

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A - SUPPLEMENTARIES

1.	<p>Councillors PB Black, MH Jones & CA Holley Will the Cabinet Member set out the timetable for bringing the Council's ICT provision in house as announced at the February Budget Council meeting.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources Cabinet approved the in house managed services option on 11 March 2014. Further reports will be brought to Cabinet during the year setting out further details for the project.</p> <p>The timetable for this project is being developed. The key milestones at this stage are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• April 2014: Develop Project Plan• May 2014: Produce first draft Exit Plan• June 2014: New ICT Strategy• November 2014: Establish new ICT operating model and costings• January-December 2015: procure specialist ICT support (eg: ORACLE); implement service migration plan incrementally• January 2016: new Service commences <p>The detail within this timetable will depend on the future model agreed, our procurement options and the transition plan we agree with Cap Gemini.</p>
2.	<p>Councillors PB Black, MH Jones & CA Holley Will the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee outline what process will be put in place to scrutinise the bringing of ICT in-house.</p> <p>Response of the Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee</p> <p>The Scrutiny Programme Committee determines its work programme at the beginning of each municipal year. This is informed by a range of sources including proposals from Members. I will therefore take up this issue and ensure that it is given proper consideration as part of that process which is due to commence shortly.</p> <p>Members should note that the scrutiny work programme remains flexible to enable consideration of any urgent issues that council wishes the Scrutiny Programme Committee to look at. The committee will also take account of any ideas for future work suggested by any councillor at any time during the year. I would also remind councillors that they can also make requests for pre-decision scrutiny on any future cabinet business.</p> <p>In addition there is also provision for 'councillor calls for action' (CCfA) although this is a more formal route enabling councillors to refer issues of local importance to the scrutiny committee, however as a means of 'last resort' in a broad sense, with issues being raised at a scrutiny committee only after other avenues have been explored. Though, it is likely that the types of issues that would make for a CCfA would be cross cutting and multi-agency in nature.</p>

3. **Councillors PM Meara, AM Day & J Newbury**
Will the Cabinet Member tell Council how many people might be expected to reply to the Consultation on the Council's Gambling Policy? Could s/he also tell us what s/he would consider to be a minimum number of respondents for a consultation of this sort to be considered valid.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Place

It is difficult to predict how many people might be expected to reply to the consultation on the Council's Gambling Policy. Previous consultations on the Gambling Policy resulted in 7 responses when the policy was initially adopted in 2007, 3 responses when it was reviewed early 2010, 3 responses when it was amended in October 2010 and 1 response when it was reviewed in 2013.

The legal requirement is that the Authority carries out a consultation when preparing or revising the policy. The legislation also prescribes a list of consultees and provided the consultation is carried out in accordance with the legislation, the consultation will be considered to be valid.

The validity of the consultation does not depend on the number of responses received.

4. **Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker**

Much concern has been raised in regard to empty properties and the blight that these can cause within a community. Under new legislation, some councils in England are now withdrawing council tax discounts and are charging a premium council tax rate on long term unoccupied properties. This has helped reduce the number of empty homes. Does the Cabinet Member consider that this kind of pecuniary penalty should be used in Wales and in Swansea as an additional tool to help to reduce the number of empty properties.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources

The ability to reduce or remove the amount of discount which can be allowed on empty and substantially unfurnished dwellings (Class C) was provided by the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2004, section 12(c).

If the Council resolved to adopt section 12 (c), at present it can vary the discount and charge up to 100% on properties which are unoccupied and unfurnished for periods over 6 months.

When these particular regulations were amended in 2004 the Council was keen to use any powers to encourage the owners of empty properties to bring them back into occupation. However there was concern that the regulation did not just target long term empty properties but specified a period to reduce or remove discount at the end of the statutory period of 6 months, for all properties. This would have for example affected all taxpayers who were in the process of refurbishing or trying to sell their property, as well as long term empty properties. At this time approximately 2000 properties would have been affected with only a third of this total being long term empty properties.

