



Report of the Convener

Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

Annual Review of Work 2021-22

Purpose:	As the municipal year ends, it is good practice to reflect on the Panel's work, experience, and effectiveness.
Content:	A summary of the year's activities and achievements is provided.
Councillors are being asked to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect on the year's work; and• Share ideas to improve the effectiveness of Service Improvement and Finance scrutiny
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Chris Holley Chair / Convener of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel.
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Emily Davies, Scrutiny Officer E-mail: emily-jayne.davies@swansea.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1 As this is the final meeting of this municipal year, the Panel is invited to reflect on the year's scrutiny work, experience and effectiveness. Any ideas that will improve the effectiveness of the scrutiny of Service Improvement and Finance are welcome.
- 1.2 To aid panel members, a summary of the year's work is attached.
- 1.3 Some of the questions the Panel may want to consider:
 - What went well?
 - What did not go so well?
 - Has the Panel's work focused on the right things?
 - What have we learnt that will help us with future scrutiny?

2. Overview

- 2.1 The Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel monitors the Council's budget and performance measures. It also completes pre-decision scrutiny on a number of Commissioning Reviews where required.

2.2 The Panel has a core membership of 11 councillors.

3. Remit of the Panel

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

3.2 In practical terms this means:

- 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

4. Supporting Data

- Number of Panel meetings = 8
- Number of Convener letters = 12

5. Future Work Programme

5.1 Next year's plan will include most of the same performance and finance items it has received in the previous year and include a number of annual reports.

Appended:

A. Completed Work Plan 2021-2022

B. Panel Update for Scrutiny Programme Committee February 2022

Service Improvement and Finance – Scrutiny Performance Panel

Work Plan 2021/22

<p>Meeting 1 11th June 2.00</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirmation of Convener 2. Overview: <i>Understanding Financial Reporting</i> 3. Revenue Outturn, HRA Outturn and Capital Outturn and Financing 20-21 <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy 4. Draft Work Plan 2021/22 Panel to discuss/agree work plan topics for the coming year.
<p>Meeting 2 23rd June 2021 10.00</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welsh Language Standards Annual Report <i>Invited to attend:</i> Sarah Lackenby - Chief Transformation Officer Cllr Louise Gibbard – Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities Cllr Robert Smith – Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning & Skills 2. Overview: Byelaws <i>Invited to attend:</i> Craig Davies – Associate Lawyer
<p>Meeting 3 Monday 20th September 2.00</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q1 Budget Monitoring Report – 2021/22 <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy 2. Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Adam Hill - Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery and Performance Manager Cllr Andrew Stevens – Cabinet Member for Business Improvement & Performance
<p>Meeting 4 Tuesday 19th October 2021 9.30</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q1 2021/22 Performance Monitoring Report <i>Invited to attend:</i> Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager Cllr Andrew Stevens – Cabinet Member for Business, Improvement and Performance 2. Overview from Ben Smith: <i>Understanding Financial Reporting (Reserves)</i> 3. Review of Revenue Reserves <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and

	Strategy
Meeting 5 Tuesday 16 th November 2021 9.30	1. Mid-term Budget Statement (Verbal) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy 2. Planning Annual Performance Report <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Andrew Stevens – Cabinet Member for Business, Improvement and Performance Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations Phil Holmes – Head of Planning and City Regeneration Ian Davies - Development Conservation and Design Manager Tom Evans – Placemaking and Strategic Planning Manager 3. Swansea Airport (restricted) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery and Operations Martin Nicholls – Director of Place Geoff Bacon – Head of Property Services Alex O'Brien – Property Manager
Meeting 6 Wednesday 15 th December 2.00	1. Recycling and Landfill - Annual Performance Monitoring <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure Chris Howell – Head of Waste Management and Parks Matthew Perkins – Group Leader, Waste 2. Potholes & Carriageways (Verbal update) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr Mark Thomas – Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure 3. Q2 Budget Monitoring 2021/22 <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy
Meeting 7 Tuesday 18 th January 2022 9.30	1. Budget Proposals 2022/23 – 2025/26 <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Chief Finance Officer / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy 2. Q2 2021/22 Performance Monitoring Report <i>Invited to attend:</i> Richard Rowlands – Strategic Delivery & Performance Manager Cllr Andrew Stevens – Cabinet Member for Business, Improvement and Performance
Meeting 8 Tuesday 15 th	1. Annual Budget: Pre-Decision Scrutiny <i>Invited to attend:</i>

<p>February 2022 9.30</p>	<p>Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy</p> <p>2. Sustainable Swansea (verbal update) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Ben Smith – Director of Finance / S.151 Officer Cllr Rob Stewart - Cabinet Member for Economy, Finance and Strategy</p> <p>3. Property Investment Fund Strategy (Closed Session) <i>Invited to attend:</i> Cllr David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations Geoff Bacon – Head of Property Services Tom Rees – Property Investment Manager Alex O'Brien – Property Manager</p>
<p>Meeting 9 Tuesday 22 March 2022 9.30</p>	<p><i>Cancelled</i></p>

TBC:

1. **Annual Review of Well-being Objectives and Corporate Plan**
2. **Welsh Housing Quality Standards Annual Update - TBC for July 2022**
3. **Progress update on the Local Government Use of Data Action Plan** (delayed due to pandemic impacts and diversion of resources)
4. **Annual Complaints Report 2020-21**
5. **Sustainable Swansea** (Transformational delivery aspects)
6. **Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report** (delayed due to pandemic impacts, due from Welsh Government from April 4th 2022).

Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update to SPC

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. The Panel meets on a monthly basis.

2. Key Activities

Meetings have included a range of issues such as budget monitoring and annual performance reports as outlined in the table below.

Since the last update, in August 2021, meetings have resulted in a number of convener's letters to Cabinet Members. The issues covered were as follows:

Meeting	Topic(s)
20 th September 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q1 Budget Monitoring Report – 2021/22 2. Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021)
19 th October 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q1 2021/22 Performance Monitoring Report 2. Overview from Ben Smith: Understanding Financial Reporting (Reserves) 3. Review of Revenue Reserves
16 th November 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mid-term Budget Statement 2. Planning Annual Performance Report 3. Swansea Airport
15 th December 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recycling and Landfill - Annual Performance Monitoring 2. Potholes & Carriageways 3. Q2 Budget Monitoring 2021/22
18 th January 2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Q2 2021/22 Performance Monitoring Report 2. Budget Proposals 2022/23 – 2025/26

3. Achievements / Impact

Financial Monitoring

The Panel heard that within the Recovery Plan Service Transformation Programme, work continues to develop service delivery plans linked to savings targets and prioritisation of services.

Members queried ongoing issues with Council Tax collection, referring to the £2M shortfall reported. Members questioned whether Welsh Government will meet this shortfall. Officers acknowledged this was an on-going issue, given the strain on people's finances and confirmed that Welsh Government continues to monitor this issue.

The Panel requested a statement regarding the energy price increases, and the effect on Swansea Council. Officers undertook to provide a briefing note, which has now been received with thanks.

Performance Monitoring

The Panel asked questions in order to explore this work, and provide challenge on performance in relation to the relevant indicators.

The Panel heard that, overall, 81% of indicators have improved or stayed the same. We understood that the Council's response to the pandemic, whilst not necessarily reflected in the established performance indicators, has been extraordinary.

Members queried some indicators and why they have improved in such adverse circumstances, asking how indicators are selected. Officers explained that the indicators help to measure priorities within the corporate plan, and are selected specifically for that purpose.

Members raised their concerns over the general use of the term 'tackling poverty' as a descriptor, suggesting this term be reviewed in the near future. Members also queried how poverty is measured by Swansea Council and the standard definition used.

Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021)

The Panel received an overview of the guidance in Part 6 Performance and Governance provisions of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Officers explained that the essence of Part 6 is to see local Councils as 'self-improving organisations through a system based on self-assessment and panel performance assessment'.

Members commented on the nature of the process, challenging the role of Scrutiny in this, and Councillors in general. Officers explained that the Panel will be assessing the Council as a whole, via the panel performance assessment. Officers also explained that scrutiny will have a clear and important role to play in this process.

Planning Department Performance

Members queried why the Welsh Government had not required Annual Performance Reports to be submitted this year. Officers explained that workloads last year were too onerous across Local Authorities, and, additionally, a number

of issues have arisen this year in terms of introduction of temporary legislation for businesses to deal with pandemic adaptations.

Members queried whether the Council had filled vacancies within the planning department. The Panel heard that the department is fully staffed as of November 2021, however, some officers are employed on temporary contracts. Members noted the issue of staff recruitment / retention across the Council, commenting that the use of temporary contracts may not retain staff long-term.

The Panel held a detailed scrutiny discussion focused on the Planning Department, in addition to the Planning Annual Performance Report. Members felt that the investigation was very informative and helpful, suggesting that this should arise each year concurrently with the Annual Performance Report.

Swansea Airport

The Panel undertook pre-decision Scrutiny regarding the Update Management Report on Swansea Airport. Due to commercial sensitivities and the likely disclosure of exempt information (under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, paragraphs 14 and 16), the report was heard in private session. Further reports will be available in due course.

Recycling and Landfill - Annual Performance Monitoring

It was reported to the Panel that the recycling target of 64% was achieved last year, despite the challenges of the Pandemic. Members noted this as an incredible effort by crews and praised the efforts by all staff involved.

The Panel heard that Swansea Council will move away from landfill operations, towards an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility. We understand that more details on this will follow in the New Year, pending finalisation of contracts. Panel Members queried the EfW scheme and whether there would be savings in landfill costs. Officers explained that EfW is a more costly process, however, by closing the landfill site the operational costs are reduced, thereby being more cost efficient going forward.

4. Future Work Programme

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

Meeting	Topic(s)
15 th February 2022	1. Sustainable Swansea 2. Budget: Pre-Decision Scrutiny