



To:
Councillor Andrew Stevens
Cabinet Member for Business
Improvement & Performance

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Overview & Scrutiny

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9th November 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Business Improvement & Performance. This letter relates to the meeting held on 19 October 2021 and the discussions concerning the Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2021/22.

Dear Councillor Stevens,

On the 19 October 2021, the Panel met to discuss the Q1 Performance Monitoring Report 2021/22. The Panel are grateful to Richard Rowlands, Strategic Delivery and Performance Manager, and Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Resources, for their attendance and contributions.

The Panel asked questions in order to explore this work, and provide challenge on performance in relation to the relevant indicators. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussions and to share the observations of the Panel. Discussions focused on the issues outlined herewith.

It was reported that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has brought huge challenges and changes to the Council, its services and workforce. Officers highlighted the impact of the pandemic on reporting and the inevitable and significant impact on the usual areas of performance reporting across the Council.

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.

We heard that the reporting of performance against the *Safeguarding* priority has been disrupted this quarter, predominantly as a result of the local authority implementing the Welsh Community Care Information System and at the same time Welsh Government updating its performance framework with the introduction of new

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performance metrics. We understand from officers that the new suite of indicators should be accurately reported at Q2.

Officers explained to us that the impact of the pandemic, and associated demands, remains high - particularly in adult social care. We heard that demands across the health and social care system are extremely high and that hospitals are struggling to meet current demand, catch up on backlogs, manage Covid restrictions on capacity and manage the numbers of staff having to self-isolate.

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 concerns over greater demands from Welsh Government under the Peer Review & Self-Assessment (Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021). Officers confirmed that these new arrangements will be built into current workloads, aiming to limit the burden of new demands and embed this into existing process and procedure.

In relation to *Education and Skills* indicators, officers explained to us that published attendance data is still not available as a result of the pandemic and that attendance remains lower across Wales due to Covid-19. We also heard that authority-wide attainment measures for Foundation Phase, KS2 and KS3 are no longer collected by Welsh Government. We understand that in KS4 and A-Level age groups, awarded grades have been determined by schools themselves and that levels of appeals have been lower than expected.

It was explained to us that static indicators, in relation to *Economy & Infrastructure* performance reporting, are due to non-progression of projects; although it was reported that the majority of targets have been met this quarter. However, we also heard that the impacts of the pandemic on the construction sector are now becoming increasingly clear, with major shortages of construction materials likely to have an impact on programme and construction costs for the foreseeable future.

The Panel heard that the delivery of actions within the Swansea Economic Recovery Action Plan continues at pace, supported by deployment of the Council's economic recovery fund which has now commenced via a range of initiatives to stimulate economic activity and resilience within Swansea's local economy.

Officers explained that the majority of data, within the *Tackling Poverty* performance indicators, shows improving trends with the exception of two indicators ('The amount of welfare benefits raised through securing rights and entitlements by the Welfare Rights Team' and 'The average number of days all homeless families with children spent in Bed and Breakfast accommodation').

Officers explained to the Panel that in Q1 2020/21 the Council was in the height of the pandemic and saw less family homeless presentations due to the suspension of evictions. This had a direct impact on Council data and the comparable indicators.

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. Officers undertook to provide this definition, based on multiple sources and metrics (now received with thanks).

We heard that under the *Transforming Future Council* indicators, one had declined (number of forms completed online for fully automated processes). Members queried why there was not a higher uptake in online services, given the remote nature of working that many people have adapted to. Officers explained that the drop in this indicator is due to a very high uptake last year and that the figure this year remains high, although has lowered since last year's aberration and the unusually high uptake.

Members commented on the statistic regarding 'Number of data breaches which has resulted in an enforcement or monetary penalty notice being issued by the Information Commissioners Office' - these results being zero, and an impressive reflection on the Council.

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and we would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within, but we require no formal written response on this occasion.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

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