



**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA**  
**DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**

**To/  
Councillor Rob Stewart,  
Cabinet Member for Finance &  
Resources**

**BY EMAIL**

*Please ask for:  
Gofynnwch am:*

**Scrutiny**

*Direct Line:  
Llinell Uniongyrchol:*

**01792 637257**

*e-Mail  
e-Bost:*

**scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk**

*Our Ref  
Ein Cyf:*

**SPC/2013-14/11**

*Your Ref  
Eich Cyf:*

*Date  
Dyddiad:*

**10 February 2014**

Dear Councillor Stewart,

**Cabinet Member Question Session – 20 January**

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 20 January 2014 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources.

Although you highlighted the budget and financial management as the main area of work it was interesting to note the range of your portfolio responsibilities which included Information Technology, Human Resources, Asset Management, Legal Services and Procurement. And of course finance runs through every service area.

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

**Budget**

You stated that a lot of work has been carried out over the last year undertaking forensic analysis of spend across the departments which has informed budget proposals.

At the time of our meeting the budget consultation was still open. We asked about what issues had come out of that process and what impact or influence it may have on proposals, and how it was being brought together. You informed the committee that cabinet would discuss the consultation response (closing on 22 January) and consider outcomes, and if appropriate amendments to any proposals ahead of the report to Council in February. You

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**  
**CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA, SA1 3SN / CANOLFAN DDINESIG, ABERTAWE, SA1 3SN**  
[www.swansea.gov.uk](http://www.swansea.gov.uk)

indicated that the majority of responses centred on proposed care home and day centre changes, the EMLAS service, school crossing patrols, and closure of Pennard Library.

We asked whether the consultation process had generated new ideas for savings, as opposed to objections to proposed cuts. You stated that there were views about doing things differently or over different timescales and consideration would be given to looking at the route to the proposed changes, if not proposals themselves.

It was good to hear of a fairly large public response to the budget and how people have been able to give comments in a variety of ways. We noted that cabinet members have played a lead role in the process and been available at various public drop in sessions as well as in a 1-2-1 capacity. It is clear that many people welcome the opportunity for face-to-face engagement and, as you acknowledged, we need to ensure that venues can manage the demand.

We did express some concern about future reliance on the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector / community volunteers and their financial capability and stability to take over any service provision. You emphasised that due diligence work would take place ahead of any transfer of service and evaluation of relevant business plans to check that financial arrangements were sound and the skill base / capability was there. We agreed that this was not something that should be rushed and each case would need a carefully managed gradual transition period. We acknowledged that the council faced stark choices and where services were under the threat of closure efforts were being to identify alternatives that may keep things open. Indeed, it was noted that there are some good examples of community management of local facilities. Though we agreed that there was no broad brush to solve every issue and safeguard all services.

We also discussed the impact of significant changes over the next few years and challenge to the culture of the organisation and staff. We were particularly concerned about the impact for staff from externalisation and guarding against changes to terms and conditions and initiatives such as the living wage.

### **Information Technology**

You talked about the priorities for the service including stabilisation of infrastructure and solving service issues, and considering support in the future given the contract with Cap Gemini was soon up for renewal.

We asked about the cost of Microsoft licenses and whether thought had been given to moving towards the use of open source software. You undertook to provide a response to confirm that cost to the council in renewing Microsoft licenses. You explained that at this time there were constraints in the existing contract with Cap Gemini however alternatives would be fully explored to see how we could best reduce cost and increase capability in house and

opportunities to develop our own software. We would encourage you to explore this and suggested that some sort of audit of PC usage / I.T. requirements amongst the workforce might be useful in reducing costs as it could identify opportunities for bespoke set ups based on different needs. We also talked about developments in mobile and flexible working in terms of IT, for example hot-desking.

### **Workforce Development**

We noted that you were working jointly with the Cabinet Member for Citizen, Community Engagement & Democracy on workforce development. With increasing pressure on staff to do more for less you mentioned that you were looking at introducing incentives and ways in which good performance could be rewarded, particular for those working on the front line of service delivery. Also you were keen to modernise the annual reporting system (staff appraisals) and ensuring that the process is applied across all levels of the organisation.

### **Williams Report**

We asked about the implications of the Williams Commission report, which had just been published, and collaboration between councils. You were aware of the report and stated that, with the likelihood of local government reorganisation, it was pleasing that the report included suggestion that Swansea could stand alone as an authority. We were interested whether there had been any discussions with local authorities elsewhere to discuss future collaboration to achieve financial savings. We noted that there had been no direct discussions but consideration was being given to the potential for shared services and financial (as well as service) benefits.

### **The Next 12 months**

It is clear that the council faces significant financial challenges over the next few years which will have an impact on services. Cabinet Members will be responsible for delivering changes to their portfolios as a result of budget decisions, the achievement of savings, and the outcomes. Scrutiny will have an important role to play in questioning and holding cabinet members to account on how they are doing this. You welcomed the value that scrutiny can add to the process and our involvement in the implementation of budget changes and challenging progress against achieving intended changes / outcomes.

We note that the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel will be meeting on 10 February to discuss budget proposals with you prior to Cabinet and Council, but we agreed to make arrangements for an initial scrutiny meeting post-agreement of the budget to enable the Scrutiny Programme Committee to ask questions of cabinet members about the implications of the budget decisions and implementation. This is likely to take

place in April. We will contact the Cabinet Office shortly regarding Cabinet Member attendance and availability.

We look forward to meeting with you, and hopefully some of your cabinet colleagues, in April.

A formal response to this letter is not required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Day". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

**COUNCILLOR MIKE DAY**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

✉ [mike.day@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:mike.day@swansea.gov.uk)