

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE PANEL HELD BY TEAMS LIVE ON
FRIDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2021**

PRESENT

County Councillors JG Morris, Chair, A W Davies, M J Dorrance, J Gibson-Watt, A Jenner, P Roberts, E Vaughan, D A Thomas and R G Thomas and Mr J Brautigam

1.	APOLOGIES
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Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors L Fitzpatrick and J Pugh

2.	NOTES
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Documents:

- Notes of the last meeting held on 25 June 2021

Discussion:

- The Chair and Mr J Brautigam had attended the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee when schools outturn figures were discussed
- Information regarding C02 reductions and revenue savings had been circulated after the last meeting

Outcomes:

- **The notes were agreed as a correct record**

3.	COST REDUCTIONS AS AT 31 MARCH 2021
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Documents:

- Report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance

Discussion:

- The Panel had requested details of cost reductions delivered and not delivered. Those delivered, £9.4M represented 76% of the target leaving £2.9M, or 24%, undelivered. Subsequently £1.6M of these were written out during the budget setting process with £1.7M being carried forward into the current year.
- Detail has been provided by each Head of Service within the report to explain why some cost reductions had not been achieved
- There was confidence that those reductions rolled forward would be achieved and this was being monitored
- The Q2 report, which should be issued shortly, will provide evidence of progress
- If there were to be any changes due to public opinion, Heads of Service would have to report back
- Some reductions had been carried forward from 2019/20 into 2020/21 and it could be questioned if these would be met in the current year. Greater detail was required for clarity. The Portfolio Holder recognised that some reductions should have been achieved and have become an immediate pressure when rolled forward to the current budget.

- The revenue budget for Y Gaer was showing a loss of £34K and Members questioned whether this was a loss of revenue due to closure. A new partnership agreement will be completed shortly, but the losses could be attributed to the pandemic.

Outcomes:

- **The report was noted**
- **Q2 cost reductions report would be considered by the Finance Panel at its next meeting**

4. FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

The Panel noted that scrutiny committees were to monitor financial aspects of their respective services and some training had been commenced prior to the pandemic. It was vital that the three scrutiny committees monitored finance.

The Head of Democratic Services noted that CIPfA training had been suspended and outlined the proposals for future scrutiny of financial issues. It was to be suggested that Finance Officers for each Committee be invited to pre meetings to identify avenues for questioning. Committees should be making the link between Vision 2025 and budgets. The next step will be to introduce bespoke training with individual scrutiny committees. New training will commence following the election in 2022

The Head of Finance informed the Panel that there was some capacity within the Finance Team to develop benchmarking to aid scrutiny in understanding live data and how to challenge effectively.

The Chair of the Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee noted that there was effective scrutiny of schools, but greater emphasis needed to be placed on the Schools Service and Transport.

The Chair of the Economy, Communities and Residents Committee recognised that this was an area for development by scrutiny but thought there was a lack of sight on this issue by Heads of Service. Costings were not provided by officers. He acknowledged this could be an area for further professional development.

The Chair of the Health and Care Scrutiny Committee noted that finances had previously only been considered in the run up to budget setting time. High level information had been provided but there was little narrative behind it. The Heads of Service, Chair and Vice Chair had gone through the budget line by line to enable them to brief the Committee beforehand to enable scrutiny to take place. Quarterly updates have been requested but the service is currently in business critical mode and regular meetings have been suspended. The Chair is seeking officer support to assist with benchmarking. The Committee had oversight of two large budgets and intended to pick areas for deeper consideration

The Portfolio Holder suggested that Members could cross check outturns with the original budget papers for monitoring purposes.

The Chair noted that in all Committees there were varying degrees of engagement and that perhaps smaller groups could be considered for reviewing financial matters.

County Councillor Mr J Brautigam (Chair)