

Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update – April 2025

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 November 2024. The below table updates on all meetings since the last update. From these 4 meetings, 7 letters were sent to Cabinet.

Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance	
Meeting	Topic(s)
5 November 2024	1. Review of Revenue Reserves 2. Regeneration Project(s) Summary report
10 December 2024	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	1. Budget Proposals 2025/26 – 2028/29 2. Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 3. Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25
18 February 2025	1. Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget incl Q3 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25

3. Achievements / Impact

Financial Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Review of Revenue Reserves, Mid Term Budget statement 2024/25, Budget Proposals 2025/26-2028/29, Quarters 2 and 3 of the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25 and pre decision scrutiny of the annual budget.
- At outturn the officer recommended to add £2m to general reserves bringing general reserves to £12m and an additional £6m to HRA reserves which was approved by Cabinet. With this addition when compared to other authorities in Wales, general reserves are now mid table and HRA reserves are towards the top of the table.
- The Panel were informed that earmarked reserves remain adequate and sufficient for the risks, size and scale of the Authority.

Appendix 2

- During budget discussions, the Panel noted the net investment of around £50m into services. The current pressures in social services, housing and homelessness were highlighted.
- The Panel requested more details on several budget saving proposals which were provided.
- The Panel raised several points as part of its pre scrutiny of the annual budget. It acknowledged the lack of detail on National Insurance contributions and an expected further settlement. It noted that the Capital Equalisation Reserve is now being used to support the budget and that commercial sensitivities and a lack of background information make scrutiny of budgets challenging.

Performance Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 2.
- The report was noted and several questions relating to Social Services performance were passed to the Adult Social Services Scrutiny Panel.

Development and Regeneration Monitoring

- The Panel were given an update on several city centre developments.
- The target opening for Debenhams was given as October 2026. This was later than the Panel expected however they heard that long lead in times are common in the retail industry.
- Y Storfa is estimated for practical completion at the end of 2025. The Panel asked about slippage and heard that delays were caused by the challenges of reconfiguring the site to meet the mix of uses the site will have.
- The Panel have asked for Felindre to be included on their next summary report.
- The Panel have asked for several financial updates on current city centre developments, this is planned for April 2025.

Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring

- The Panel were pleased to hear that in 2023/24 the Council exceeded the current statutory recycling target of 64% by achieving 70.5%.
- It asked several questions relating to encouraging more residents to recycle, and heard some reassurance that promotion was taking place and resources at this time were appropriate.
- Discussion was held on maximising the amounts recycled. Packaging extended producer responsibility is due to come in 2026. This may discourage producers from difficult to recycle materials and the Council plans to carry out a trial recycling flexible plastics.
- The Panel has requested a report on the bailing plant, this is planned for June 2025.

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report

- The Panel were given an update on how well the Council is providing this legislative service. They heard that there are 16 quality indicators, seven of which have targets. Of these seven quality indicators, four were met in full, one in part and two were not met.
- It was noted that Swansea Libraries continue to perform well and compares well with other Authorities on virtual usage, significant increases in event attendance and in general use support.

Appendix 2

- It performs less well in terms of acquisitions including Welsh language books, the number of qualified staff and the amount of time staff devote to training.
- The Panel heard about an ongoing community hub project review looking at the future model of Community hubs. The Cabinet Member reassured members there were no plans to close any libraries. The Panel would like to see the community hubs report when comes out to have an input in any actions taken, based on its findings.
- It asked to be provided with footfall/usage of the individual libraries and their estimated stock levels to help Councillors answer any potential questions on the value for money of libraries. This was subsequently provided.

4. Future Work Programme

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

Meeting	Topic(s)
8 April 2025	1. Achievements against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments for Development and Regeneration 2. Update on City Centre Development Project Costs 3. Campuses Project
6 May 2025	1. Planning Annual Performance Report 2. Freedom Leisure

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.