Cabinet Member Report

**Cabinet Member:** Leader – Councillor Jamie Adams  
**Portfolio:** Corporate Matters and Finance  
**Electoral Division:** Camrose  
**Political Group:** Independent Plus

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<th>Cabinet Portfolio Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>My portfolio covers Corporate Matters and Finance.</td>
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<td>Corporate Matters encompasses many central services which support the running of the organisation. This includes corporate functions undertaken in the Policy, Customer Service and Communications section, such as improvement planning, corporate planning, performance management, community planning, partnership and scrutiny support, customer contact and communications. Human Resources and Information Technology and Central Support Services also fall within my portfolio.</td>
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<td>Finance includes budgeting and accounting, as well as other treasury management services. I also have portfolio oversight of other finance related service areas, such as revenues and assurance, and procurement.</td>
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<td>Corporate and financial services are key to the successful function of the organisation, providing many support mechanisms to make the business operate effectively. In some instances, corporate and financial services undertake statutory functions, without which we would not be able to discharge our duties.</td>
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<th>Role and Responsibilities</th>
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<td>I sat on the following Committees:</td>
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| Cabinet  
Corporate Governance  
Senior Staff Committee  
Urgency Committee |
| I sat on the following groups: |
| Local Service Board  
Employee Liaison |
| I represented the County Council on the following external organisations: |
Welsh Local Government Association
Local Government Association
Joint Council for Wales
ERW (Education through Regional Working)
Partnership Council for Wales

I sat on the following additional organisations:

**Progress Report**

1. What has gone well:

   - Financial Planning

We were asked to deliver savings of £12.9 million for 2013/14. I believe that we delivered the budget in a way that had limited impact on the provision of services in Pembrokeshire, and therefore the people receiving those services. We have, on the whole, made very few changes to frontline service delivery, and delivered our savings for 2013/14 by focusing on efficiencies rather than direct cuts to services. I am confident about the financial stability of the Council, whilst acknowledging the challenges that remain ahead (see below - point 2.).

I was particularly pleased with the way in which we engaged with the community when we developed the budget for 2014/15, providing people with an opportunity to outline their priorities in relation to how we spend our budget. This careful budget planning had to take place during 2013/14 in preparation for the £12.9 million savings we were expected to make in 2014/15. Our budget for 2014/15 was developed against the backdrop of the most difficult financial settlement the Council has ever faced, with the cost reduction target increasing from £7 million to £20 million over 2 years (2014/15 and 2015/16). Despite this, I believe that we, through very careful planning, agreed a budget for 2014/15 which protected services for the most vulnerable people in Pembrokeshire.

The aim of the public engagement was to engage local people in identifying areas of Council activity which they felt could potentially be cut back on, or areas of activity in which there was less opposition to cuts being made. We used this information to inform some of the decisions we made for the 2014/15 budget.

I, along with other members of the Cabinet, hosted open drop in sessions for members of the public throughout December 2013, and also took part in three evening sessions with members of Town and Community Councils. The Council also undertook consultation via the main
website, with National Non-Domestic Ratepayers, partner organisations and Trade Unions; and discussions around the budget took place at both the Local Service Board and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Group. Questions on the budget were also included in the Citizens’ Panel questionnaire to get results from a sample of residents that has a balanced demography.

Because doing this was so valuable, we have further developed our approach to public engagement and consultation in relation to planning the 2015/16 budget, and intend to repeat the open drop in sessions for members of the public during 2014.

In April 2013 the Wales Audit Office acknowledged, as part of a Public Engagement Follow Up undertaken in late 2012, that we were placing public engagement at the core of our work, through the development of a Public Engagement Strategy.

- Estyn

This year, we continued on our journey of improvement in relation to concerns highlighted by Estyn in 2011, and in their re-inspection report of December 2012, as well as the Wales Audit Office Special Inspection of 2011.

A Ministerial Board was appointed in October 2011 to provide support and challenge. We worked constructively with the Board, between December 2011 and March 2013, and the Chair of the Board wrote to me in March 2013 to summarise the Board’s assessment of the continuing progress made. The Chair concluded that the “direction of travel is right and that significant progress has been made”, and that “the prospects for permanent, embedded change are good”. Whilst taking on board the comments made about the considerable distance left to travel, I was pleased that the Board acknowledged what we have achieved, and the positive note on which they concluded their work with the Council.

