

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A – SUPPLEMENTARIES

1.	<p>Cllrs Paul Meara, Jeff Jones, John Newbury</p> <p>Can the Leader inform Council what support, specifically what Financial Support this Council offers to Debt Support Organisations in the area?</p> <p>Response of the Leader / Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty</p> <p>For this current financial year the Council has funded Citizen's Advice Bureau, the main provider of debt advice in Swansea, with £151,000 via the Change Fund. This amount is not solely for debt advice provision</p> <p>There are a number of organisations receiving financial supported, that contribute to the tackling dent agenda although not specifically delivering debt advice.</p> <p>LASA Credit Union received £25,740 from the Change Fund for the expansion of their prepaid card scheme for members, as well as the facility for members to pay Local Housing Allowance to landlords. Over the last 2 years LASA have also received £1130.50 via a SLA with Housing to cover the joining fee of 133 Council tenants to access the 'jam jar account' offered by the Credit Union which provide tenants who have no fully functioning bank account with a convenient way of paying their rent.</p> <p>Age Concern Swansea Bay is funded via Supporting People £111,334.00 per year specifically to deliver a Housing Advice Service to help people stay in they own homes and prevent homelessness. This support includes Welfare benefit checks, support with applications. Debt and budgeting advice & support and signposting</p> <p>Shelter Cymru receives £12k per annum via the Voluntary Sector Grant. Whilst this money isn't used for the sole purpose of providing debt and financial advice, part of this money will include providing debt advice in order to prevent homelessness, eg a shelter caseworker sometimes attends court to advocate on behalf of LA tenants who are being evicted on grounds of rent arrears.</p> <p>Managing money is a one of the National Supporting People programme outcomes. There are a range of support workers within organisation that receive funding from the Supporting People Grant that provide debt reduction activity as part of a wider menu of support.</p>
2.	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker</p> <p>Recently, Coventry Council published information on staff sick absences. The cost to Coventry Council was £11.6m which was £2m more than the previous year and resulted in a reduction of 24 staff, 9 of whom retired but 15 were sacked. Could the Leader inform Council what the sick absence position was in Swansea for the periods 2013-14 and 2014-15?</p>

Response of the Leader

The average sick days lost in 2013/14 was 8.79 and in 2014/15 it was 9.56. This is a considerable improvement on the sick absence rates prior to 2012, i.e. for 2011/2012 it was 11.55 and in 2012/2013 it was 11.32.

The Council is continuing to take a wide range of actions to reduce sickness and, in particular, to manage stress, including:

- Helping Hands – the scheme is piloting numerous initiatives to help prevent sickness and stress by embedding coping techniques
- Stress Risk Assessment Workshops
- Mandatory Wellbeing Training
- Health Surveillance – this allows early identification/intervention, and prevent ill health in the workplace
- Health Fairs

The Executive Board has reviewed and reiterated the importance of firm management action and preventative approaches, with proactive support from the HR team, including:

- Appointment of a further full time Occupational Health Adviser for a period of 12 months
- Monthly meetings between Services Managers, HR Officers and Occupational Health to discuss the long term sickness cases
- Dedicated HR officer to contact employees on day 3 of sickness absence to clarify the reason for continuing absence and encourage an early return to work
- Regular reports on sickness, including compliance reports
- Further review of the Absence Policy

3. Cllrs Mike Day, Mary Jones, Cheryl Philpott

Will the Cabinet Member for Education give Council her assessment of the working of ERW including telling Council how much the Council contributes to it?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Education

Earlier this month Estyn published 'Improving Schools through Regional Education Consortia'. C&CS officers, Heads and teachers and elected members provided evidence and contributed to that report. Estyn makes positive comments about ERW and provides helpful recommendations. Publication was delayed until after the Westminster election but consortia were party to informal discussions and a start has already been made on the recommendations.

Swansea Council officers have and still are challenging on the issues of governance, transparency and school to school working. Terms of reference of the committees and groups who have to deliver the programme have been clarified. Work still needs to be done on Scrutiny arrangements and ensuring financial allocations are transparent.

Our joint Improvement Hub with NPTC has seen the Challenge Advisor team expand and improve and has gained respect from Heads across the Region. The National Model for Regional Working is now implemented providing both rigorous challenge and bespoke packages of support according to need.

The national categorisation of schools had some teething problems but has proved to be an effective tool in framing improvement dialogues with Heads and Governing Bodies. It is too early to gauge the full impact, but the system has greater clarity, better moderation and greater ownership.

The Council currently maintains a minimum ring -fenced contribution of approximately £1.4m to support regional working. The funding is used primarily to employ Swansea staff to support Swansea schools. There are socio-economic differences between the partner authorities the implications of which need further discussion.

4. **Cllrs Mike Day, Chris Holley, Graham Thomas**

In response to a question at the 4 November 2014 Council, the Cabinet Member for Education gave Council the percentage of surplus places in the Primary and Secondary sectors up to January 2014.

Will the Cabinet member for Education tell Council what are the most recent figures for surplus places for both sectors and also state the number and percentage of surplus places for every school in the City and County of Swansea?

Can she also tell Council what her target figure will be for surplus places in the Primary and Secondary sectors for this current academic year and for each of the years between now and August 2020?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Education

The most recent capacity figures are attached (January 2015) for each of the schools in Swansea. There is also a projection to 2022. We calculate the surplus capacity figures each January and September.

