

Report of the Convener

Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel 2 August 2017

ROLE OF THE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL

Purpose	This report intends to provide members with the aims and objectives of the Panel and useful advice in relation to ways of working and questioning.
Content	The report contains the Terms of Reference of the Panel and some sample questions in relation to effective scrutiny of performance and finance.
Panel Members are being asked to	Discuss the role of the Panel and effective working as required
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Chris Holley, Convener of Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The main aim of scrutiny is to act as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet and other decision makers in order to promote better services, policies and decisions. Councillors involved in scrutiny will hold the Council's executive to account and examine the work of Council departments, as well as other public services.

2. Role of the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel

- 2.1 The Panel will meet monthly to ensure that the Council's budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient. Terms of Reference are attached in **Appendix 1**.

3. Membership

- 3.1 Having appointed a convener to lead this work, the Scrutiny Programme Committee invited expressions of interest from all scrutiny councillors to participate in this Panel. As a result the membership of the Panel is as follows; Chris Holley (Convener), Phillip Downing, Des Thomas, Peter Jones, Lynda James, Mary Jones, Jeff Jones, Paxton Hood-Williams, Brigitte Rowlands, Irene Mann.

- 3.2 Conveners are responsible for ensuring that Panels are operating effectively. A role description for conveners is attached in **Appendix 2** (taken from 'New Scrutiny Arrangements' Council Report 18 October 2012)

4. Developing Effective Ways of Working

- 4.1 The Panel should take the opportunity to discuss how it can work most effectively, for example in its preparation for meetings:

- Developing Questions and Questioning Strategy
- Use of short Pre-meetings / Post meetings / summing up
- Team / Inclusive Working and Communication
- Decorum at meetings
- Any other practical considerations

5. Developing Key Questions for Service Improvement and Finance Performance Scrutiny Sessions

The following advice is taken from; *Putting financial and performance management information to good use by the Centre for Public Scrutiny*

- 5.1 Looking at performance measurements - Performance management is about planning what you're going to do, reviewing what you've done and revising how you can do things in the future. To make the most of performance information, where you can add most value is not in reviewing existing historic information, but using that information to signpost future improvements.

5.2 Scrutinising Performance Questions

1. How does performance compare with previous years? Why is it better/worse?

2. How does performance compare with neighbouring authorities / the rest of Wales? Why is it better/worse/the same?

3. How does performance compare with the targets that have been set? Why is it better/worse?

4. Has the service been subject to any recent external inspections? If so, what were the findings?

5. How do service users/the public/partners view the performance of the service?

6. Is an improvement/decline in service performance linked to a decline/increase in resources available to the service?

7. How does the service contribute to the attainment of corporate objectives?
How is this contribution measured?

5.3 Looking at local finances - Financial scrutiny should be constructive and focused, but not overdetailed or trying to micro-manage budgets which are the responsibility of the organisation's financial professionals. Financial scrutiny should, instead, address strategic issues underpinning the budget.

5.4 Financial information may still seem impenetrable, but there are four strategic areas where scrutiny can add value to the council's management of its finances by looking at the big picture:

1. Scrutiny can challenge whether the processes are effective and accessible: is corporate planning linked with service planning, and is performance management linked with financial management?
2. Scrutiny can challenge how resources are allocated, monitor how they are used, and examine their impact
3. It can test out and make explicit whether the council is using its budget effectively to meet its priorities and show whether the council is achieving value for money
4. Scrutiny provides an additional and transparent challenge to the executive's management of the council's finances.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

1. Terms of Reference
2. Scrutiny Conveners Role Report

Terms of Reference

Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel

1. Why is this topic important?

- Scrutiny can make an important contribution to the budget process by providing a critical friend for the Cabinet and engaging non-executive councillors
- Scrutiny can make an important contribution to the annual improvement process, in particular to the Corporate Improvement Plan, Annual Review of Performance and the response to the Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report.
- The Welsh Government states that *“There is a clear role for an authority’s scrutiny function in its improvement processes: as part of its role in holding local decision makers and policy makers to account, and in its policy development role”*.
- The Welsh Government further states that: *“If an authority’s scrutiny processes are sufficiently developed, and there is clear evidence that this is the case then this scrutiny activity can be drawn upon by the Auditor General and relevant regulators in the course of their dealings with the authority¹.”*

2. What is the purpose of this Panel?

- To ensure that the Council’s budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient.