In July 2013 the Minister for Education and Skills appointed a Recovery Board to provide ongoing support and challenge to our improvement journey, and we worked very closely with the Recovery Board during 2013/14. Following their initial contact with Pembrokeshire in September 2013, which focused on safeguarding within education, the Board concluded that we had put appropriate policies and procedures in place and that the arrangements to assure their delivery and implementation were evolving and developing.

In November 2013 the interim Chair of the Board again wrote to me to provide an early update on their work, concluding that they had seen the Authority make ‘solid steps towards changes’ during the time they had been in place, and that ‘timely progress’ was being made. The Chair of the Board wrote to us again in January 2014 to provide further positive feedback on some of the specific areas we had been working on. The Chair noted that, among other things, the Board was ‘impressed’ with the approach we had taken in relation to school re-organisation.

In December 2013 we received feedback from Estyn in relation to their monitoring visit, which took place on 6-8 November 2013. During the visit Estyn found that we had acted quickly and decisively which had resulted in change and improvement happening at a rapid pace and that,
at a senior level, we took some difficult and sensitive decisions to remove barriers to progress
to bring about the necessary improvement. I welcome Estyn’s comments that there had been
‘a significant change in culture within the authority demonstrated through greater openness
and transparency’, and I am glad that Estyn recognised the way that Elected Members, and
officers worked constructively with themselves and other bodies to identify and address
shortcomings. Whilst the monitoring visit focused on only three of the six recommendations
(with the remainder assessed in June 2014) I was very encouraged by the positive comments
made.

- Wales Audit Office – Annual Improvement Report

I was very pleased with the Annual Improvement Report we received from the Wales Audit
Office, for our delivery and evaluation of services in 2012/13 and our planning of improvement
for 2013/14.

The Wales Audit Office found that, in 2012/13, we made good progress in delivering
improvements in our priority areas, in particular by meeting current national waste targets
and making good progress in reducing our carbon footprint; and by acting decisively to achieve
a culture of greater openness and transparency within education services, strengthening
arrangements for safeguarding and improved scrutiny of education. The report also noted the
WAO view that we have improved our approach to self-evaluation and have produced a
comprehensive review of our performance.

The Auditor General commented that there is ‘robust’ evidence of active performance
management with clearer and more effective links between service improvement plans and
our Improvement Plan. Corporate arrangements for reporting performance have also been
strengthened, with the publication of the revised Performance Management Framework,
which enables us to manage performance and drive improvement in a more robust and
thorough way. He also recognised that we were ‘much better’ at consistently evaluating the
impact of what we were doing on the public.

It is also encouraging that Member involvement with the evaluation of progress in relation to
the plan was noted in the report.

In relation to planning for improvement during 2013/14, the WAO found that our
arrangements were sound, namely because we discharged our improvement planning duties
under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and acted in accordance with Welsh
Government Guidance; we continue to make good progress in addressing the proposals for
improvement identified in previous assessments; we have developed clear financial plans; we
have good arrangements for preparing our financial statements; and we are improving our
governance arrangements and encouraging greater member involvement and challenge.
It is encouraging that the WAO made no new recommendations, however, I do note the areas for further consideration highlighted within the report (see below - point 2.).

I am reassured that the progress that I see us making as a Council has been recognised and acknowledged externally, by the Wales Audit Office.

- Improved Corporate Governance

The Wales Audit Office acknowledged our improvement planning and improvement reporting during the year, which I believe was undertaken very well. In a letter from the Wales Audit Office in August 2013, the Auditor General concluded that we had discharged our improvement planning duties and had acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance. He reached this decision because, he concludes, we produced a well written and easy to understand plan, which outlines what we wish to achieve and how we will achieve it. Further, the links between the Improvement Plan and the Single Integrated Plan, and 2013/14 Service Improvement Plan were acknowledged, with the ‘golden threads’ running through the plans making them much easier to relate to one another. The ‘at a glance’ improvement plan was also seen as a useful addition for the public.

