

Service Improvement, Regeneration & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel Update

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

This is newly merged Panel of the Service Improvement and Finance and Development and Regeneration Panels, as agreed by the Committee in July.

The last update to Committee for the Service Improvement and Finance Panel was January 2023 and for Development and Regeneration was April 2023. The merged Panel first met in September 2023.

The below table updates on all meetings post and prior to the Panel merge since the last updates until November 2023. From these meetings **18** letters were sent to Cabinet.

Service Improvement and Finance	
Meeting	Topic(s)
17 January 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Budget Proposals 2023/24 – 2026/27 2. Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23 3. Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2022/23 4. Sustainable Swansea Update
14 February 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan: Pre-Decision Scrutiny
14 March 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Planning Annual Performance Report 2021/22 2. Annual Complaints Report 2021/22
18 April 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Review of Wellbeing Objectives and Corporate Plan 2023/28 2. Q3 Performance Monitoring Report 2022/23
9 May 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress update on the Local Government Use of Data Action Plan 2. Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2021/2022
27 June 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Road Repairs
Development and Regeneration	

15 May 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project Review - Swansea Arena 2. Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report
Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance	
5 September 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revenue Financial Outturn 22-23 and Revenue Outturn 22-23 (Housing Revenue Account) 2. Annual Performance Monitoring Report 2022/2023 3. Annual Review of Performance 2022/2023
26 September 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capital Outturn and Financing 2022/23 2. Quarter 1 2023/24 Performance Monitoring Report
17 October 2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audit Wales Report – Setting of Wellbeing Objectives 2. Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report

3. Achievements / Impact

Financial Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Budget Proposals 2023/24 – 2026/27, pre decision scrutiny of the Annual Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan, the Q2 and Q3 Performance Monitoring Report 2022/23 and the Capital, HRA and Revenue Outturns and Financing 2022/23.
- Regarding the budget, the Panel shared concerns about the tight timetable for the budget setting process, hindered by the timing of Welsh Government budget announcements. The Panel welcomed the increase in central funding, but felt it fell short when considering the level of inflation and other pressures, such as energy costs.
- Concerns were raised in the outturn reports that £3.8m is being carried forward for the Oracle project for the next financial year. It was therefore agreed for the Oracle Update Report to be brought for pre scrutiny with the Scrutiny Programme Committee in October.
- The capital outturn position reported a net underspend of £28.8m. Several large-scale schemes have added to the programme due to material overspending or reprofiling. Officers reported that the first quarter budget report of 2023/24 will reference a capital programme for the current year of more than £150m. This has been complicated by some significant cost overruns and the additional impact of challenges faced with the Copr Bay development.

Performance Monitoring

- During this period the Panel looked at the Performance Monitoring Report for Q2 and Q3 2022/23 and Q1 2023/24, the Annual Review of Performance and the Annual Performance Monitoring Report for 2022/23.
- The Panel noted 6 new indicators introduced because of the National Social Services Performance Framework introduced by Welsh Government.
- Due to several questions arising on road repairs the Panel agreed to invite Cllr Andrew Stevens to a future meeting. This was then held on 27 June 2023.

- It was noted that the speed of processing Housing Benefits and Council Tax reduction claims has declined. The Panel asked about measures to improve this and were informed of training of replacement staff which will take time to increase productivity levels.
- The Panel noted demands on Social Care workforce, waiting times, particularly in adult social care and the pressures on funding in the social care market for the 2022/23 Annual Reports.
- A new suite of indicators for Nature Recovery and Climate Change were introduced in Q1 2023/24. The Panel were concerned however that some indicators were too broad. Habitat, biodiversity, and pollution levels are all areas that merit monitoring and are not currently mentioned.
- The Panel have ongoing concerns with sickness levels. The Cabinet Member, Cllr Hopkins, suggested inviting officers to a future meeting to discuss the work that is being carried out in this area and the Panel plan to do this at a later date.

Sustainable Swansea Update

- Sustainable Swansea had been previously discussed a number of years ago and due the impact of the Covid pandemic a final report had been delayed. Some of this project has been superseded now by the subsequent Achieving Better Together program.
- The Panel recognised the difference Sustainable Swansea has made but were unsure how well the progress column clearly aligns with the intended outcomes.
- The Panel requested additional information including further information on the impact of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018, progress made in the Social Services catering review and how these meet the intended outcomes, more information on the Day Services Review and an update on whether feedback was collected from service users to gauge effectiveness and satisfaction.
- The additional information was provided. The Day services review was reported to be in its initial stages. Regarding service user feedback, the department are undertaking a large-scale consultation and will report findings to Scrutiny during September 2023.

Planning Annual Performance Report 2021/22

- Officers reported a significant increase in applications during this period. Additionally, the pandemic created a backlog of enforcement cases due to officers not being able to attend sites as easily, as well as the impact of staff vacancies.
- Concern was raised in regard to enforcement not being seen to be fully carried out and officers reassured the Panel that they are all investigated and dealt with accordingly just not all are within the target number of days.
- The Panel asked whether application fees could be increased in order to recruit more officers potentially temporarily to reduce the backlog of enforcement cases, however officers have written to the Minister to ask, and Welsh Government have said no at this point.
- Concerns were raised about the new Local Development Plan to identify lessons learnt that may avoid predictions not materialising.

