

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

**FINANCE PANEL
25 November 2019**

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REPORT TITLE: Improvement and Assurance Board

REPORT FOR: Information

Purpose

1. To brief the Finance Panel on the membership, remit and accountability of the Council's Improvement and Assurance Board.

Background

2. At the Finance Panel meeting on Tuesday 31 October comments were made by Councillors regarding the role and accountability of the Improvement and Assurance Board which were factually incorrect. These comments were subsequently published in the local press on 3 November¹ and 5 November² In particular, the comments suggested that the Board:
 - was "not answerable to anyone in the council"
 - needed to look at "the broader aspects of the budget as a whole"
 - has a direct influence on the Council's budget setting process
3. This paper addresses the comments made in the meeting and provides information to ensure members of the Finance Panel understand the membership, remit and accountability of the Improvement and Assurance Board.

Advice

4. In May 2018, the then Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services delivered an oral statement in the Assembly announcing details of a corporate support package for the Council, including the introduction of an Improvement and Assurance Board to support and monitor progress of improvement across the organisation. The Board provides strategic oversight to the Leader of the Council, ensuring cross-authority collaboration and action to secure the improvements required.

¹ <https://www.countytimes.co.uk/news/18011919.powys-finance-panel-concerns/>

² [Social Care, Education costs still a concern](#)

5. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Housing and Local Government. The current full membership of the Board is as follows:
 - **External Independent Chair** (Jack Straw)
 - **Council Leader** (Cllr Rosemarie Harris)
 - **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Countryside and Transport**, (Cllr Aled Davies)
 - **Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Welsh Language** (Cllr Myfanwy Alexander)
 - **Cabinet Member for Education** (Cllr Phyl Davies)
 - **Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Engagement** (Cllr Graham Breeze)
 - **Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture** (Cllr Rachel Powell)
 - **Leader of Welsh Labour Group** (Cllr Matthew Dorrance)
 - **Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats** (Cllr James Gibson-Watt)
 - **Independent Member (Social Care)** appointed by the Minister, Phil Hodgson
 - **Independent Member (Education)** appointed by the Minister, to be confirmed
 - **Welsh Government, Local Government representative** (Lisa Hughes)
 - **Welsh Government, Social Care representative** (Alistair Davey)
 - **Welsh Government, Education representative**, to be confirmed
 - **Wales Audit Office observer** (Lisa Williams)
 - **Estyn observer**, to be confirmed
6. Council officers are in attendance at Board meetings including the Chief Executive, relevant Directors and Heads of Service, including the Section 151 Officer.
7. Under the original Terms of Reference (see Annex 1) the Board:
 - Provides advice and constructive challenge to the Council's corporate transformation and improvement activity including the follow up to the recommendations in Sean Harriss' *Review of Leadership, Governance, Strategy and Capacity*
 - Oversees and ensures co-ordination of all external support for corporate and service specific change in the Council
 - Oversees the actions of the Director of Social Services and provide constructive challenge and strategic oversight of the Director's actions as regards all social services functions, including implementation of the respective Improvement Plans for children and adults.
 - Advises the Cabinet Secretary and Welsh Government officials regularly on progress and make, if necessary, recommendations for further support or modification to the existing support package
8. The Terms of Reference were amended and approved by the Minister in October 2019 following the Estyn inspection of the Council's Education Service and the decision of the Minister to extend the remit of the Board to:

- oversee, monitor and support the progress made by the Council's Education Service in terms of addressing each of the recommendations made by Estyn in their inspection report of September 2019.
9. At the same time the Minister appointed Phil Hodgson as an Independent Member of the Board; previously he has performed the role of External Advisor.
 10. Since its establishment the Board has received regular reports on the in-year financial position of the Council from the Section 151 Officer. It has also considered the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the introduction of Integrated Business Planning and Outcome Based Budgeting. As such the Board has a sound understanding of the financial context in which the Council's improvement agenda is being delivered.
 11. The priority for the Board is to oversee the improvements required across the organisation, including in corporate governance, to create and maintain sustainable social care and education services that have addressed the recommendations of the relevant inspection reports. Against that background the Board has placed a clear emphasis on the importance of focusing on short, medium and long-term service and workforce changes that will help to reduce costs and the demand on services, while improving quality and outcomes.

Conclusion

12. The Improvement and Assurance Board is accountable to the Council, through its membership and regular public reporting to the Cabinet.
13. It is an advisory board that has no executive functions and has no locus in setting the Council's budget.
14. In fulfilling its remit, the Board provides advice and constructive challenge to the Council's corporate transformation and improvement activity, with a clear understanding of the Council's budget as a whole.