Estyn also acknowledged improvements in our strategic planning, following their November monitoring visit, recognising that a clear hierarchy of plans provide a coherent structure for setting objectives and targets.

The WAO noted that the five improvement objectives identified for 2013/14 brought a clearer focus to our immediate priorities, and also aligned directly with the themes of the Single Integrated Plan, which supports our on-going agenda of continuous improvement across all services. Indeed, the WAO also acknowledged the way we have referred to other improvement activity that we would undertake as part of our general improvement duty, helping the public to better understand the wider context within which we operate.

Our prospects for ensuring continuous improvement were also recognised by the WAO, with the Auditor General concluding that we had made good progress in addressing proposals for improvement made previously. I was particularly pleased that the progress we had made in relation to the action plan developed following the Special Inspection in January 2012 was recognised, including the way that we have clarified our governance and decision making processes through Terms of Reference and the Members Handbook. Other key developments were highlighted, including publication of Corporate Management Team agendas, reports and notes on our intranet; clarification of roles and responsibilities of Members; improved information about Member attendance at meetings; and the development of a protocol to enable Members to understand how and when information will be provided to them.
The WAO also acknowledge developments in relation to scrutiny support services, which I have elaborated on further below.

In November 2013, the Wales Audit Office wrote another Improvement Assessment letter to us, in relation to our improvement reporting. Again, the Auditor General concluded that we had discharged our improvement reporting duties and had acted in accordance with Welsh Government Guidance. This was because we had published a Review of our performance during 2012/13, in a timely manner, which: assessed our performance and set out how we sought to discharge our duties; evaluated our success in achieving our improvement objectives in a fair and balanced way; included information for members of the public who wanted to provide feedback or make comments; included details of performance and comparisons; and included information on how we sought to collaborate.

Again this year, the Auditor General did not make any further proposals for improvement.

- Improved Scrutiny

I am very pleased with the further encouraging progress made in relation to scrutiny during the year, and again, it is reassuring that the Wales Audit Office have recognised this. Since 2012 we have undertaken a considerable amount of work in relation to scrutiny, including the establishment of a Partnership and Scrutiny Support Team, providing additional officer support; the development of a greater understanding by Members of the role of overview and scrutiny as a result of a number of WLGA facilitated training seminars; and voluntary engagement with the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s Wales Scrutiny Programme (funded by the Welsh Government).

In particular, the provision of additional officer support has had a significant impact on the standard of scrutiny in Pembrokeshire, enabling improved planning and communication arrangements before and after meetings, better use of pre-meetings, improved communication with the Cabinet, better focused work programmes with improved links to the cabinet work programme, and consolidation of regular performance and finance monitoring.

I have witnessed improved levels of constructive challenge from most Members, and welcomed acknowledgement from the Wales Audit Office, in the Improvement Assessment letter (received in August 2013), that we have continued to develop our scrutiny functions, and that scrutiny support services are also progressing well. In particular, the WAO referred to the self-assessment session that was held with Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs and Directors, which identified a number of improvements but also areas for further development.

In Estyn’s letter of December 2013, following their Monitoring Visit, they noted that there had been significant improvement in the effectiveness of scrutiny by elected members in both the
Safeguarding Committee and the Children and Families Committee. It was acknowledged that these Committees provide a robust challenge, and hold myself and other members of the Cabinet accountable.

In September 2013 the Democratic Services Committee received a Review of Scrutiny Effectiveness, following a resolution made in November 2012 to receive a report on the effectiveness of the Partnership and Scrutiny Support Team one year on. The purpose of this review was to enable the Committee to assess the impact of the team in supporting the scrutiny function. The Committee also received further information in relation to work being undertaken by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, offered by the Minister for Local Government and Government Business following the issues highlighted in the Wales Audit Office Special Inspection Report of 2012. The Centre for Public Scrutiny has undertaken an analysis of the scrutiny function, and in its report, published in January 2014, concluded that scrutiny had experienced a ‘step-change’ in its operation over the last 18 months.

In his final letter to me, in late March 2013, the Chair of the Pembrokeshire Ministerial Board summarised the Board’s assessment of progress made in relation to Democratic Accountability and Scrutiny. The Chair noted the Board was ‘heartened’ by the ‘very considerable progress made in relation to scrutiny’.

