



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

Dinas A Sir Abertawe

Councillor Rob Stewart
Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy
(Leader)

BY EMAIL

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14/2/17

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy (Leader) following the meeting of the Panel 7 February 2017. The main item on the agenda was the Council's Annual Budget.

Dear Leader,

**Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
7th February 2016**

We are pleased with your willingness to engage with scrutiny and provide a further opportunity for Members to directly ask you questions on the budget. We are grateful to you, Mike Hawes and Ben Smith, for attending our meeting on 7th February where you answered a wide range of detailed queries.

Following my attendance at the Special Cabinet Budget Meeting on 9th February where I verbally presented the key points that scrutiny wished to bring to Cabinet's attention; this letter is intended to provide a formal record of the Scrutiny Panel's views and comments, for response.

Views of the Panel

- The Panel has concerns regarding the level of borrowing that the Council is committing itself to.
- Appendix E p126: the panel recommends that the capital budget should show the funds that are allocated to the infrastructure works such as road safety traffic

schemes, drainage works, flood alleviation works, bus facility and car park schemes, coast protection and Foreshore and marina. These columns are currently blank and we were told that the £1m allocated for Highways/Infrastructure additional capital maintenance will cover these items.

- The Panel believes that the format/presentation of the Budget could be improved to make it more accessible by providing more narrative, for example more explanation is required on page 102 regarding the meaning of the “overlap” in relation to “commissioning reviews”.

Whilst you answered the majority of our questions at the meeting you agreed to provide further information on the following:

- We were concerned to see a £20k reduction in the budget for the education psychology service (p107), particularly in light of the findings from the CAMHS Scrutiny Inquiry which found that services in this area are insufficient to meet need. We would like clarification on the impact of this cut will be on service provision.
- We noted the significant increase in car parking and enforcement income of over £1m and would like to know how this will be achieved?

Views of other Scrutiny Performance Panels

We received comments from the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel and the Adult Services Panel, who met separately to discuss the elements of the Budget that relate to their areas of responsibility, they are grateful for the advice and information they received from Cllr Jen Raynor, Lindsay Harvey, Brian Roles and Alex Williams.

The following issues were raised:

Schools Performance Panel

- We recognise the very difficult financial position facing the Authority
- We wish to pass on our thanks to schools and education staff for continuing to deliver excellent services under difficult financial pressures.
- We support the letter from the Schools Budget Forum and agree that it is a balanced and measured response which demonstrates a good level of engagement with the budget process. We look forward to seeing the Leader’s response to this letter in due course.
- We continue to be concerned about the high levels of reserves amongst some schools and recommend that the Cabinet Member needs to continue to work with schools to put in place measured plans to effectively spend these reserves.

Adult Services Panel

- As part of the proposal to “improve processes by consolidating financial arrangements” (p75) the panel understands that charges for the community

alarm service are to be made irrespective of means. The Panel is concerned about the impact this will have on poorer families and people reliant on benefits.

- The panel has doubts about the viability of the proposal to “review eligibility for social services transport” (p.76) and plans to monitor this should it go ahead.
- In respect of the proposal to “maximise health contributions to packages of care” (p76) the panel questions why, when the two services are so closely linked, social services and health are seeking savings from each other in separate processes. The panel would like to see shared responsibility and a ‘one public service’ approach to delivering savings.
- The Panel believes that the 20% savings over 3 years for Adult Services outlined in the Medium Term Financial Plan (p.30) is unrealistic given the pressures on the service and should be reviewed.

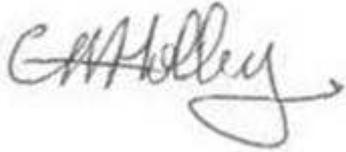
Your response

In your response we would appreciate your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful however if you could address the following specific matters:

- show within the capital budget the funds that are allocated to the infrastructure works such as road safety traffic schemes, drainage works, flood alleviation works, bus facility and car park schemes, coast protection and Foreshore and marina;
- provide an explanation in the budget papers what is meant by ‘overlap’ in relation to commissioning reviews;
- tell us what impact the £20k budget reduction for the education psychology service will have on service delivery;
- tell us how the £1m increase in the income from car parking and enforcement will be achieved;
- share your response to the letter from the Schools Budget Forum so that it can be provided to the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel;
- task the Cabinet Member for Education to work with schools with high levels of reserves to help put in place measured plans to effectively spend these reserves on improvements;
- clarify budget plans with regard to charges for community alarms;
- explain why, in respect of the proposal to “maximise health contributions to packages of care” (p76), social services and health are seeking savings from each other in separate processes when the two services are so closely linked; and
- review the 3 year 20% savings plan for Adult Services outlined in the Medium Term Financial Plan (p.30), given the pressures on the service.

Please could you provide your response by 7 March 2017.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CHolley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Chris Holley
Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
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