Annual Complaints Report 2021/22

- Officers highlighted the suppression in complaints during lockdown followed by a surge post lockdown.
- The Panel requested additional information on complaints related to Communications and Customer Engagement and year on year trends.
- We asked if there is any data held that looks at year on year trends to see comparisons further back than the previous year, the officer said it would be possible to include this in subsequent reports in the future.
- Service delays and pressures during this period contributed to an increase in adult Social Services complaints.
- The Panel valued looking at the received compliments and recognised there is as much to learn from examples of good practise as from complaints.

Annual Review of Wellbeing Objectives and Corporate Plan 2023/28

- The Panel discussed the readability of the new Corporate Plan, with concern regarding the length of the document and how this may have affected the consultation survey response.
- The Panel were made aware of the challenging balance between a plan that is user friendly but also a document that meets legislative responsibilities and fulfils statutory guidance.
- Questions were raised regarding progress measurements with the officer reporting that this work is underway on a new suite of measures, the results of which will be brought to the Panel in the Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24.

Progress update on the Local Government Use of Data Action Plan

- This action plan resulted from the All-Wales study by the Welsh Audit Office into how councils were making use of data in a report originally published in December 2018. The pandemic had a profound impact on this work and delayed an update.
- The Panel noted the significant progress in all the 11 specific recommendations which are now considered closed and the new digital strategy 2023-28 was approved by Cabinet in April 2023.
- Staff training was discussed and the Panel felt there was a need for more training for Councillors on understanding what data is available and how data is used. This would support the Councillors carrying out performance related scrutiny but also in other areas of the Councillor role. The officer noted this request.

Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2021/2022

- The Panel learned there were 160 Welsh Language standards which local authorities are required to adhere to with 6 complaints made within the year.
- There was concern that 20% of translations are being outsourced externally due to an increase in service demand. They Panel wondered if it would be cheaper to increase internal staff rather than paying for external translators. The officer informed the Panel they would look into this.
- The Panel requested additional data on the cost of external translation compared to internal translation and historic data on how much translation had been carried out externally in the last few years.

Road Repairs

- The Panel were given an overview of routine repairs and planned maintenance.
- Several future challenges were raised including further marginal winters, carbon emissions from road resurfacing materials and road damage from traffic calming as this creates more wear and tear on the roads.
- Questions were raised by the Panel regarding the impact of electric vehicles, water ingress on potholes, water run offs, road closures, the planned maintenance list and statutory undertakers, damage from private developers, budgets and active travel.

Project Review - Swansea Arena

- The Panel were grateful for the attendance of the Arena Director and heard a summary of the Arenas first year of trading. Overall, the year had been positive while dealing with post covid recovery and adapting to the new building.
- Concerns about exiting the Arena car park were raised, traffic signals have now been adapted to deal better with clearing car park backlog.
- The Panel were concerned about the potential for a negative effect on other venues and competition for acts and were informed that there are positive working relationships between the different venues and an understanding of which events suit which venue.
- The venue expects a second positive year within the context of an ongoing post covid recovery.

Regeneration Programme / Project Monitoring Report

- The Panel received several public questions relating to Skyline.
- A summary of the numerous development and regeneration projects was provided to the Panel. This included an update on the Kingsway office development where Panel Members were concerned the next access route could be to the detriment of Picton Arcade business.
- The Panel asked officers to chase up the public information boards that have not yet been installed down Wind Street in regard to Castle Square.

Audit Wales Report – Setting of Wellbeing Objectives

- The Panel heard that overall, Swansea Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives and embedding its approach to engagement and performance monitoring will further strengthen this.
- The Panel appreciated the opportunity to ask Audit Wales questions at this session, particularly around benchmarking and measuring performance in areas like consultation.
- Concerns were raised for the potential cost implications of meeting wellbeing objectives in future. Reassurance was made that the council have provisions in place to budget for this.

- Audit Wales have taken on board the Panels suggestion to offer examples of good practice where benchmarking is not available.

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Performance Report

- The Panel pleased to hear about the hard work and post covid recovery of local library services sharing support and positive experiences.
- There is a trend to remove library book fines across Wales but in Swansea there is a large income pressure from the fines budget of about £50,000 and without an ability to offset that, fines in Swansea were reintroduced in April 2023.
- Welsh Government have raised concern regarding the lack of qualified library staff in Swansea. There are some plans to rectify this so the Panel will be interested to see if this has improved next year.
- Some recommendations were made by the Panel including ways to increase completion of children's questionnaires, increased advertising of the libraries' print programme and shared workspace provision.
- The Panel have requested an update about a Swansea Library of Things and are currently awaiting a response from the Cabinet Member.

4. Future Work Programme

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

Meeting	Topic(s)
14 November 2023	1. Q1 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – 2023/24 2. Regeneration Project(s) Update – Skyline/Copr Bay
12 December 2023	1. Mid Term Budget Statement 2023/24 2. Review of Revenue Reserves 3. Recycling and Landfill - Annual Performance Monitoring Report
16 January 2024	1. Budget Proposals 2. Q2 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 3. Q2 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24 4. Tourism Destination Management Plan Update
February 2024 (Date TBC)	1. Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Cabinet Reports: Annual Budget / Medium Term Financial Plan 2. Q3 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24
12 March 2024	1. Regeneration Project(s) Update (To be decided) 2. Achievement against Corporate Priorities / Objectives / Policy Commitments for Development and Regeneration
9 April 2024	1. Annual Review of Wellbeing Objectives and Corporate Plan 2. Q3 Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24
7 May 2024	1. Planning Annual Performance Report 2. City Centre Retail

5. Action for the Scrutiny Programme Committee

None.