

**Providing Council with Written Responses to Questions at Council –  
22 October 2015**

1.	<p><b>Lis Davies</b> <b>Questions:</b> Agenda Item11 “Local Housing Strategy”. Page 64. 1) “During October one homeless person was found dead in a doorway in Oxford Street and another fined for begging in High Street. The Councils Rough Sleepers Winter Plan – offers temporary accommodation during the winter months along with other temporary measures, however, there appears to be no mention of any strategy for the permanent re-homing of the homeless. Therefore, I would appreciate answers to the following questions.</p> <p>a)A copy of any report identifying how successful the homeless strategy has been in previous years?</p> <p>b)Copies of risk assessments carried out identifying the probable mortality rates amongst the homeless community during a predicted cold winter?</p> <p>c)Since 2012 to date, how many homeless persons have been provided with permanent homes by the Council?</p> <p>d)Chapter 6 – Ageing Population. How many older people’s complexes / units are currently provided by the Council in Swansea?”</p> <p><b>Joint Response of the Cabinet Members for Next Generation Services and Anti-Poverty</b></p> <p>1) The Local Housing Strategy 2015-2020 aims to address key housing issues in our area over the five-year period. It also takes into account the changed financial climate and housing market, in order to ensure an up to date and focussed delivery of housing and housing related services. Tackling homelessness is a key part of the document.</p> <p>The Strategy has taken account of the 10 Year Homelessness Plan for Wales and focusses on the prevention of homelessness. This is achieved by working across organisational and policy boundaries, on placing the service user at the centre of service delivery, on ensuring social inclusion and equality of access to services and on making the best use of available resources.</p> <p>Specifically the Homelessness chapter (6.1) sets out our challenges and objectives when providing permanent housing solutions for homeless residents. This chapter also describes Move On accommodation and the steps taken to both prevent homelessness and also to help people maintain a tenancy in the long term. In addition, chapter 5.2 (Letting and Managing Council Housing) makes specific reference to our assessment based Allocations Policy that is used to ensure transparent and equitable allocation of homes to those who need them most, including the homeless.</p> <p>a) There is no published report on the success of the homelessness strategy, we do however conduct a robust annual homelessness review. This review looks at the data available on persons approaching the Council for assistance in relation to homelessness. The reasons for them approaching the Council are studied in detail. This information is used to inform our</p>
----	---

strategic response and commissioning of services to manage homelessness locally.

In addition we have a performance management framework in place that is monitored and reported within the Council and to Welsh Government. This for example indicates our homelessness prevention levels, allows comparisons to be made with other Councils and areas for improvement to be identified.

b) Whilst we do not conduct any specific activities to identify probable mortality rates during periods of cold weather, there is a robust Winter Plan in place for Swansea. This is reviewed each year and aims to ensure all possible support is available to rough sleepers at times of severe weather. The weather is closely monitored and the plan is put into force when required.

For the last four winters we have operated a partnership between the Council, the Voluntary Sector and local churches to provide a Night Shelter and other essential services during some of the coldest months of the year.

Over the last two winters 77 Night Shelter referrals were accepted. 41 were moved into some form of accommodation from the Night Shelter. Some returned to the streets or went to stay with friends or family, but have since been helped into accommodation again. Accommodation provided may be a long term tenancy with a private or a social landlord, or an initial placement in a temporary supported housing scheme that has an exit strategy for planned moves into longer term independent housing.

For a variety of complex reasons not all rough sleepers want assistance. However, the Local Authority and the Voluntary Sector continue to try and engage with all rough sleepers to ensure that the risk of harm is minimised and their basic needs are met. The Local Authority also works very closely with the local health board. In particular, we are in close liaison with the outreach nurse and the street homeless mental health nurse.

c) Since Jan 2012, a total of 2891 households presenting as homeless have been housed permanently by the Council and RSL's. In addition, the Council has assisted 1,364 in securing accommodation in the private rented sector.

d) There are 31 Council owned, warden supported sheltered housing complexes across the City with a total of 983 units of accommodation. They provide a range of property types from bedsits to bungalows.

In addition there are 552 units of older person's accommodation throughout the City, again offering a range of property type from bedsits to 2 bedroomed bungalows.

We hope the information above is of use in terms of answering your queries. If however you require further detail then please let us know.

2.

**Lis Davies**

**Questions:**

1)Agenda Item 17 "Democratic Services Annual Report 8 May 2014–18 May 2015".

"Page 238. The report states that the WLGA is now intending to charge for

services on top of the annual payment it receives from the City and County of Swansea.

a)What is the annual contribution paid by the City and County of Swansea for membership of the WLGA?”

2)Agenda Item 17 “Democratic Services Annual Report 8 May 2014–18May 2015”.

“Page 236. The report identifies that 26 Councillor training events had been arranged. However, although there were 582 available spaces on offer, only 171 Councillors attended. This equates to about 30% attendance.

Therefore, a response to the following question would be appreciated.

a) A detailed breakdown of the costs associated with running the Councillor training programme, to include – both in-house and external costs relating to the WLGA and consultants fees?

