

Council – 17 December 2015

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A – SUPPLEMENTARIES

1. **Councillors EW Fitzgerald, DG Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K E Marsh, IM Richard & GD Walker**
- In view of recent fire regulations what can be done to assist those with mobility scooters who live in Council complexes where these can no longer be stored in communal areas.
- Response of Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services**
- Whilst we recognise the wishes of tenants who want to remain independent by purchasing mobility scooters, we need to balance their wishes with the needs of other residents and the wider management and safety of the sheltered housing complexes.
- In 2009, Mid and West Wales Fire Authority visited a number of the Council's Sheltered Housing Complexes and provided advice in relation to the storage, charging and use of mobility scooters in communal areas. This was based on the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Under these regulations, the Council has a duty to consider any significant fire safety issues within the premises and put in place control measures to mitigate against these issues.
- Following this advice, the use of mobility scooters at sheltered housing complexes was reviewed and a report on 'The Use of Mobility Scooters at Sheltered Housing Complexes' submitted to Council in August 2010.
- The report recognised that property types within sheltered complexes vary. Whilst those living in a flat or bungalow with their own front door leading directly to a path or pavement would be expected to store and charge mobility scooters within their own home, it concluded that, from the professional advice received, it is essential to prohibit the use of scooters within communal corridors of internal complexes
- There is one exception however to the above; where a tenant has been assessed by an Occupational Therapist as requiring a powered mobility aid due to severely restricted mobility, they will be allowed to drive a scooter in all communal areas to access their flats, but will not be permitted to store or charge the scooter in these areas.
- As it is not an option for the vast majority of tenants in internal complexes properties to store scooters in their own home, should a request for a storage facility be made by tenants within an internal site, a consultation exercise is carried out with all tenants.
- To date, the only requests for scooter storage have been from Gloucester House and Llys Gwalia; an internal scooter storage and charging area has been provided at Gloucester House, and an external hardstanding has been provided at Llys Gwalia for the purpose of storage only.

	<p>New tenants are given advice on scooter storage and charging based on their property type when they are made an offer of accommodation.</p>
2.	<p>Councillors M H Jones, J W Jones & J Newbury Will the Cabinet Member tell Council what provisions there are for rough sleepers this winter.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty We offer a range of services to rough sleepers who may want/need assistance.</p> <p>This help is offered in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations aiming to assist anyone who may be homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to find a new home. Where a risk of homelessness exists, we look to prevent this by offering assistance via our Housing Options Service and partner agencies. We are however aware that, for a variety of sometimes complex reasons, rough sleeping does occur in Swansea. Local services actively seek out rough sleepers in the city. We operate a Rough Sleeper Helpline. This can take voice messages and texts regarding the location of rough sleepers. In response to notifications, an Outreach Worker will visit the location where the rough sleeper was seen. This will be done early the next working day. This is with aim of offering support and assistance.</p> <p>We monitor numbers of rough sleepers. Annual rough sleeper counts have previously identified 7-10 rough sleepers on the streets in any one night. Most are helped into accommodation. Some individual circumstances are particularly difficult to resolve due to complex and multiple needs around substance misuse, alcohol, behaviour and personality disorders. Our multi-agency approach means services are in place to tackle physical ill health and low level and undiagnosed mental health disorders.</p> <p>We operate a Rough Sleeping Task Group chaired by Housing Options. Services to rough sleepers include early morning outreach services, daytime drop in services, evening drop in services, street pastors during certain nights, specialist health services, support and pre-tenancy work, emergency accommodation and employment and training opportunities.</p> <p>Specifically in relation to the winter months, Swansea has a rough sleeper plan. It details extra measures that are put in place during exceptional circumstances such as severe weather events or pandemic illness. We have operated a partnership with local churches to provide a winter night shelter over the last 4 winters during some of the coldest months of the year. This is due to reopen again for January and February 2016 or sooner if the weather dictates it. The church night shelter has an extremely high success rate for moving men and women into accommodation.</p>

3. **Councillors C A Holley, C P Philpott & P M Meara**

The completion of the 360 cafe and toilets are the only piece of the Swansea Bay Strategy that has been completed.

