

Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching remit of the Panel is to ensure that the Council's budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient, acting as a critical friend for the Cabinet and helping to ensure accountability. In addition, this Panel is responsible for ongoing monitoring of Council performance in relation to development and regeneration, including the 'health' of the city centre, wider economic development across Swansea and discussion about progress on the Swansea Bay City Deal. The Panel meets monthly.

2. Key Activities

The last update to Committee for the Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Panel was April 2024. The below table updates on all meetings since the last update. From these 5 meetings, 8 letters were sent to Cabinet.

Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance	
Meeting	Topic(s)
7 May 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning Annual Performance Report 2. Audit Wales report "Springing Forward" - Workforce 3. Pre Scrutiny of Updated FPR7 for Palace Theatre Refurbishment
11 June 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audit Wales Report Sustainable development? – making best use of brownfield land and empty buildings" (national) 2. Audit Wales Report – Use of Performance Information: service user perspectives and outcomes (local) 3. Draft Work Plan 2024/25 and Role of the Panel
6 August 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revenue Financial Outturn 23-24, Revenue Outturn 23-24 (Housing Revenue Account) and Capital Outturn and Financing 23/24 2. City Centre Retail Update
10 September 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q4 and End of Year 2023/24 Performance Monitoring Report 2. Audit Wales Report – "Springing Forward"– Assets (local)
8 October 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q1 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 2. Update - 71-72 The Kingsway 3. Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25 4. Annual Review of Performance 2023/24

3. Achievements / Impact

Financial Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Revenue Financial Outturn 23-24, Revenue Outturn 23-24 (Housing Revenue Account) and Capital Outturn and Financing 23/24 and the first quarter of the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25.
- The previous years outturns highlighted approximately £40m worth of slippage which although quite sizeable was not dissimilar to previous years and will roll over into the following year.
- Clarity was given to the Panel around lending protection.
- Officers highlighted the short term positive outlook, with challenges on the horizon, particularly for adult social care with pressures on homelessness, waste and children's services.
- £7m IT schools reserve which has now been given to schools. The Panel heard that this would need to be replenished over the forthcoming years. The officer was confident this would be fully replenished by the time its needed and will be spent on schools ICT infrastructure.
- The Panel raised concerns about timing of reports to scrutiny running sometime after cabinet meeting.
- The officer stated that there remain several uncertainties including the local government pay award, teachers' pay and teachers' pension costs. £16m of the contingency fund is allocated for spending in this financial year, however some of the allocations e.g. teachers pensions are contingency sums and may not be required. with additional sums from inflation provision allocated if these go higher than budgeted.
- The contingency fund is being used to cover overspends in Social Services and Homelessness as emergency triage action. The Panel discussed whether other funds like the capital equalisation reserve be used for overspends.
- In 2024-25 an estimated £12m less than budgeted would be needed from reserves this year. There is still a planned draw of £11m excluding schools which are likely to make a significant draw from schools reserves.
- The Panel requested additional information on the low capital spending from Education in the first quarter.

Performance Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Quarter 4 and End of Year 2023/24 Performance Monitoring Report, the Annual Review of Performance 2023/24 and the Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25.
- The Annual Review of Performance was curtailed because of illness but the new format was better and was noted as being lighter and easier to read than previous years, however it is still lengthy, and the Panel felt that getting feedback from the public will be challenging.
- It encouraged user friendly, simpler descriptions where possible particularly with the areas of continued improvement. Also targets for improvement which include language like "contribute to" or "focus on" will be difficult to quantify.
- The Panel raised questions regarding some the content and details of performance. These are then emailed to the relevant department. In relation to these reports emails were sent to Social Services and HR.

Development and Regeneration Monitoring

- Pre Scrutiny of Updated FPR7 for Palace Theatre Refurbishment

- This discussion was held in closed session.

- City Centre Retail Update

- The officer informed the Panel that a placemaking plan is being drafted for completion at the end of 2024. The Panel requested to see this once completed.
- Russell Greenslade, chief executive of Swansea BID attended and spoke positively about an increase in new businesses and investments in workforce although increased costs were a hinderance.
- The Panel received updates on several city centre developments including Y Storfa, the Hacer building, Castle Gardens, the Arena and Swansea Market.
- City centre development is ongoing but the Panel were concerned about costs and overruns.

