



City and County of Swansea

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

**Multi-Location Meeting - Gloucester Room, Guildhall / MS**

**Teams**

**Tuesday, 8 November 2022 at 10.00 am**

**Present:** Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

P M Black  
J W Jones

**Councillor(s)**

P R Hood-Williams  
M W Locke

**Councillor(s)**

L James

**Cabinet Members**

Cllr David Hopkins  
Cllr Andrea Lewis  
Cllr Elliot King

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance  
Cabinet Member for Service Transformation  
Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture

**Officer(s)**

Ben Smith  
Richard Rowlands  
Karen Gibbins  
Karen Davies  
Carol Morgan  
Dave Meyrick  
Dave Bratley  
Rachel Percival

Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer  
Corporate Performance Manager  
Library Services Manager  
Principle Librarian  
Head of Housing and Public Health  
Programme Planning and Delivery Manger  
Housing Asset Manager  
Scrutiny Officer

**Apologies for Absence**

Councillor(s): B J Rowlands

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**16 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were no disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

**17 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips**

None

**18 Minutes**

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed.

**19 Public Questions**

There were no public questions received.

## **20 Review of Revenue Reserves**

Ben Smith the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer attended to give an overview of the Revenue Reserves. He talked through the following issues:

- The Council have added 100m to reserves over the last 3 years giving a total for earmarked reserves of £157m.
- Pay award remains unfunded and likely to be a significant draw from the reserves.
- All functions and services are under pressure and draws from reserves will be made in the current year with an estimated 20/25% of reserves being used in the current year.
- The Leader has announced at Council a pausing of the Economic Recovery Fund further to commitments already made, to provide some protection around the budget position.
- Additional capital decisions which require future borrowing may need to be funded through revenue contributions rather than the capital equalisation reserve.
- Using cash backed reserves in the short term means borrowing can be avoided for as long as possible until a more stable and affordable position for external borrowing is achieved.
- Section 151 officer advice is that the current Council needs to continue to prepare for significant change in service delivery that will inevitably impact on direct employment levels going forward.

## **21 Annual Review of Performance 2021/22**

Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance and Richard Rowlands Corporate Performance Manager presented the report. It was noted that:

- This report is a requirement of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and the Local Government and Elections Act 2021.
- The review assesses the progress made meeting the steps in the corporate plan, assessing the use of resources and the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements.
- The review identifies areas for improvement. The corporate plans are measured over a five year period and other measures are ongoing.
- The procurement scrutiny inquiry is referenced in the report but the final report to Cabinet was made after the time frame of this report.

## **22 Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report**

Cllr Elliot King, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Culture, Karen Gibbins, Library Services Manager gave an overview of the Report. Karen Davies, Principal Librarian was also in attendance. They talked through the following:

- The reporting period of 2020/2021 covers the pandemic time when libraries were temporarily closed. Despite this all 12 entitlements were still met during this time.
- eBooks saw a huge increase due to an investment of £500,000 investment in eBook titles.
- There has been a reduction in borrower numbers which is being addressed.
- Swansea remains in the bottom quartile in libraries for qualified staff.
- Apprenticeship schemes and external funding are utilised where possible to support staff development.
- Providing access to free broadband and Wi-Fi in public libraries was essential during the pandemic.

## **23 Welsh Housing Quality Standards Annual Update**

Cllr Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Service Transformation, Dave Meyrick, Programme Planning and Delivery Manager presented the update with Carol Morgan, Head of Housing and Public Health and Dave Bratley, Housing Asset Manager also in attendance. It was noted that:

- WHQS was introduced by Welsh Government in 2002 to improve social housing within Wales.
- The standard requires a number of elements to ensure compliance.
- 70% of our homes are now fully compliant, which is up 13% from the previous year.
- Of the 30% acceptable fails, 15%, were due to the residents declining the opportunity to have a Council kitchen or bathroom installed and the other 15% due to program planning. Acceptable fail is a recognised component part of WHQS compliance.
- During this year the Council spent £546m on their properties. £381million of this was from rent revenue contributions and £165m pounds from Welsh government Major Repairs Allowance Grant. None of this came from Council Tax revenue.
- WHQS has had an economic impact in the locality including job opportunities and the building economy.
- 72% of residents said the delivery of the work was either good or excellent.
- 75% of residents expect expressed a positive opinion about the local authority on the Welsh Government STAR survey.
- WHQS will remain a legal requirement and programs are in place to meet the current standards.
- New WHQS standard will be introduced on the 1st of April and will introduce new measures including decarbonisation.
- The cost to meet the new standards may be in the region of £875m. £423m is currently set aside to meet the current standard but falls short of what will be required for new standards.

Further information about the new standards will be received in due course from Welsh Government.

## **24 Letters**

No comments were made on the attached letters to Cabinet Members.

**25 Work Plan 2022/23**

No comments were made on the Work Plan.

The meeting ended at 11.43 am

**Chair**