



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor David Phillips,
Leader / Cabinet Member for Anti-
Poverty**

BY EMAIL

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Overview & Scrutiny

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SPC/2013-14/6

18 November 2013

Dear Councillor Phillips,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 28 October

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 28 October 2013 and answering questions on your work as Leader and Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty. Acting as a 'critical-friend' the committee was able to explore your role and responsibilities and key issues, what you have done as cabinet member, what you hope to achieve, as well as future challenges.

We thought it would be useful to write to you in order to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, and share the views of the committee.

It was clear that your work as Leader, and that of the administration, was focussed on delivering the policy commitments adopted by Council in July 2012, and the values and vision which underpin these, for a safer, greener, smarter, fairer, healthier, richer Swansea. But, you also mentioned the challenge of delivering improvements at a time of severe financial pressures on the Council.

The document includes commitment to:

- Strong Council Finances
- Council Democracy
- Council Employees
- City of Learning
- Jobs & Regeneration

Cont'd...

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

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www.swansea.gov.uk

- Strong Transport Links
- High Quality Health & Social Services
- Better Housing
- Best in Arts, Culture & Sport
- Stronger & Safer Communities
- Better Environment & Better Planning

You informed the committee of achievements to date including reference to the following which were either complete or in hand, demonstrating a measure of progress:

- Review of the Authority's finances
- Strategic alliance with the City's Universities
- Review of democratic processes (including the introduction of webcasting Council and Cabinet meetings)
- Councillor contract and pledge on standards (Swansea Council charter including an internal inter-councillor mediation procedure that is likely to be rolled out across Wales as an example of 'best practice')
- Establishing a cooperative relationship with council staff
- Resolution of pay & grading / single status / equal pay (almost concluded)
- City of learning (a positive Estyn inspection, only 1 of 6 Welsh Local Authorities whose prospects for improvement were good; also Swansea has been chosen as the first city in the UK to collaborate with cities around the world in a UNESCO initiative aimed at developing 'Learning Cities', which help all citizens get better access to learning opportunities. The initiative is being launched in at a conference in Beijing)
- Housing improvements – there is £11m of reserves (mainly arising from banked council housing rents) to improve council housing to ensure the Welsh Housing Quality Standard is achieved more quickly. Also looking at Houses in Multiple Occupation and empty properties
- Entrepreneurship (working with schools and Further Education/Higher Education institutions to encourage entrepreneurship in young people)
- City Centre (conference planned to review opportunities to develop the city centre)
- Transformation of Adult Social Services
- Liberty Stadium expansion (backing the Football Club and Stadium Management Company about stadium expansion)
- City of Sport
- Swansea shortlisted (final four) to be UK City of Culture 2017 (decision due in November)
- Young citizenship / implementation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Sustainable Development – the City & County of Swansea is the pilot authority for the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) on Sustainable Development, to develop thinking and good practice which other local authorities could learn from and contribute towards

- Consultation (example of widespread consultation regarding the search for 2nd Gypsy & Traveller site and Sustainable Swansea budget consultation and promoting importance of public engagement on major issues)

A number of specific issues / challenges were discussed, which are summarised below:

Anti-Poverty

You stressed that tackling poverty was at the top of the administration's agenda, which is laudable. This is obviously not a short term issue but we want to see that steps being taken have clear objectives and measurable outcomes so that we can check that things are heading in the right direction.

You added that this was not an issue that the authority can deal with alone, and was dependent on working together with partners and across organisational boundaries.

We noted that the authority has recently appointed to a new post to support this commitment. We welcome Sarah Crawley as the Council's Head of Poverty & Prevention, and look forward to the difference that this could make, developing a clear picture of the scale of the problem and ensuring that work in this area can be sustainable.

Target Areas

We were interested in this new approach to target areas and how the people and communities within the areas were being engaged. We asked about the basis for deciding which were Target Areas and were concerned whether this would mean other areas, that may be deprived but not identified as target areas, would lose out. You explained that an initial focus on the areas of greatest deprivation was right and if successful this targeted approach could be rolled out to other areas. You assured the committee that the intention of the initiative was not to divert resources that would otherwise go to other areas. In response to a question, you also confirmed that there are no deliverables that those living in target areas are expected to make in response to the resources allocated in those areas.

Gypsy & Traveller Site - Cost

We had some correspondence from the public asking about the potential cost of further work on the search for a 2nd Gypsy & Traveller site given budget situation. You explained that this could not be answered at this moment as Cabinet had not yet decided next steps (following the view expressed at the 21 October council meeting). If agreed, the implications of the view that a 'whole-Swansea' approach be adopted for the search, rather than just looking at land owned by the authority, would be considered in due course by cabinet.

Works to the Civic Centre Council Chamber

We also had correspondence from the public about the cost of works to the Council Chamber and whether cheaper alternatives were considered. You

reiterated that this was about improved public access to council meetings and decision making and that the process involved inviting tenders based on the improvement necessary. You stated that if the cost had been excessive the requirements may have needed to be revised however it was felt that the proposed spend on improvements is both acceptable and within budget.

We asked you to share with us some of the challenges for the next 12 months and you referred to the following:

Swifter decision making – you expressed the frustration that many of the new councillors had shared with you about how long it appeared to get things done and resolved to speed up decision making.

Performance appraisal – it was interesting to note that you had introduced a 360 degree appraisal of yourself and you were clearly open about self improvement and areas of development that would help you to be an effective Leader.

Budget – you were clear that there was no hiding from the financial situation facing the Authority. We acknowledged the reality that a significant reduction in spending must be achieved over the next few years which will clearly impact on the services provided. This is a huge challenge.

Local Service Board – since you have become chair of the Local Service Board you stated that you have been reviewing its purpose and effectiveness, in order to refocus the work of the Local Service Board to ensure that a shared vision, strategic leadership, and clearly defined outcomes.

It will be interesting to follow these up when we next meet with you, especially to review the impact of those achievements that you mentioned in the meeting, and which are listed above.

Finally, we did not have sufficient time at the meeting to be able to fully explore your work as Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty so it was agreed that we would schedule a further question session in our work plan to focus on this. Your support for scrutiny and its importance in improving decision making was also noteworthy and we look forward to meeting you again.

A formal response to this letter is not required.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MIKE DAY

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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