



To:
**Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet
Member for Corporate Services and
Performance**

BY EMAIL

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Overview & Scrutiny

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2 February 2023

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance concerning the meeting held on 17 January 2023 and the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2022/23. This letter requires a response by 23 February 2023.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On the 17 January, the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2022/23. The Panel are grateful to Richard Rowlands, Corporate Performance Manager, for attending to discuss and answer questions. Our observations focused on the following areas.

We were informed that out of the 27 comparable indicators in the report, 14 showed an improvement, 4 showed a decline but within 5% of the previous result and 9 showed a drop in performance, 2 of these drops were attributable to the pandemic and the remaining 7 were not.

Safeguarding

In regards to safeguarding, we are aware of the 6 new indicators as the result of the introduction of a new social services performance framework by Welsh Government which have no previous comparable data and these will be supplemented by further indicators on corporate safeguarding, in line with the corporate development of Oracle fusion and also the development of the new corporate plan.

The overview informs us that safeguarding performance remains strong, but challenges also remain in terms of workforce capacity, which is an issue across health and social care. The shift to preventative and well-being approaches, which is envisaged by the social services well-being act which are yet to be fully embedded due to investment being directed towards health boards. The officer informed us that the Council is committed to investing in preventative models to allow people to remain at home, and that is reflected in the Council's investment into integrated enablement services and supporting informal carers.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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Education and Skills

In regards to education we raised our concern about attendance levels and although they are within 5% there is still a general decline. We are aware that school attendance varies from school to school and considered whether there were good practise examples from those with higher attendance figures.

Economy and Infrastructure

You officer reported a general improvement in Economy and Infrastructure compared to the same period last year compared to the same period last year in the number of projects with social benefit clauses and Beyond Bricks & Mortar in their contracts. There was a slight fall in the percentage of planning applications determined in 8 weeks due to vacancies within the team.

Tackling Poverty

We considered the time taken to process housing benefit and council tax reduction claims. While council tax reduction claims benefit from a new automated system, in the main these indicators have declined in quarter 2 similarly to the previous quarter 1. At the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Panel on 6 December looking at quarter 1, we were informed by the officer that this was due staff being diverted to processing Covid and other Welsh Government grants and this is still the case in quarter 2. At the December meeting the officer informed us that the Welfare Right Team had indicated they were not too adversely affected by this however the quarter 2 report also indicates additional strain from the loss of staff to other services. Your officer told us it will take some time before we can expect an improvement in performance in this area.

We therefore seek further reassurance that individuals claiming a benefit or grant are not being adversely affected by this delay and that housing benefits continue not to be adversely affected by their challenging circumstances. We will address this question to the Cabinet Member for Welfare.

Also in relation to the indicator reflecting the amount of benefits raised through securing rights and entitlements by the Welfare Rights Team, we noted that this indicator continues to decline which the comments explain is due to the impact of welfare reform, resulting in less benefit income being available to claimants. In addition there has been an increase in the need for appeals representation. Therefore this indicator is not reflective of the efforts and successes of the Welfare Rights Team in terms of securing income maximization and instead based on the amount raised. We wonder if a change to this indicator in relation to welfare reform in the current climate should be considered.

Transformation and Future Council

In regards to Transformation and Future Council Performance indicators it was noted that staff sickness continues to be impacted by Covid but in additional personal stress and critical illness has had an impact.

Nature Recovery and Climate Change

It remains difficult for us to comment on Nature Recovery and Climate Change until the new indicators are introduced. Your officer informed us they are aiming to introduce these for the first quarter of next year or as soon as possible thereafter in line with the work needed to define them and ensure data is collectable and reportable.

Your Response

We welcome your comments on any of the issues raised and request a formal response by 23 February in regards to the following -

- Your thoughts on the indicator relating to the amount of benefits raised through securing rights and entitlements by the Welfare Rights Team and consideration of whether an indicator that indicates income maximisation rather than income amount may be more suitable.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Chris Holley
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