and other informal task and finish groups. The membership of Panels and Working Groups is determined by the Committee. The Committee will appoint Panel Conveners in the first year of a Council term, however, has agreed for Performance Panels to then re-confirm / appoint their Convener at the start of every subsequent municipal year. There are no fixed number of seats on Panels, however, more than one political group should be represented on each and should be of a manageable size in terms of team working and effective questioning. A minimum of 3 members should be present at all meetings.

- 1.10 Performance Panel Conveners are required to provide the Scrutiny Programme Committee with regular progress reports on the work and

impact of their Panels. Performance Panel conveners can attend meetings of the Scrutiny Programme Committee as co-opted members.

- 1.11 Panels and Working Group meetings are accessible to the public, just as the Scrutiny Programme Committee. Agendas, reports, letters relating to scrutiny activities are published on the Council's modern.gov online platform:

<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1&LLL=0>

## 2. The Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

- 2.1 The Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel is responsible for ongoing monitoring of the Councils finance and performance matters. Last year the Panel looked at:

- Pre-decision of the Annual Budget and medium term financial plan
- Quarterly Financial Budget monitoring
- Quarterly Performance monitoring
- Welsh Language Standards
- Byelaws
- Revenue Reserves
- Planning Performance
- Revenue Outturn, HRA Outturn and Capital Outturn and Financing
- Peer review and Self-Assessment of Local Government Elections Act 2021
- Swansea Airport
- Recycling and Landfill
- Potholes and Carriageways
- Sustainable Swansea
- Property Investment Fund Strategy

- 2.2 The Panel currently has a membership of 8 councillors.

- 2.3 In accordance with the agreed Scrutiny Work Programme, the Panel will meet monthly.

- 2.4 The Panel will write to the relevant Cabinet Members, to convey its views including suggested action, arising from meeting discussions. Letters, and responses where requested, are reported back to the Panel for comments and discussion as necessary.

- 2.5 Corporate Objectives / Council Policy Commitments:

- 2.5.1 The Council's Corporate Well-being Objectives are:

- **Safeguarding** people from harm – so that our citizens are free from harm and exploitation.
- Improving **Education & Skills** – so that everyone in Swansea gains the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life.
- Transforming our **Economy & Infrastructure** – so that Swansea has a thriving mixed use City Centre and a local economy that will support the prosperity of our citizens.
- **Tackling Poverty** – so that every person in Swansea can achieve their potential.

- Delivering on **Nature Recovery and Climate Change** – so that we maintain and enhance nature and biodiversity in Swansea, reduce our carbon footprint and tackle climate change.
- **Transformation & Future Council** development – so that we and the services that we provide are sustainable and fit for the future.

2.5.2 Policy Commitments 2022-27 recently adopted by Council (7 July 2022) are **appended**.

2.5.3 Progress / achievement against objectives, commitments, and implementation of agreed plans will need to be monitored between the Performance Panels. The Service Improvement & Finance Panel has overview of corporate performance and finance, but will need to avoid duplication with the other Panels, who may be looking at specific objectives / policy commitments.

### **3. Support**

3.1 Performance Panels have the dedicated support of a member of the Council's Scrutiny Team. This lead Scrutiny Officer will assist with work planning and project-manage scrutiny activities and help to ensure that things run smoothly, for example by:

- directly supporting meetings
- liaison with Cabinet Members, departments, partners and the public
- contacting and arranging witness sessions
- carrying out research and arranging evidence gathering
- carrying out and assisting with any consultation and public engagement exercises
- helping to keep the work to time
- capturing and reflecting back the ideas, evidence gathered and any key issues that have been highlighted
- assisting in the drafting of scrutiny letters and reports
- promoting work using social media and other methods of communication

3.2 The Corporate Management Team and Service Departments are also an essential source of advice and support. Engagement with departments will be important in providing context for areas of work, knowledge about policies and service delivery, and technical expertise.

3.3 The Committee should recognise that resource constraints may have an impact on the scrutiny activity and delivery of work plans. Being focussed, proportionate and flexible will be important as we carry out scrutiny.

### **4. Effective Working**

4.1 The Panel is encouraged to consider how it can work more effectively, for example in its preparation for meetings, and think about its approach to issues including the following:

- Developing Questions and Questioning Strategy
- Use of short Pre-meetings / Post meetings

- Team / Inclusive Working and Communication
- Decorum at meetings
- Meeting times / length
- Any other practical considerations

**Background Papers:** None

**Appendices:** None