Will the Cabinet Member tell Council what plans are in place for the Swansea Bay Strategy to be delivered given that we had support from the Welsh Government to enhance our Bay.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration

The Swansea Bay Action Plan adopted by the City and County of Swansea in February 2008 set out a range of policies and proposals for new developments and enhancements for the Bay. Whilst major new schemes including Mumbles Pier and foreshore, and Oystermouth Square will be largely private sector led and funded, the City and County of Swansea has put significant effort and resources towards supporting these projects, by preparing planning guidance and ensuring extensive engagement has been undertaken with the community in particular on the Pier and foreshore scheme. Mumbles Pier is privately owned by Ameco, and they have plans to refurbish the pier as part of a larger scheme which includes potential residential development and redevelopment of the Pier Hotel. Part of the pier refurbishment was undertaken during the recent construction of the new RNLI boat house and this provides safe access to the end of the pier. We understand that there is still market interest in the wider proposals for the regeneration of the Pier and foreshore area, outline planning permission has been renewed, and discussions are ongoing to bring a scheme forward for the site.

The Authority has also supported other private developers wherever possible to bring forward regeneration projects in the Bay area. For example it has released land to support the development of the Oyster Wharf scheme at the Tivoli which was also originally highlighted as having regeneration potential in the Swansea Bay Strategy. It is understood that the developer, Next Colour Ltd has agreed lettings on nearly all of the proposed units including the café bar and restaurant, and once completed the development will deliver significant public realm enhancements to the adjacent Foreshore.

In recent years funding has also been secured by the Authority for a number of key tourism and heritage projects in Mumbles. Significant restoration and conservation work has been undertaken by the Authority at Oystermouth Castle along with the provision of new visitor facilities and educational space. This £3 million scheme was delivered by the Council with funding from Heritage Lottery Fund, the Welsh Government through Cadw, the European Regional Development Fund and Visit Wales. The 360 Café and Watersports Centre at St Helens and small new visitor facility at Knab Rock was delivered as part of a broader £1.4 million scheme to make Swansea Bay a Watersports Centre of Excellence using funding from the Wales European Funding Office as well as the Welsh Government through Visit Wales and the Regeneration Area programme and Mumbles Community Council.

The future management of Swansea Bay and the protection of its landscape designations and biodiversity assets were identified as a particular issue through the preparation of the Strategy. A draft Environmental Management Plan has therefore been prepared to consider the feasibility of a range of potential initiatives and support potential funding bids. It includes potential

projects such as the management of sand movement and visitor beach access, and efforts to raise awareness of the Bay as a significant environmental asset through interpretation, training and events.

There was also significant investment in the public realm at the urban end of Swansea Bay during 2011-14 as part of the Waterfront City programme with over £1m invested in new railings, lighting, bins and seating on the City's promenade and new and improved pedestrian linkages between the City centre and the waterfront. Works are currently underway for the refurbishment and reuse of the vacant former Observatory building on the seafront for a café bar restaurant, supported in part by Vibrant and Viable Places funding. The re use of this building and occupation of commercial units at Swansea Point's Atlantic Square is also contributing to greater visitor use and vibrancy of the waterfront and promenade.

The current focus for future regeneration and development on Swansea Bay is at the urban end of the foreshore at the City Waterfront. The draft Swansea City Centre Strategic Framework was published for public consultation in January 2015, and included proposals for the Civic centre site and its adjacent car parks as originally highlighted as part of the adopted Swansea Bay Strategy. The new draft Framework recognises this area of Swansea Bay as a priority site, and a unique asset for the City which could make a substantial contribution to the future regeneration of the City centre and its future in a City Regional context. The site on the waterfront along with St. Davids in the core area has recently been the subject of a high profile marketing exercise, and the Authority is currently considering a number of bids for the redevelopment of the Waterfront site with proposals that could include landmark tourist developments and high quality spaces. Swansea University is also exploring the potential for a hydro hub research and development facility on the site that could include an iconic aquarium.

With established and updated regeneration strategies in place for the Bay and City centre, active efforts to draw in available grant funding, ongoing work with private sector developers and the appointment of potential developers in the near future for key sites, we remain positive about future investment in development and regeneration opportunities around Swansea Bay. In what is currently a difficult economic climate and where there are considerable pressures on local authority budgets, we hope that the information set out above helps to confirm that the City and County of Swansea has an ongoing commitment to regeneration in Swansea Bay.

