

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.

3. Key Activities

The Panel held 5 meetings between February 2019 and July 2019. These meetings included a range of issues including budget monitoring, Annual Reports and Wales Audit Office Reports. This has resulted in 7 convener’s letters being sent to Cabinet Members. The issues covered were as follows:

February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budget Proposals
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friends of Community Centres/Green Spaces Report• Corporate Complaints Annual Report 18/19
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wales Audit Office Report – Welsh Housing Quality Standards• Welsh Library Standards Annual Report 18/19
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commissioning Reviews – An Overview
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wales Audit Office Report – Local Government Use of Data

4. Achievements / Impact

The continued close scrutiny of budgets has continued as again the Council has had a very challenging financial year in line with other Local Authorities. The monitoring of performance and the impact of these cuts has formed a large part of the Panel’s work. In addition to the annual reports and general performance monitoring, there has been the inclusion of reports compiled by the Wales Audit Office and their associated response and action plans for the Panel to consider.

The Panel has had a very busy year with some complex and substantial agenda items and has continued to provide effective scrutiny.

Budget and performance monitoring

The Panel regularly receives quarterly and annual performance and budget reports. This enables it to maintain a good level of understanding of performance and budgetary issues. It is closely monitoring a number of key issues and has suggested areas for improvement in monitoring and reporting of information including:

Reserves: The Panel are still closely monitoring the Council's reserves and what they are allocated against. We are concerned about this issue and will be visiting the issue on a regular basis.

Budget: The Panel understand that difficult decisions need to be made in respect to the budget again this year but the Panel will be looking intently at the changes and impact of these decisions including the formal budget meetings in February. We will be asking service groups for their views and impact on their services.

Wales Audit Office Reports: the Welsh Housing Quality Standards Wales Audit Office Report came to the Panel in March along with the associated response and action plan. The Panel were very pleased with all of the progress made to date and praised the team for their hard work and commitment to the WAO recommendations. We expect more to come to the Panel in the coming year.

Libraries: The Panel were concerned about the changes to library services as they form integral 'hubs' and a wealth of information for communities. The Panel met with the relevant Cabinet Member in March and are disappointed by the changes in hours. We will be minded to look again at the impact of this service change.

Capital Spend: The Panel are monitoring the Capital Spend closely and the impact of this on performance. They are also looking at any slippage in the Capital Spend and will be asking questions relating to this. We are concerned about how performance has not improved. The Panel are looking to set up a working group to look at how capital spend it being undertaken and have greater scrutiny

Well-being and Future Generations Act: As a SIF Panel we are looking to see how the WBFGA principles are being embedded into policies and decisions from a finance and performance perspective.

5. New Items

The Panel also have some new items coming to the Panel for monitoring in the remainder of this year, including but not limited to;

- Equality Review Report
- Archives
- Wales Audit Office Reports