Summary of the figures:

Surplus Capacity	January 2015	January 2022
Primary	12.08%	9.51%
Secondary	10.70%	6.58%

The Welsh Ministers had a target of no more than 10% surplus capacity in schools by 2015 and therefore this would also be my target figure for the coming years.

[Additional information attached]

5.

Cllrs Mary Jones, Mike Day, Chris Holley

Can the Cabinet Member explain to council how her administration can afford to consider free transport for students but not for children attending Faith schools?

Response of the Leader / Cabinet Member for Education

It is not clear which group of learners the Councillors are referring to. Students in Higher Education do not receive free transport from the Council. Post-16 learners attending Gower College and Neath Port Talbot College are assisted in the costs the colleges charge for transport by an annual payment the Council makes to the Colleges dependent on student numbers. The Colleges decide on the final charge to each 'student' which is more than the Council subsidy. Transport is not free unless the young person has a Statement of Special Educational Need which includes the need for transport.

At the present time, the only group of 'students' who receive free transport, apart from those learners who have a Statement, are those who choose to attend a Swansea School which has a sixth form and who live more than three miles from the school or where there is no available walking route. A total of 485 pupils qualify for this assistance this academic year.

The Cabinet aims to bring forward options which will address the post 16 transport issues and place the support we are able to give on a fair and sustainable basis to help those who are most in need. The Council budget allocates almost £7m for transport for all learners.

In 2014, the Council consulted on proposals to withdraw all elements of discretionary transport. The decision taken at the time was to proceed with the removal of free transport for Faith schools. This decision has been overturned by the Judicial Review on two grounds and the Cabinet will consider the implications for transport policy.

6.

Cllrs Graham Thomas, Jeff Jones, Paul Meara

Will the Cabinet Member please tell council what are the current vacancy levels in our Council run older people's day centres?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Adults & Vulnerable People

Day services are an integral part of the overall support we offer older people and much valued by those accessing these services. As part of the prevention strategy this service aims to support the individual in their own home within their local community as long as possible. It contributes to the individual's overall health and wellbeing by offering emotional and physical stimulation. It attempts to reduce loneliness where friendships are formed, and can pick up early warnings signs of possible ill health, depression or signs of dementia. The individual's quality of life is significantly improved.

This valued service is also seen by carers as a life line - enabling them to continue supporting their loved ones and is part of the Carer's strategy which again is based on the person centred prevention agenda. Carers view this service as an essential part of the support they need knowing there is respite available for them as well as providing the service user something to look

	<p>forward to. The benefits of this service cannot be underestimated - the outcomes can be measured by the increase number of individuals staying in their own homes, reduction / delays in residential admissions and possible prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions.</p> <p>Given the above this service is much needed, it offers support to both the individual and their respective carers. It is an essential cornerstone of our prevention and wellbeing strategy for older people and it is therefore important that we ensure there is sufficient capacity for us to manage the potential increase in attendances.</p> <p>The figures as at 29 May 2015 were as follows:</p> <p>Hollies – potential to expand a further 43 places per week Ty Waun – potential to expand a further 30 places per week St Johns – potential to expand a further 53 places per week Rose Cross – potential to expand a further 64 places per week Norton Lodge – potential to expand a further 30 places per week</p> <p>The remodelling of both social work practice and service provision to an approach that promotes safer independence has coincided with a reduction in the use of day services.</p> <p>An evaluation of the reasons behind this reduction is being undertaken as the use of day services as a support to carers and to promote the safer independence of citizens is an essential part of our strategic plan going forward. We anticipate that the use of day services will increase in the coming months.</p>
7.	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker</p> <p>The Council has lost its case to remove free transport for children attending faith schools. Could the Leader advise Members what costs were incurred taking this case through the legal processes?</p> <p>Response of the Leader / Cabinet Member for Education</p> <p>The Councils legal costs incurred to date are £82,481.00 plus VAT. The Court ordered that the Council pay the Claimant's costs, however they have yet to submit these.</p>
8.	<p>Cllrs Mary Jones, Mike Day, Peter Black</p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member explain to Council why the Budget cuts to EOTAS (Education other than at school) are being implemented before any conclusions have been finalised by Scrutiny?</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Education</p> <p>The decision to move forward, after consultation, with the remodelling of the Home Tuition Service element of the EOTAS proposal has been made because home tuition addresses the needs of an entirely different cohort of children from the remainder of EOTAS.</p>

The Home Tuition Service is currently high cost. There are too many permanently appointed full-time teachers within the service which means that for several months of the year, the capacity of the team to provide home education exceeds the demand for the Service. In the academic year, 2014/15, the Service has an overspend of £200,000 after meeting demand. The same figure is projected for 2015/16.

With regard to the issue of waiting for Scrutiny to finalise a report, it is for the Scrutiny Programme Committee to consider how effective Scrutiny is in the process and timing of pre decision Scrutiny. I am sure the Committee is aware of the key dates within the Academic year for decision making in particular for staff. The Scrutiny Programme Committee is also aware of the need for savings across the Council this year.

The Chief Education Officer and I will be attending the meeting of the Social Inclusion Panel on 29 June to answer questions and provide an update on how the Council can deliver a service which provides better outcomes to pupils. The Panel and the Convenor have kept me informed of their work and their comments have been taken into account.

9. PART B – NO SUPPLEMENTRIES