

Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

1. Remit of the Panel

The overarching purpose of the Panel is to ensure that the Council's budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient

2. Introduction

The Panel is focused on contributing to the budget process and annual improvement process by providing a critical friend for the Cabinet, and helping to ensure accountability. This is particularly important when the Council is experiencing one of the most difficult budget settlements it has ever faced, with cuts to the Local Government Settlement increasing from an anticipated 1.5% to a potential 4.5% in 2015/16.

3. Key Activities

The Panel held 3 meetings between November and January. This has involved speaking to a range of Principal Officers and Heads of Service (9) about performance, improvement and budget monitoring. This has resulted in 3 convener's letters being sent to Cabinet Members and 3 letters sent to external organisations

The main issues covered were as follows:

11 November

- Mid-Year budget statement.
- Update on the ICT project - The Move to an In-House Managed ICT Service.

9 December

- Welsh Public Library Standards – Annual Performance Report
- Recycling and Landfill – Annual Performance Monitoring
- Overview of Commercial Service and Procurement

20 January

- 2nd Quarter Performance Monitoring Report, including Policy Commitments Tracker
- Annual Review of Performance
- 2nd Quarter Budget Monitoring Report, including Budget Savings Tracker

4. Achievements / Impact

The Panel has met with 9 Principle Officers and Heads of Service since October, holding them to account on a range of issues. This has included:

- **Budget Monitoring** – We have discussed issues around:
 - Unprecedented scale of challenge facing the council in delivering future required savings.
 - The Mid-Year Budget Statement is consistent with last year's report and MTFP.
 - Current overspend in 15/16 so it is unlikely that a balanced outturn can be achieved for this year at this time – will struggle to deliver 15/16 within budget.
 - The need to accelerate pace and scale in order to implement the Sustainable Swansea delivery programme.
 - Unusual year – draft budget proposals go to Cabinet on December 10th (without the indicative settlement from WG).
 - Use of reserves – mechanism used year on year then they are clawed back. Restructuring reserve for costs involved in setting up new models of delivery.
 - Updated Assessment of future funds position
- **Update on the ICT Procurement Framework for Oracle Support** – The Panel noted the progress on the ICT project and that we now have a hybrid model – some in-house, more technical support by the third party contract Infosys (also some onsite presence). The Panel was concerned about resilience of the new systems and whether any simulations/tests/scenarios have been carried out – what emergency preparations are in place. We also raised questions about the evaluation and monitoring of the project by Gartner and what has been implemented via self service and what will be implemented in the future. The Panel has requested a breakdown and outline of the savings achieved from the project. We will be looking at this and a review of the project at a later meeting.
- **Welsh Public Library Standards – Annual Performance Report** – The Panel discussed the fifth framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards and the performance of Swansea Libraries against them. We were pleased to hear that Swansea Libraries has met all of the 18 core entitlements in full and that the overall assessment by WG was a good performance. The service has the highest level of active customer use in Wales. The Panel had requested beforehand that the presentation address these questions:
 1. Specific activities and achievements.
 2. Key decisions that have been taken and impact / difference made.
 3. What you hope to achieve over the next 12 months and what the challenges are (e.g. resources / budget).
 4. Any specific issues where you would welcome the involvement of scrutiny.

The Panel noted that the service is maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction within the current climate and context of budget savings, also that the service is putting measures in place to try and achieve business as usual. The Panel will look at the results of the Libraries commissioning review and the different options for the service in a future meeting.

- **Commercial Service and Procurement** – The Panel had an update about the role of procurement and the current status of it within the Council. The Panel understood that the Council now has a wider commercialisation agenda and that it has to think in a more business like way. It will monitor and review the performance of the improvement plans that have been put in place for more informed spending and procurement processes.
- **Recycling and Landfill – Annual Performance Monitoring** - The noted the work that has been carried out to meet the statutory targets for Recycling and Landfill and the plans to address any target shortfalls. The Panel questioned the long term plans for Waste to Energy and Baling Plants and will look at the results of the commissioning review. The review could change the direction of the service and how it is delivered. Therefore, the Panel would like to wait and see what the outcomes of review will be.
- **Performance Monitoring** – The Panel has raised questions around local performance indicators in terms of aspiration and how external organisations view the authority’s performance. The Panel would like to discuss the performance of the authority with these organisations to assist their monitoring and evaluation.
- The Panel has written to BIDs, the Chamber of Commerce and Swansea Bay Business Club. Representatives from these organisations have been invited to attend future meetings. We have also requested training on how to analyse and interpret performance data in order to improve our monitoring of performance information.

5. Future Work Programme

- The Panel will continue to send letters to external organisations as a result of their attendance at meetings and to further explore topics on their work plan.
- The Panel will also to discuss performance with external organisations and plan to do some work around this.
- The Panel will continue with the Q & A sessions with Cabinet Members and to monitor the budget at key points throughout the year.
- The Panel will look at the review of the ICT project once it is available at a later date.
- The Panel will consider the draft and final budget figures in their next two meetings.

6. Action required by the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.