



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

To/
Councillor Mark Child,
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing

BY EMAIL

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21 August 2013

Dear Councillor Child,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 5 August

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 5 August 2013 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Wellbeing.

Acting as a 'critical-friend' the committee was able to explore your portfolio responsibilities and key issues, what you have done as cabinet member, what you hope to achieve, as well as future challenges.

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. I am also copying this letter to the members of our Wellbeing Scrutiny Performance Panel who of course carry out the in-depth monitoring of social services.

Rising Demand for Services:

The committee recognised a number of factors which are contributing to a rising demand for public services. It is well documented that we have a growing elderly population but there is also the impact from the economic downturn and, more recently, welfare reforms. Amongst the pressure on services and increased need you mentioned a particular increase in dementia that has been experienced in Swansea. You also shared a concern about the need to improve a number of services despite the challenges including services for children with disabilities, mental health services, and support for adults with learning disabilities.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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It was clear that meeting rising demand at a time of significant budgetary pressures was a huge challenge. You talked about 20% cuts anticipated across the council budget over the next 2-3 years. Although we would not expect the impact on social services to be this great it does highlight the growing need for challenge on spending and robust financial monitoring and management.

Transformation of Adult Social Services:

We understood the basis and philosophy behind the council's Transformation of Adult Social Services (TASS) Programme. Given the rising demand and limited resources we accept the need for a radical rethink of approaches to future service provision as it was no longer effective to keep trimming at the edges. You stated that the service needed reconfiguration and that the council may have to consider not doing some things and/or making better use of other providers including the 3rd sector. This would mean shifting more towards being an enabler of services rather than provider, and focussing more and more in the future on dealing with critical needs.

However, any significant changes in service breed uncertainty and we cannot emphasise enough the need for openness and transparency about what we want to achieve and how we will do it, and clear communication with service users, staff, and partners. You mentioned that you would be reporting to cabinet shortly on the next steps of the TASS Programme. We would encourage you to engage with scrutiny on the transformation of adult social services and will welcome any opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny.

You talked in particular about wanting to improve domiciliary care and tackle over reliance on residential care, so that people can live independently as long as possible, and, with the necessary support, enjoy far greater wellbeing. We noted that as part of this aim you were working on bridging the gap between getting people back in their own homes and the need for a hospital bed and avoiding the need for dependency on residential care. We were pleased to hear you talk about how a closer working relationship with health has developed and look forward to hearing about achievements in this area. We noted that you welcomed scrutiny undertaking detailed work looking at the balance of providers in domiciliary social care. We will consider this when looking at possible future work.

Western Bay Health & Social Care Regional Programme:

We were interested in how this regional collaboration with Bridgend Council, Neath Port Talbot Council and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board was developing to improve services. It appeared that things were moving on at a pace however we felt that there was a lack of information about the management and delivery of the programme, aims and objectives, the extent of the council's involvement, and practical implications, including public information about what it means for service users. As with the TASS

Programme it is important that the citizens of Swansea understand the purpose of this collaboration, its relationship with the delivery of local services and the difference it will make.

We understood that the responsibility and accountability for local social service provision remained with this authority but we felt that the complexities of the programme and decision-making demanded greater scrutiny. It was unclear as to how the programme and the scale of work was subject to challenge. It was noteworthy that even you had concerns about the low level of elected member representation both within the Programme and in scrutinising it. We agreed that we needed to have a debate amongst scrutiny colleagues about how best to hold any regional collaborative work to account whether by joint scrutiny or otherwise.

We were interested to know, as this regional collaboration developed, to what extent the dialogue would turn to the possible integration of services. We have already seen the example of regional safeguarding boards, and now we understand Youth Offending Teams, and there are examples with other areas such as Education of the 'regionalisation' of services.

Looked After Children:

The numbers of looked after children (LAC) are still high although it was good to hear that the figures have come down over the last few months: April (591), May (567), June (565). Comparisons across Wales showed Swansea to have amongst the highest LAC population although you stated that many other authorities were seeing dramatic increases. You were not sure whether the numbers would continue to fall but felt that things were stabilising and had confidence in the strategies in place to manage numbers and the experienced workforce that we now had in place. You also mentioned that the rate of referrals had come down dramatically (with an increased % requiring action) which suggested an improving relationship with partners with regard to managing the 'front door'. There has been overspend in Child & Family Services for a number of years and the committee was interested in how you were planning to bring this under control. You were clear however that making sure that all LAC were being properly supported was paramount, and we would agree.

Foster Swansea:

It was particularly pleasing to hear of the success in recruiting 40 new foster carers over the last year within Foster Swansea. You praised the marketing and publicity initiatives within the Foster Swansea team which have clearly made an impact. The latest figures (June 2013) showed that there were 170 (57%) children placed with Foster Swansea compared with 127 (43%) placed with independent foster agencies. This compared with a split of 49 to 51% 12 months ago. This represented a remarkable shift and is helping our efforts to

keep more looked after children in Swansea, which in turn is a help to our budget.

These were the big issues which we discussed and we will be interested in following these up when the next question session is arranged. We did not cover all aspects of your portfolio, particularly your responsibility for housing services, but will hopefully explore such areas then.

Summary of Suggested Action:

- a) considering engagement with scrutiny on the transformation of adult social services and inviting pre-decision scrutiny to assist your decision making on the big service issues;
- b) clarifying the decision-making process / structure in relation to the council's involvement in, and scrutiny of, the Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme.

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 20 September so that it can be included in the agenda of the Committee meeting taking place on 30 September.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MIKE DAY

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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