4. **Councillors J W Jones, C A Holley & A M Day**

Will the Cabinet Member tell Council how many people are currently using the Community 1st programmes.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty

The total number of participants that have taken part in Communities First Delivery Plan activity during the full year 2014/15 (As reported to Welsh Government) was **8,229**.

The total number of participants that have taken part in Communities First Delivery Plan activity during the first six months of 2015/16 (As reported to Welsh Government) was **3,894**.

5.	<p>Councillors L G Thomas, P M Black & T H Rees Will the Cabinet Member explain to Council what method was used to select the areas for the two building plots for the very welcome council house building programme.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services The locations for the two pilot schemes of new Council housing were agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on the 17th September 2015. The purpose of the pilot schemes is to inform and assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the overall financial viability of directly developing new Council housing; • the practical, organisational and capability issues that will need to be addressed as part of the ongoing More Homes programme; • specification options to balance the viability of the scheme with the affordability for the occupants and overall sustainability of the design. <p>As such, a number of factors were taken into account to inform the choice of suitable locations including the potential funding of the schemes, that they should be Housing Revenue Account (HRA) owned land, that the developments would be relatively small scale and that any land with unusual characteristics should be avoided in order to ensure that viability could be tested and the results used elsewhere.</p> <p>The basis for the selection process was the HRA owned candidate sites for residential development in the Local Development Plan. This ensured that only HRA owned sites of sufficient size for meaningful development were considered. It also meant that some desktop analysis in terms of planning requirements, site restrictions and general topography by officers across a number of services had already been undertaken.</p> <p>The sites were then the subject of a further, more detailed desk top assessment of any related issues that may impact on development and the two sites that emerged from this process that would best fulfil the objectives was land at Milford Way in Penderry and at Parc Y Helig in Birchgrove.</p>
6.	<p>Councillors M H Jones, C A Holley & P M Black We were assured by the Cabinet Member that the transfer of the IT provision to “back in house” would be a seamless exercise. Will the Cabinet Member tell us what went wrong.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Finance & Strategy This question is completely outrageous and disingenuous. Cllr Mary Jones has either deliberately mixed up two separate pieces of work in order to try and undermine the staff working in those areas or has demonstrated yet again her complete lack of knowledge and understanding of ICT.</p> <p>I would have thought Councillor Jones would be congratulating staff for the excellent work they have carried out rather than attacking them and taking cheap shots against people who have no right to reply.</p>

The recent ICT issues experienced by the Council were as a result of critical electrical maintenance work required both to the loading bay transformer and server room wiring. This work has been in the planning for many months involving many different departments across the Council and is totally unrelated to the transfer of ICT to an in-house provision which has been seamless. In respect of these electrical works, IT staff have worked long hours before, during and after the changes, sometimes until the early hours of the morning. If the contract were still external the remedy would have been very costly for the Council and in all likelihood would have taken longer to resolve with the previous supplier contracts. During these works the ICT team also took the opportunity to further improve resilience by installing additional capacity, reconfiguring parts of the infrastructure, and replacing some of the back-up power systems. All Councillors were advised of this in October.

What Cllr Jones conveniently forgets is that this issue goes directly back to the disastrous Service@Swansea programme which was supposed to deliver £80m of ICT savings over 10 years and delivered less than £2m.

Further to this, the Lib Dem led administration with Cllr Jones as the relevant Cabinet member, failed during their time in charge to invest and keep the council's IT estate up to date. When Labour took over in 2012 we were horrified at the risks the authority was carrying and immediately took a decision to make emergency investment in our IT estate to stabilise it. That investment has continued and further investment is planned this year.

So in conclusion, our Council IT Team Members, some of whom have only recently transferred to the Council, and who have worked tirelessly to make sure the upgrades to the IT estate have taken place, should be commended not criticised, as should the staff who have handled the Capgemini contract exit which, as stated earlier, is entirely separate from the ICT infrastructure work. For the record, the ICT transfer has met all its targets and milestones and will deliver savings from next year of over £1million per annum. This is a great achievement given where the Council was and all Councillors should take great pride in this achievement and in the quality of the dedicated staff that we have.

PART B - None