	<p>Representations from the former Chief Executive Bob Carter were made to Welsh Government seeking an amendment to the regulation to allow Billing Authorities in Wales the power to reduce or remove discount after a longer period and suggested a two year period after the statutory period of six months ended. A response was received from the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services suggesting that the Council should obtain independent legal advice on whether it would be appropriate to remove or reduce discount two years after the statutory period ended but also confirmed Welsh Government had no plans to amend the legislation.</p> <p>A report to Cabinet 20 January 2005 therefore recommended that the provisions contained in the amended regulation relating to empty and unfurnished properties (Class C) be not adopted and that the discount remain at 50%. This recommendation was accepted.</p> <p>Counsel opinion was obtained on this issue in September 2005 which confirmed that reducing or eliminating discount two years after the statutory period was not permissible.</p>
5.	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker</p> <p>A recent Schools Performance Scrutiny Panel suggested that there were indications of wide variations in the 'curriculum' of different Flying Start projects and that outcomes were 'not quite as intended'. Concern was expressed that in some areas a few children starting school had no language skills and limited walking ability. Could the Cabinet Member therefore advise Council what monitoring the Authority is carrying out in order to ensure that children are adequately prepared for school and confirm that clarity is given as to what outcomes are expected from the Flying Start investment.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Learning & Skills</p> <p>Flying Start is a programme for 0-3 year olds of pre-school childcare which does not follow a curriculum as it is based on the child's needs and stage of development. The experiences that the children receive are planned on an individual basis depending on the age and stage of development. Flying Start is therefore preparation for the Foundation Phase Curriculum which starts in school.</p> <p>Whilst I am unaware of the specific references to children with "no language skills" and "limited walking ability" it is imperative to emphasise that Flying Start is an inclusive programme and therefore where there are diagnosed or emerging disabilities the individual children are supported appropriately depending on their levels of need. For children with profound disabilities, including global delay and mobility difficulties, access to the Stepping Stones Centre is also provided as part of the Flying Start Programme's offer.</p> <p>Outcomes</p> <p>The Flying Start Programme's outcomes are to improve children's outcomes across the following domains as well as to identify needs at an early stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language development • Cognitive development

- Social and emotional development
- Physical health

Programme wide Monitoring

- Monitoring of the Programme is undertaken across all elements via a termly quality assurance process to ensure consistencies across the Programme, to monitor and challenge performance, to ensure effective partnership working is in place across the Programme including early identification of need and co-ordinated packages of support.
- Via our quality assurance panels in each area it is very evident that the levels of need and challenges are extremely high with generational cycles being very hard to break. We would advocate starting at -9 months to get the parents and the family ready for parenthood and supporting their child's development, although we do not have the resources to do this with everyone. A greater consideration of our work with young people is also required so that they are better equipped for parenthood.
- Flying Start is one part of a far wider system and the whole system needs to be effective to bring about sustainable change

Childcare Monitoring framework:

- Children coming into Flying Start (FS) childcare settings are assessed using the developmental tracker and it is evident at this stage that high proportions of children are delayed in their development across the domains when they start. The 7 domains are Personal, Social, Emotional, Language and Communication, Cognitive, Gross Motor Development and Fine Motor Development.
- The trackers are used by the settings to tailor individual developmental support and learning for each child depending on their needs, and used as a distance travelled tool linked to the Foundation Phase, which evidences progress made by each child. Settings can evidence therefore the impact and distance travelled.
- Generally children in Flying Start areas have a much further distance to travel however the progress they do make needs to be acknowledged and Heads have also reported that there is significant difference between a FS and non FS child when they assess on entry.
- There is a named Flying Start Link Teacher for each childcare setting within the Flying Start Programme.
- Flying Start Link Teachers visit settings regularly to ensure that the Childcare settings are maintaining high standards of care and provision and that there is consistency across all settings.
- Regular monthly Childcare Manager Meetings are led by the Link Teachers to share information, including opportunities to share good practice

The Healthy Cities objective of giving every child the best start in life, and measuring this by readiness for school is using 3 criteria, as advised by UCL, Social, Language and Communication, Sort and Order (very start of mathematics), which are 3 of the original 7 measures advised by the Welsh Government of initial assessment of child's ability to be carried out at start of school, and which many schools in Swansea still use. (Every school should do some form of initial assessment, to establish the baseline for that child). At start of school there is currently over 1 year's difference in development between children from the top 10% and bottom 10% of areas of Swansea. The aim of