### **Response of the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance**

1)The City and County of Swansea pays various subscriptions to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). During the financial period 2015-2016 the following has been paid to the WLGA:

Basic Subscription	£92,512
WLGA Procurement Unit	£7,680
WLGA European Office	£10,565
WLGA Regional Employers Levy (estimated)	£16,815
<b>Total</b>	<b>£127,572</b>

2) Of the 26 Councillor Training events organised by the Authority, 20 were run in house by Officers of the Authority. The costs relating to the remaining 6 training events are:

Date	Event	Officer	Cost
04.08.2014	<b>Public Engagement</b>	Participation Cymru / Rhian Millar	Training was provided by the WLGA and Participation Cymru at no cost to the Authority.
05.08.2014	<b>Public Engagement</b>	Participation Cymru / Rhian Millar	
06.08.2014	<b>Public Engagement</b>	Participation Cymru / Rhian Millar	
15.10.2014	<b>Financial Governance</b>	Jeff Dong & external consultants	The cost of Trustee Training is included within the specification of the retained Treasury Management Advisors (Capita Asset Services).
19.11.2014	<b>Workshop – Elected Members Role in Supporting and Promoting Gypsies, Roma and Travellers</b>	Jake Bowers in conjunction with Anna Morgan, WLGA	Training was provided by the WLGA at no cost to the Authority.
25.11.2014	<b>Scrutiny Councillor Development Session – Making the best use of performance information</b>	Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)	The LGIU provided the training at no cost to the Authority. Room Hire £90.00 Tea and coffee £29.58.

### **3. Councillor P M Black Questions:**

1) How we will use the registration and licensing system for the private rented sector to drive up the quality of privately rented homes in Swansea and improve their management.

2) There are 2269 homes in Swansea that have been empty for more than 6 months. The use of recyclable empty home loans is very welcome but we have now effectively picked off the easy fruit. Will the council be considering Empty Dwelling Management Orders and CPOs to reduce the number of empty homes further.

3)The Welsh Government have removed priority need status for ex-prisoners but have just developed a national pathway for homeless services for this group. What engagement have the council had with this and how advanced are our arrangements to rehouse homeless ex-prisoners, particularly women and young people.

4) A recent BBC FOI found that over the last 5 years 750 children aged 16 and 17 have been put in B&Bs across Wales, 100 off those stayed longer than the 6 week limit. Does Swansea feature in those figures and are we able to sustain the objective of NOT placing independent 16 and 17 year olds in unsupported B&Bs in the future? If not then when do we envisage being able to do this.

#### **Joint Response of the Cabinet Members for Wellbeing and Healthy City and Next Generation Services**

1) We welcome the new powers under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 for the registration of landlords and licensing of landlords and letting and managing agents. Welsh Government has designated Cardiff Council as the Single Licensing Authority (SLA) for Wales. Whilst Cardiff will have the lead role with regards to the administration of the new licensing/registration regime, we will be working closely with them and Welsh Government to promote the new requirements under the 'Rent Smart Wales' banner across the private rented sector in Swansea. Our aim is to build on our established proactive approach of working with landlords and agents locally to improve property condition and management standards. Information on Rent Smart Wales has been and will continue to be distributed via existing networks, including the Council's website and the local landlords' forum.

There are elements of enforcement of the new legislation which are delegated to local authorities and we will be taking enforcement action, where necessary and appropriate, to ensure compliance with the legislation.

Two of the main aims of the new legislation are to improve standards of letting and management practice in the private rented sector, and to bring about a raised awareness about rights and responsibilities for both tenants and landlords. It does not deal directly with housing quality, but it is anticipated that increased knowledge and management standards will lead to improved levels of accommodation as well as increased confidence for tenants in their landlords and agents.

2)Recyclable empty homes loans are one of the mechanisms by which we were able to intervene and assist in bringing 456 long-term empty private dwellings back into occupation in 2014-2015.

For many years, Swansea has been proactive in dealing with empty homes in poor condition and was the first local authority in Wales to use the Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) powers. We currently have one property which is managed through an EDMO.

The EDMO process has proved to be very resource intensive but we will continue to consider their use in appropriate circumstances

The use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) as a mechanism for bringing empty properties back into use has been examined. Whilst CPOs can be a useful tool, especially where there is a reluctant owner, the powers do present financial risks to the Council including high officer and legal costs and a requirement for compensation which are not recoverable.

In Swansea we have however found the enforced sale procedure to be a much more effective method. This can only be used where an owner has local land charges outstanding in relation to the property, but this is often the case for empty properties which are having a severe impact on a neighbourhood. With enforced sale all costs, including legal, administrative and officer costs are recoverable. Swansea has carried out 14 enforced sales to date, with an additional two owners settling all debts prior to sale and a further two properties currently going through the process. Each of these properties had been empty for a number of years and in poor condition, and sale to a new owner has resulted in repair or renovation works being carried out and the properties have been re-occupied.

3) Swansea has been represented on the Welsh Government Prisoner Accommodation and Resettlement Working Group and has actively contributed to the development of the Pathway. The Pathway outlines the work that is done with a prisoner in the 3 months prior to release, including re-establishing links with family and homelessness help if needed.

Locally our Housing Options service has had a dedicated Prisoner Resettlement Caseworker for many years. The role includes prison visits and receiving referrals direct from the prisons, and we are currently receiving 20-30 referrals per month.

There are no bespoke arrangements for women or young people who have been in custody; however specific issues are taken into account which may impact on these client groups when assisting with rehousing. This for example includes previous domestic violence, substance misuse, inexperience of managing a tenancy, and consideration of need for particular types of support in appropriate accommodation.

We received additional funding from WG this year to cover the period from April 2015, when the legislation relating to former prisoners changed. This is intended to assist former prisoners in the interim period until the full introduction of the new Pathway. Swansea is currently using this funding to provide short term temporary accommodation for all former prisoners whilst more suitable stable accommodation is sought. We have a high level of success in moving people into accommodation quickly, which may include private rented housing and supported housing projects.

4) Officers in Social Services are currently considering the statistics quoted by the BBC, and will provide a response as soon as possible to enable us to reply fully to your question.