I am once again encouraged that my own assessment of the improvements made in relation to the scrutiny function have been reinforced by external organisations.

- Improved relationships with key organisations

Whilst difficult to measure, I believe that we have continued to build positive relationships with key organisations within Pembrokeshire during the year. For example, I sit on the Local Service Board, along with senior representatives from Dyfed Powys Police Force, Hywel Dda Health Board, Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services and the Welsh Government. Whilst we have had a Local Service Board in Pembrokeshire for a number of years, it has become increasingly focused due to the development of the Single Integrated Plan (see below). The role of the LSB is to provide collaborative leadership and to identify opportunities for service providers to work more closely together to benefit Pembrokeshire and its residents. Critically, the LSB is able to address and remove potential blockages to progress because it involves the regular contribution of senior representatives from core organisations working within the County. The LSB does also, when necessary, draw on other organisations with expertise in specific areas.

The LSB is not a statutory body, and the development of a strengthened LSB demonstrates an engaged public service leadership at a local level.
In 2012/13 we introduced a new partnership structure, in response to the need to rationalise the number of partnership plans, and partnership support mechanisms that we had within the County. This resulted in the creation of a new Partnership and Scrutiny Support team, which has the dual responsibilities of developing and supporting partnership working within the County, and providing additional officer support to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny. I believe that the work of the Partnership and Scrutiny Support team has brought clarity and consistency to partnership planning, and has positively influenced the operation of key strategic partnerships. Following Estyn’s November visit they noted that the partnership structure we operate demonstrates the value that we as a Council give to partnership working. Estyn also note that elected members can have confidence in the reliability of information they receive from service areas and partners, due to the central control and provision of information by the Partnership and Scrutiny Support team.

In the Wales Audit Office Improvement Assessment letter received in August 2013, the Auditor General recognised that we have better described the contribution to be made by partners towards achieving our improvement objectives.

- Development of the Single Integrated Plan

Working with Local Service Board partners, we developed and launched a Single Integrated Plan for 2013/2018. The Single Integrated Plan replaced a number of existing plans, including the Community Strategy; the Children and Young People’s Plan; the Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy; and the Community Safety Strategy.

The Plan is designed to frame public, private and voluntary sector activity in Pembrokeshire; it describes the issues that are important to Pembrokeshire; and identifies the approach that a range of organisations will adopt in attempting to tackle them.

In March 2014 we held the second Public Services Day, which is an annual event, arranged by the Local Service Board, to engage community and voluntary sector organisations in the development and delivery of the Single Integrated Plan. The focus of the 2014 event was to look at the developing policy context; review year one of the Plan and discuss priorities for the year ahead.

During the year we developed a performance framework for the LSB, in order to effectively monitor and measure performance. The framework is working effectively.

2. What still needs to be improved:

- Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report

Whilst on the whole I was very pleased with the conclusions made in the Wales Audit Office
Annual Improvement Report, I note the areas for further consideration highlighted within the report. Namely, the report highlights some areas where governance arrangements need to be considered further. I will ensure that there is continued focus on this area going forward.

- **Budget Challenges**

In October 2013 it became clear that the county’s Budget Settlement from the Welsh Government was going to be significantly reduced, resulting in a need to save £20 million over the next two years. This was £13 million more than previously planned or agreed. It has therefore presented further challenges to the local authority and whilst I am pleased with the way we managed the budget in 2013-14, and planned the budget for 2014-15, I am clear that we have a difficult task ahead. So far we have managed to protect many frontline services, as well as avoid large-scale redundancies, but decisions will inevitably become more difficult as our finances become more pressurised.

- **Internal Relationships**

Towards the end of 2013-14 it became increasingly apparent to me that there was a need to explore internal working relationships, between one another, as Elected Members, and between Elected Members and Senior Officers.