	<p>Healthy Cities is to narrow that gap in 3 years by 0.5. This will require building on those elements in Flying Start areas that are addressing this, and trying to ensure all initiatives are effective in addressing inequalities.</p>
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PART B

<p>1.</p>	<p>Councillors PB Black, MH Jones & CA Holley</p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member detail the budget that has been set aside to bring the Council's ICT provision in-house, what additional posts will be created to manage that process and the subsequent ICT service, what aspects of the new ICT service will be subject to contracts with external providers, and how the process of bringing it in-house will be project managed so as to ensure a seamless service.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources</p> <p>A budget for this process has not yet been set. This can only be done when we have received an estimate of exit costs from Capgemini and developed the proposals for the in house model. Provision will be made in the 2015/16 budget at that stage.</p> <p>Similarly, it is too early to say which posts will be in the new service as this will depend on the agreed operating model, decisions about which services we procure (rather than provide in house) and TUPE requirements for existing Cap Gemini staff.</p> <p>No decision has been taken yet about which services will be provided by external contractors; this will be addressed as part of the proposed operating model later in the year.</p> <p>Project management arrangements are already in place and include a Project Board of senior Officers and a Project Team. The project will be managed in accordance with the Council's corporate project management methodology.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Councillors PB Black, MH Jones & CA Holley</p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member outline what external assurance process will be utilised to ensure that the process of bringing ICT in-house provides value for money.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources</p> <p>The Cabinet report made clear that due diligence will be a crucial part of the project. We will shortly be engaging an appropriately qualified and reputable partner to give us advice, insight and assurance. This will sit alongside other arrangements for assurance on particular aspects as the project progresses.</p>

3. **Councillors JW Jones, LG Thomas & J Newbury.**

From a £150k grant for District shopping regeneration which was given by the Welsh Government, the Council allocated 75k to the Palace Theatre “to make the building safe”. Will the Cabinet Member give a breakdown of the works done to the Palace Theatre to date and also give a breakdown of how and to whom the remaining £75k was allocated.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

The figure of £150,000 was made available from the Council’s revenue budget for a grant scheme entitled ‘Regeneration Area Grant’. The purpose of the grant was to wide ranging – to support jobs and regeneration, tackle poverty, support suburban centres and the City Centre, and addressing problem buildings.

The allocation of £75,000 as a potential grant for urgent works at the Palace Theatre was approved by Cabinet on 3rd December 2013, since then the focus has been on helping the applicant to apply for the grant. The grant application was received, assessed and approved at the end of March 2014 and an ‘offer in principle’ has now been issued. Officers are now working with the applicant and their advisors to agree the detail of the urgent works to safeguard the Palace Theatre. The applicant has indicated that they would like to have the urgent work underway in the summer of 2014. The long term sustainable reuse of the building will require further permissions such as listed building consent and potentially will require grant assistance from other areas.

The other half of the District Regeneration Area Grant’ (£75,000) was allocated to providing small grants to businesses in Swansea seeking a contribution to enable improvements to be made to their operations either through the purchase of new equipment and technology or tools with which they could promote themselves better. Applications were invited via established local business networks and originated from businesses and entrepreneurs who were mainly, already receiving business advice from Welsh Government’s ‘Business Wales’ support providers. There were two categories, one for new business starts and the other for those that have been trading for over two years. Applicants provided information on their new business idea or operations to date along with a proposal on what they would need in terms of support and how it would enable their business to grow.

In business support terms this was small scale funding and for those successful applicants already trading the grant funded 50% of the agreed project cost retrospectively and on receipt of evidence that the applicant’s half had already been paid. New business start approved applications received a grant of upto £500 towards their start-up costs. In total, forty one new businesses were supported to a total of £19,270 and seventeen existing businesses received an average of £2500 in funding for a total of £38,975. Not all of the applications received were successful, but £58,245 of the available funding was awarded.