



City and County of Swansea

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

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, 17 February 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor C A Holley (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

P M Black
L James
J W Jones
D W Thomas
S Jones
W Fitzgerald

Councillor(s)

P Downing
M H Jones
I E Mann
W Thomas
M White

Councillor(s)

P R Hood-Williams
P K Jones
B J Rowlands
L Jones
S Gallagher

Cabinet Members

Rob Stewart

Cabinet Member - Economy, Finance & Strategy (Leader)

Officer(s)

Emily-Jayne Davies
Michelle Roberts
Ben Smith

Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Officer
Chief Finance Officer & Section151 Officer

Apologies for Absence

D Helliwell and T Hennegan

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

No disclosures of interest were made.

2 Prohibition of Whipped Votes and Declaration of Party Whips

No declarations were made.

3 Minutes

The Panel considered letters and minutes from previous meetings and agreed the minutes of the meeting on 20th January 2021 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 Public Questions

No questions were submitted by members of the public

5 Budget Proposals 2021/22 - 2023/24 - pre-decision scrutiny

The Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel, including members of the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel, met to consider this year's Annual Budget Proposals. The Joint Social Services Scrutiny Performance Panel and the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel both met in the days running up to the meeting and their feedback was considered.

6 Summarising Views for Feedback to Cabinet

Joint Social Services

- The Panel feels it is vitally important we ensure there is sufficient money allocated in the budget to provide additional health and wellbeing support to staff following the pandemic. The Panel is keen to see a joint venture with the Health Board in terms of support for staff.
- Very pleased to see the budget situation for Social Services this year, with an increase in the overall budget and very little in terms of cuts. However, the Panel is aware that there is a great deal that needs to be achieved with this money.
- The Panel is concerned that it only sees the net budget. It would be useful to see details of the income streams as well as expenditure. Officers have agreed to work with Cabinet Members to provide this information.
- The Panel would like to support the budget process in any way it can and therefore intends to revisit the budget again later in the year to closely monitor progress.

Education

- We were satisfied overall with this year's budget as it relates to education matters.
- We welcome the capital spend and the 3.3% gross uplift in the delegated schools budget.
- We were pleased that Education continues to be one of the top priorities for Swansea Council.
- Is there provision in the budget to ensure the reimbursement of any expenses incurred by those schools that remained open throughout the Covid period?
- We asked what savings proposals there are in relation to School Transport. We were informed that the proposals that are for consultation will be put to Cabinet in March. Can they be circulated to the Education Scrutiny Panel, once they are available?
- Has the cost of the potential new footprint of ERW and the closing down of the existing ERW structure been factored into the budget moving forward?
- We would like to take this opportunity to thank Schools, Governors and the Education Department for their excellent work over the past year. Particularly how they have managed the challenges that this Covid period has brought.

Natural Environment

The recruitment into new posts, as an outcome of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry, should reflect the following recommendations:

- Planning Ecologist to be a full time role (rather than part-time as currently advertised)
- Biodiversity Officer to be a full time role (rather than part-time as currently advertised)
- Climate Action Officer should be 0.5 (rather than 0.2)

Development and Regeneration

- In terms of the risk associated with the City Deal, the Panel would like clarification on the level of borrowing and how this will affect revenue streams in the future.
- The Panel seek clarity over how many jobs will be created to reflect the amount of investment in the City Deal projects.
- The Panel would benefit from a more detailed breakdown on what money has been spent in relation to the City Deal and on what is planned currently.
- The Panel would like a clear understanding of risks around ongoing capital costs and the income from the new developments.

Service Improvement and Finance

- The Panel noted the Budget this year is unique and unprecedented. That it is very much a live document and it is the first time that a substantial part of the budget is based on what might happen. We thank officers and staff for their hard work and acknowledged the quick turnaround of funding distribution.
- The Panel would like a greater understanding of the risk register with regards to ongoing revenue costs, with the uncertainties around pay back from Welsh Government
- The Panel note that the Budget is a live document subject to change, and as such it has been difficult to scrutinise to full effect this year.
- We raised concerns about the financial and performance impact on Council finances of the future multiple joint committees that will be levied against the budget, and the risks of such committees to the Council Budget.

The meeting ended at 11.42 am