



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/  
Councillor Mitch Theaker,  
Cabinet Member for Opportunities  
for Children & Young People**

**BY EMAIL**

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Overview & Scrutiny

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SPC/2013-14/2

29 July 2013

Dear Councillor Theaker,

### **Cabinet Member Question Session – 8 July**

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 8 July 2013 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Opportunities for Children & Young People.

Acting as a 'critical-friend' I was pleased that the committee was able to explore your portfolio responsibilities, what you have done as cabinet member, your measures of success, and what you hope to achieve over the next 12 months, as well as future challenges. Your knowledge and enthusiasm for your work was clearly evident and we could see that you are a good champion for children & young people.

I 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.

#### **Portfolio Responsibilities:**

You explained that there have been significant changes to your portfolio responsibilities since your appointment as cabinet member, recognising that barriers to existing opportunities needing to be tackled as well as creating opportunities. We understand that these changes have resulted from a wider review of portfolio responsibilities which will be reported to council.

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**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

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You clarified that you were now dealing with issues including NEETS (focus on 18-24 age group), youth participation, the implementation and implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Community Cohesion (development of strategies on hate crime, domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour), and campaigns to raise awareness of the effects of payday loans and alternatives (recognising that many young people are vulnerable to such services).

We recognised that you have a very broad portfolio but that you had specific priorities. You clarified that your work was about ensuring that services were universal across Swansea but with evidence based targeted approaches, for example the play service, and youth service.

### **Play Opportunities:**

We asked about what had been done in response to the new legal duty on authorities to assess the sufficiency of play and recreational opportunities for children in the area, and plans for improvement. We noted findings from the independent survey carried out by Swansea University and assessment of services which suggested that provision was good. You explained that there was no funding until 2014 from the Welsh Government to support improvement plans so this year was about low or no cost measures. We welcomed efforts to improve the Play Service website so that it provides clearer information about local provision across Swansea. You highlighted the need to bridge the gap between play and youth for those that are somewhere in the middle and the play assessment would help to identify opportunities.

Another idea which we were impressed with was the concept of 'play streets', which you stated was amongst initiatives being looked at – that is, to close down a street for a set time in order to allow children to play safely on their own street with friends who live nearby, protected from road vehicles. Experiences elsewhere suggested positive feedback and you talked of developing a pilot scheme in Swansea which if successful might attract funding in order to roll out across communities. We were enthusiastic about this initiative and would encourage you to engage with all councillors to identify possible 'play streets' and promote this. Clearly we would need to consider the set up costs and ensure that this can be sustainable.

The Committee asked whether thought had been given, in the longer term, to establishing 'home zones'. This involves making physical alterations to streets and roads in an area to strike a balance between vehicular traffic and everyone else who uses the street – one of the benefits being a safer environment for children to play. You stated that you had looked at the Poynton shared space road scheme but would find out more about the 'Home Zone' concept.

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**Childcare:**

You stated that you would welcome scrutiny to look at childcare provision across Swansea. You referred to results of an audit and survey that was carried out recently which confirmed concern about the both availability and cost of childcare in Swansea and impact on access to education, employment and training. Although you were looking to see what improvements could be made, e.g. crèche facilities at colleges, you asked whether scrutiny could carry out work to unpick the issues and come up with ideas about how the local authority could help solve the problem and to overcome barriers. We agreed that this topic would be considered in the future scrutiny work programme.

**Youth Support Services:**

You informed the committee that following a recent Estyn report you were taking a fresh look at the Youth Support Service, including mapping of provision, whether delivered by the council or not e.g. voluntary / independent. We welcomed the fact that this would enable provision across electoral divisions to be seen. We would be grateful to receive information about the audit which has been carried out.

You also stated that one of your priorities was to review youth club provision. You were clear that some key decisions needed to be taken that would involve the consolidations of youth services e.g. the transfer of provision from Birchgrove to Stadwen. However you should be mindful of the impact such decisions might have on access to services e.g difficulties with mobility / public transport provision faced by service users.

It was clear that you wanted to develop robust management structures and a clear vision and direction about the service. You were also working with SCVS to review service level agreements in relation to non-council provision to see how we can best work together on youth support services, and review the support we offer to see if it is effective and helping support our vision. It is important that we develop an outcomes focus and accountability for such funding.

**UNCRC:**

I attended the excellent 'My Life, My Rights, Your Hands' conference held on 5 July at the Liberty Stadium on UNCRC which was led by pupils from primary schools aiming to give adults a unique insight into how school life can be improved by ensuring children's rights are respected - offering adults the chance to learn about how the UNCRC can feature in everyday school life. The Committee was aware that you were intending to take a report to Cabinet on the Rights of Children & Young People about a duty on the authority to have due regards to the UNCRC when making any decision concerning children & young people. We would welcome the opportunity to undertake pre-decision scrutiny of your report and will be contacting you separately for your advice about practical implications and how this can be achieved.

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**Schools:**

We were pleased to hear about your efforts on the idea of opening up schools to communities so that play facilities / equipment, which otherwise would be locked away during the summer, can be accessed. This could be valuable asset for communities but suspect there are obstacles that would need to be overcome.

You stated that you were looking to identify a pilot school(s), possibly with teachers paid to act as play rangers to supervise the use of school facilities, and would investigate possible funding sources to progress this. Could you confirm which schools were being approached to participate in the pilot? We would support any initiatives that would see greater utilisation of schools for community benefit.

Finally we asked about your success measures and what you were hoping to achieve over the next 12 months. This would be something that the Committee would be interested to follow up at your next question session. You referred to achievement against the policy commitments adopted by Council last July as measures of success, such as promoting youth citizenship and embedding of UNCRC across the council. You also hoped to make progress with regard to a 16-20 core pledge in relation to NEETs, a successful merger of youth offending services; completing the rebranding of the youth service, the development of a hate crime strategy; effective payday loan campaigning (including seeking a commitment from local media not to advertise such services).

*Summary of Suggested Action:*

- a) engaging with all councillors to identify possible 'play streets' and promotion.
- b) looking into the 'Home Zone' concept
- c) providing information about your audit of Youth Support Services
- d) confirming which schools were being approached to participate in the pilot to open up play facilities / equipment for community use
- e) facilitating pre-decision scrutiny of your report to Cabinet on Rights of Children & Young People

I look forward to your reply to our comments and response to issues raised and recommendations made. It would be helpful to receive your reply to this letter by 27<sup>th</sup> August so that it can be included in the agenda of our next Committee meeting taking place on 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR MIKE DAY**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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