I discussed this issue with Group Leaders and non-affiliated Members and sought agreement to arrange some Member Workshops to address this matter. A series of Member Workshops, around Working Effectively Together, were planned for May and June 2014. The purpose of the sessions was to get a much clearer understanding of the strengths and challenges facing Members and officers in Pembrokeshire, and what the legitimate expectations of each other side should be. The sessions were to be facilitated by Ian Bottrill, who was the Leader of Warwickshire County Council for 12 years, and the lead tutor on ‘Political and Community Leadership’ for the Welsh Academy. Ian Bottrill was chosen for his experience working in this area, having worked extensively with Councillors throughout Wales.

**Performance**

Of the 44 indicators included within the NSI or PAM indicator set in 2013/2014 (which are the performance indicators we rely on to monitor and manage our performance), our performance either improved or stayed the same against 27 indicators. Our performance declined against 17 indicators.

When compared with previous years, I am satisfied with the overall performance during 2013/14. The majority of indicators improved during the year, though the proportion of indicators that improved, as well as the proportion of those that declined, was not as positive as in 2012/13.
I am particularly pleased with improvements made against the waste management indicators and the key indicators associated with Adult Social care. Our child social care indicators were consistently good and we were one of the best performing authorities in Wales in relation to some of the indicators for leisure. Yet there are areas where I would like to see further improvement, particularly our performance in relation to GCSE’s and school attendance and processing statements of special needs. I was also disappointed with our performance in relation to processing Disabled Facility Grants which did not improve in line with other authorities.

However despite these areas of concern, I am reassured that where performance has declined, we have already established the foundations for future improvement.

**Learning and Development**

I have attended the following courses/seminars:

- Adult Protection
- Safeguarding Awareness – Cabinet
- The Child’s Journey
- Welfare Reform
- Pay and Grading - Appeals Process
- Briefing by the Chief Constable
- 14-19 Transformation
- Service Planning
- Post Inspection Action Plan
- School Data
- Financial Settlement
- Autism Spectrum
- Financial Settlement 2
- County Council Budget 2014/15

**Other Activities and Issues**

The Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (commonly known as the Williams Commission) ran from April to December 2013, and in January 2014 the Commission reported its findings.

The aim of the Commission was to objectively review the way public services are governed and delivered in Wales, and how they could be improved. It was widely anticipated that the report was going to recommend local government restructuring, and when it was published, it did in fact reveal proposals for a reduction in the number of Council’s across Wales. The Commission concluded that there was a need for change in local government structures and
responsibilities to address issues of scale. They based this view on an analysis that small organisations, and in particular small local authorities, face much greater degrees of risk to their governance and service delivery, which will eventually affect their performance. They cite that the pattern of formal support and intervention given by the Welsh Government and regulators has been heavily concentrated in smaller local authorities. The Commission claims that scale of the organisation impacts on capacity; leadership and expertise; costs and overheads; and demographic changes; and that smaller organisations are less flexible, innovative and resilient.

However, despite the Commission’s conclusions, I challenge their view that smaller Council’s perform worse than larger ones as I don’t believe that our performance reflects this. We consistently perform in the top quartile across over 30% of national performance indicators, and in the upper middle quartile for at least a further 15%. Further, the Wales Audit Office reports on progress and performance in Pembrokeshire support my view.

I believe that by reducing the number of Councils there is a real risk that decision making becomes too remote from the people of Pembrokeshire. As it stands, there is far more accountability than could be achieved in a larger and ultimately more remote and bureaucratic administration. I am also concerned about the potential financial and budgetary impact of reorganisation, for instance if we merged with Ceredigion, as proposed by the Williams Commission, we would see a 9% increase in Council Tax for Pembrokeshire residents. This rises to a 12% increase if Dyfed were to be reconstituted. Pembrokeshire residents have been the recipients of the lowest Council Tax in Wales for a number of years, whilst continuing to receive excellent services and I do not see why people should have to pay more for their services with no real evidence of the benefits that a larger organisation would bring. As I have made clear in my report, we are currently under a lot of pressure to make savings, which I find difficult to reconcile with calls from the Welsh Government for the creation of larger organisations, with more substructures and increased bureaucracy, as well as having to face a costly reorganisation which would potentially negate any savings made.

I am confident that we can continue to provide excellent services that perform well in comparison with the rest of Wales, despite the budgetary pressures that we currently face.

Signature of Councillor: J L Adams
Date: 7 September 2014