3. What are the possible lines of inquiry?

- Consider quarterly and annual corporate finance reports
- Consider proposals for the Council’s annual revenue and capital budgets including savings proposals
- Look at medium and long term planning arrangements
- Look at whether financial and policy objectives are aligned
- Consider quarterly and annual performance reports and whether any issues need to be looked at further
- Consider the Council’s overall improvement processes
- Look at the fitness of the Council to discharge the general duty to improve
- Look at the processes that the Council has gone through in the selection of its improvement objectives, including engagement with stakeholders
- Look at how the delivery of improvement objectives are monitored
- Provide challenge and new ideas

¹ Local Government Measure 2009 – Part 1 Guidance to Local Authorities – Wales Programme for Improvement para 3.29 & 3.30.

4. Scrutiny Support

Your Lead Scrutiny Officer is Bethan Hopkins and you can contact her at bethan.hopkins@swansea.gov.uk or Tel: 01792 636292

As at: 26 July 2017

Scrutiny Convener Role Description

1. General

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Convener will be responsible for a portfolio of scrutiny topics that they will manage and deliver. These topics, allocated by the Council's Scrutiny Programme Committee, will not be confined to a single subject or department. The scrutiny work led by these conveners will be done through informal task and finish groups / panels and the conveners will chair the meetings of these groups. Conveners will be accountable to the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

2. Providing leadership

- 2.1 To provide confident and effective management of the topics for which they are responsible.
- 2.2 To promote the role of scrutiny within and outside the council, liaising effectively both internally within the Council and externally with the Council's partners.
- 2.3 To contribute to the development of a balanced scrutiny work programme.
- 2.4 To ensure the programme takes account of relevant factors such as: the work programmes of the executive and other committees, strategic priorities and risks, and relevant community issues.
- 2.5 To demonstrate an objective and evidence based approach to scrutiny and to facilitate the identification of conclusions and recommendations accordingly.
- 2.6 To evaluate the impact and added value of scrutiny activity and identify areas for improvement.
- 2.7 To promote cross party working.
- 2.8 To keep any relevant deputies fully involved and informed to ensure they are able to cover the conveners' role as required

3. Managing the work programme

- 3.1 To ensure that the work programme is delivered.
- 3.2 To report on progress against the work programme to Council, and others as appropriate.
- 3.3 To liaise with officers, other members and community representatives to resource and deliver the work programme.

4 Effective meeting management

- 4.1 To set agendas containing clear objectives and outcomes for meetings.
- 4.2 To manage the progress of business at meetings, ensuring that meeting objectives are met.
- 4.3 To ensure that the necessary preparation is done beforehand.
- 4.4 To ensure that all participants have an opportunity to make an appropriate contribution

5 Community leadership

- 5.1 Where necessary to act as a focus for liaison between the council, community and external bodies in relation to the scrutiny function.
- 5.2 To build understanding and ownership of the scrutiny function within the community.
- 5.3 To involve fully external stakeholders for example, service users, expert witnesses and partners in scrutiny activity.
- 5.4 To support the involvement and development of scrutiny members
- 5.5 To encourage high performance from all scrutiny councillors in task and finish groups.
- 5.6 To assess individual and collective performance within task and finish groups and facilitate appropriate development.

6 Values

- 6.1 To be committed to the values of the Council and the following values in public office:**
 - a. Openness and transparency;
 - b. Honesty and integrity;
 - c. Tolerance and respect;
 - d. Equality and fairness;
 - e. Appreciation of cultural difference;
 - f. Sustainability.