

Audit Committee

22 September 2017

Finance Scrutiny Panel

Purpose of Report: Progress report

The Panel has been re-established and advised of its role.

At its first meeting, Members considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) but noted that this would be revised in light of the Cabinet's 2025 Vision. As it stands, the MTFS reflects the previous Cabinet's aims and objectives. The Panel were concerned that the Vision was not yet costed and there was limited detail as to how the Vision would be delivered.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance was keen to develop a longer term MTFS whilst acknowledging that there would be less detail in the later years. This was in line with a previous Panel recommendation. It was suggested that the MTFS could be improved by identifying a range of assumptions. The MTFS was a strategic document and should be read in conjunction with budget papers and the Finance Resource Model (FRM).

The Panel raised concerns regarding the reversal of decisions made by the previous Cabinet and the impact this would have on the budget, including council tax. Whilst some costs would be met from the Budget Management Reserve, services would be expected to meet ongoing costs from within their budgets.

The Panel have indicated their wish to engage with the Cabinet in a positive and proactive way.

Savings need to be identified earlier to ensure robust plans are in place to ensure they are achieved – the WAO have identified that planning within the Authority has improved but achievability needs to be more robust. It appears that in modelling new methods of delivery in some areas there was not always sufficient attention paid to available budgets.

The budget timetable has been issued and will provide the basis on which to build the Panel's work programme. A Finance and Performance Working Group has been re-established and will meet monthly to consider the Budget Monitoring Report allowing the Panel to concentrate on strategic issues. The Portfolio Holder for Finance has agreed that the Group can have earlier access to the report to facilitate their work.

The Chair, who is an observer at the Strategic Overview Board (SOB) reported that the role of the SOB was to be reviewed to develop a more proactive approach and will include consideration of the frequency of meetings.

The next meeting of the Panel is scheduled to take place on 15 September when discussion with three portfolio holders will take place regarding their financial plans within the MTFs and how they will achieve their 2025 vision. The Chair will provide an oral update to Audit Committee.

Report contact: Lisa Richards, Legal, Scrutiny and Democratic Services

Contact details: lisa.richards@powys.gov.uk, 01597 826371

Background papers: Notes of meeting held on 1 August 2017

Group Membership: County Councillors J G Morris (Lead Member), M Dorrance, J Gibson-Watt, D R Jones, P Roberts, D A Thomas, E Vaughan, G Williams and Mr J Brautigam