- 71-72 The Kingsway Update

- The Panel heard that the building work was at 99% practical completion.
- Officers reported there was a positive response from potential tenants.
- The Panel were interested to hear if the site would create jobs or move jobs from elsewhere in the city, officers told them that predominantly they are from outside the city, the tenants currently in the city are upscaling so this will also create new jobs.
- The remainder of this discussion was held in closes session.

Planning - Annual Performance Report

- The Panel noted the Councils positive benchmarking against other Welsh Authorities, pressure in resources and a historic backlog from the Pandemic.
- Welsh Government will carry out a consultation on the whole structure of fees over the next few months following the meeting in May 2024.
- The Panel requested further information on enforcement action and challenged the visibility of enforcement.
- Further information on the percentage/number of applications where developers have been unable to deliver their Section 106 agreement requirements was requested and subsequently provided.

Audit Wales Report – “Springing Forward” - Workforce

- This was a local report. The Panel were given an update on progress with recommendations.
- At the time of this meeting (May 2024) year one progress against the workforce strategy was reported as completed at recruitment was the planned top priority in year two. Officers propose a further follow up to the SPC in early 2025
- Overall, the Panel were encouraged by the report, and heard plans to roll out a development needs analysis which will identify skills gaps, with interventions designed to tackle the gaps and about the Strategic Equality Plan.
- An overarching workforce plan which will be published later in 2024.
- The Panel requested further information on reassurance that the Workforce Strategy goals would be monitored, with areas for improvement identified and improved upon.

Audit Wales Report - Sustainable development? – making best use of brownfield land and empty buildings”

- This was a national report. The Panel suggested the report could have recommended that Welsh Government change its guidance on Local Development Plans (LDP) to support the systematic approach suggested in the report.
- It raised concerns on the issues of bringing privately owned brownfield sites back into use and the additional costs compared to greenfield sites which can deter developers and remain sceptical that brownfield sites would be chosen over greenfield sites.
- It noted that Swansea Council have a good record of regenerating brownfield sites and felt a more proactive approach to councillor involvement could be taken by the Council.

Audit Wales Report – Use of Performance Information: service user perspectives and outcomes

- This is a local report. Since the report the Council has consequently carried out a recent resident survey, are participating in a WLGA organised national resident survey and have included more qualitative information to supplement the quantitative measures.
- The Panel felt that without consistency of performance measures, comparing data over time is much more difficult and would prefer making to changes to measures less frequently. We also referenced the work of scrutiny within the area of performance which was not noted in the Audit Wales report.

Audit Wales Report – “Springing Forward” – Assets

- This is a local report. The Council has accepted the report and responded accordingly to the recommendations.
- Officers stated that benchmarking is a historical challenge across local authorities and that local performance indicators are the preferred method.
- A five year programme of condition surveys to all buildings will start in September 2024 and will inform future capital maintenance budgets.
- The Panel queried the estimated backlog in building maintenance and heard that £211m was accurate, however reports will show this figure dropped due to the new Welsh Government methodology introduced in 2018. Officers did stress that the Council do a full investigation and survey and keep a comprehensive list of future requirements.
- The auditor also commented within the report on the strategic partnership with Urban Splash and concern that the Council are not relying on public sector subsidy and therefore reliant on private sector investment.
- Officers have offered to share the Annual Service Plan which contains several outputs and performance indicators with the Panel.

4. Future Work Programme

The programme for the remainder of this municipal year is as follows:

Meeting	Topic(s)
5 November 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of Revenue Reserves 2. Regeneration Project(s) Summary report
10 December 2024	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mid Term Budget Statement 2024/25 2. Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring 3. Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report
14 January 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Budget Proposals 2025/26 – 2028/29 2. Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25
February 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget incl Q3 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 2. Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25
11 March 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regeneration Project(s) Update – Swansea Bay Strategy 2. Achievement against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments for Development and Regeneration
8 April 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Review of Wellbeing Objectives 2. Q3 Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25 3. Campuses Project
6 May 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning Annual Performance Report 2. Freedom Leisure

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.