



To:
Councillor Rob Stewart
Cabinet Member for Economy
Finance and Strategy

BY EMAIL

Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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17th February 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy Finance and Strategy. The Panel met on 17th February 2021. This letter relates to the Annual Budget proposals.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 17th February, the Panel met to discuss the Annual Budget. The Panel are grateful to Cabinet Members and Officers who attended all the Panel meetings to provide information and answer questions.

Panel Members had the opportunity to scrutinise the Budget in relation to their performance Panels. Each Panel was then asked to produce the points they wish to raise.

Please find below the comments from each Performance Panel:

Joint Social Services

- The Panel feels it is vitally important we ensure there is sufficient money allocated in the budget to provide additional health and wellbeing support to staff following the pandemic. The Panel is keen to see a joint venture with the Health Board in terms of support for staff.
- Very pleased to see the budget situation for Social Services this year, with an increase in the overall budget and very little in terms of cuts. However, the Panel is aware that there is a great deal that needs to be achieved with this money.
- The Panel is concerned that it only sees the net budget. It would be useful to see details of the income streams as well as expenditure. Officers have agreed to work with Cabinet Members to provide this information.
- The Panel would like to support the budget process in any way it can and therefore intends to revisit the budget again later in the year to closely monitor progress.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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Education

- We were satisfied overall with this year's budget as it relates to education matters.
- We welcome the capital spend and the 3.3% gross uplift in the delegated schools budget.
- We were pleased that Education continues to be one of the top priorities for Swansea Council.
- Is there provision in the budget to ensure the reimbursement of any expenses incurred by those schools that remained open throughout the Covid period?
- We asked what savings proposals there are in relation to School Transport. We were informed that the proposals that are for consultation will be put to Cabinet in March. Can they be circulated to the Education Scrutiny Panel, once they are available?
- Has the cost of the potential new footprint of ERW and the closing down of the existing ERW structure been factored into the budget moving forward?
- We would like to take this opportunity to thank Schools, Governors and the Education Department for their excellent work over the past year. Particularly how they have managed the challenges that this Covid period has brought.

Natural Environment

The recruitment into new posts, as an outcome of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Inquiry, should reflect the following recommendations:

- Planning Ecologist to be a full time role (rather than part-time as currently advertised)
- Biodiversity Officer to be a full time role (rather than part-time as currently advertised)
- Climate Action Officer should be 0.5 (rather than 0.2)

Development and Regeneration

- In terms of the risk associated with the City Deal, the Panel would like clarification on the level of borrowing and how this will affect revenue streams in the future.
- The Panel seek clarity over how many jobs will be created to reflect the amount of investment in the City Deal projects.
- The Panel would benefit from a more detailed breakdown on what money has been spent in relation to the City Deal and on what is planned currently.
- The Panel would like a clear understanding of risks around ongoing capital costs and the income from the new developments.

Service Improvement and Finance

- The Panel noted the Budget this year is unique and unprecedented. That it is very much a live document and it is the first time that a substantial part of the

budget is based on what might happen. We thank officers and staff for their hard work and acknowledged the quick turnaround of funding distribution.

- The Panel would like a greater understanding of the risk register with regards to ongoing revenue costs, with the uncertainties around pay back from Welsh Government
- The Panel note that the Budget is a live document subject to change, and as such it has been difficult to scrutinise to full effect this year.
- We raised concerns about the financial and performance impact on Council finances of the future multiple joint committees that will be levied against the budget, and the risks of such committees to the Council Budget.

I will present these points to Cabinet at the meeting on 18th February 2021.

We welcome comments on any aspect of this letter but would like answers on the following points:

1. Could Cabinet provide their thoughts regarding a joint venture with the Health Board in terms of support for staff?
2. Is there provision in the budget to ensure the reimbursement of any expenses incurred by those schools that remained open throughout the Covid period?
3. Has the cost of the potential new footprint of ERW and the closing down of the existing ERW structure been factored into the budget moving forward?
4. Could the Natural Environment Panel recommendations, relating to the job vacancies, be implemented?
5. The Panel would like clarification on the level of borrowing, in relation to the City Deal, and how this will affect revenue streams in the future.
6. Can you clarify how many jobs will be created to reflect the amount of investment in the City Deal projects?
7. Can you provide a more detailed breakdown on what money has been spent in relation to the City Deal and on what is planned currently?
8. Can you provide further information about the financial impact on Council finances of the future multiple joint committees that may be introduced and be levied against the Council budget; inclusive of the risks of such committees to the Council budget?
9. Can you provide further information regarding the risks around ongoing capital costs and the income from the new developments?
10. Can you provide us with a risk register with regards to ongoing revenue costs, with the uncertainties around pay back from Welsh Government?

I will be presenting this information to you at Cabinet on 18th February 2021, however, I would be grateful if you could provide a written response to this letter by 11th March 2021.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'CH Holley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

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