



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

**To/  
Councillor Rob Stewart,  
Leader of the Council**

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**SPC/2015-16/1**

*Your Ref  
Eich Cyf:*

*Date  
Dyddiad:*

**03 August 2015**

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Leader of the Council following the meeting of the Committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2015. It reflects on the question and answer session held with the Leader about his responsibilities as Leader and chair of Cabinet, including the budget, commercialism in the council, city centre, developments, adult social care and the Local Service Board.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

**Cabinet Member Question Session – 13 July**

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 13 July 2015 answering questions on your work. We focused on your role as Leader and chair of Cabinet, and wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact in relation to your areas of responsibility.

We are writing to you in order to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the committee, and, where necessary, raise any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

**Budget**

You highlighted the current challenging financial position and projections. You were particularly pleased with progress against savings targets however stated that the situation remained very difficult. You indicated that there would be in-year cuts in Welsh Government funding that would affect local government across Wales and anticipated the need to find additional savings. For Swansea this would mean losing around an additional £3.5m which would threaten grant funded services; money which the authority cannot replace.

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**  
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You felt this one was of major challenges ahead as cuts will have an impact on continuing improvement and needed a strategic refocusing of services. You referred to a number of commissioning reviews of various services, underway as part of the Sustainable Swansea Programme, including adult social care. You also told us that you were learning from authorities elsewhere, looking at what they have done in dealing with the impact of significant cuts.

You also highlighted the importance of ambition, innovation and creativity to future improvement and success for the City and County. You questioned the UK policy of continuing cuts against the need for growth, particularly in Swansea and the region. As an example you talked about plans for a new council house building programme.

### **Commercialism in the Council**

You stressed the importance of exploring ways to generate income to reduce to impact of budget cuts and loss of grants, in order to protect services and jobs. We discussed the investment the council is making in this new approach. We heard that you were looking to progress a number of schemes to make the council more commercial and business-like.

The committee did highlight the need for oversight of the approach to ensure that decisions about commercial ventures are made at the appropriate level between members and officers i.e. to encourage innovative approaches but ensure a clear framework so that schemes can stand up to scrutiny. You recognised that this was new territory and required a degree of cultural change within the organisation for members as well as officers.

You provided an example of the running of car parks in Nottingham to illustrate the benefits of adopting business-minded practices, and ensuring council services are attractive and competitive with other providers. We raised some issues members had with the costs quoted from within the council of environmental improvements identified in their wards. You agreed that this needed to be looked at.

### **City Centre**

We asked about progress with the marketing of Civic Centre and St. David's sites. You informed the committee that the marketing process (following OJEU advert and presentations for interested parties) has resulted in the council currently working with 5 national / multinational consortia. We learned that some of these were interested on only one of the sites, some both. You were working towards a preferred developer being identified before the end of 2015. You stated that the St David's site was likely to see work first due to the relative readiness of the site for development. You clarified that at this stage the discussions were about development proposals and assessing those, not simply the sale of land. Consideration of financial implications and options will

follow in due course and what is best for Swansea, but you stressed that it would be private money that would be behind the development of the sites.

## **Developments**

You referred to a number of positive developments for Swansea. You mentioned the Tidal Bay Lagoon project, Swansea University's Bay campus, and the expansion of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. You spoke with excitement of Swansea becoming a 'major league' university city.

We also discussed the development of the City Region and benefits. You clarified that this was about authorities across the region working in collaboration for mutual benefits and the ability to attract funding for schemes that would otherwise be difficult to achieve through competition with each other. It was about getting organised and coordinating work across the region with a coherent strategic foundation. You believed that a strong Swansea city centre was good for region as a whole. You stressed the importance of the city and wider region being able to encourage graduates to stay and work, and creating the right environment to attract business, and for business in the area to flourish.

## **Adult Social Care**

We received a question from a member of the public via Twitter (@angrees9) which asked about "action being taken on crisis in elderly care, respite and emergency being moved out of county and the private sector overwhelmed". You stated that you would provide a full response in writing although did speak about the council's transformation of adult social services and commitment of resources to helping older people to stay in their own homes. You also talked about the value of newly appointed Local Area Coordinators as part of investment in prevention, as well as the collaborative working under the Western Bay Health & Social Care programme. It would be helpful if you could provide a copy of the response to the public question to us when you do so.

## **Interface with the Local Health Board**

We discussed the issue of funding of the National Health Service in Wales and the interface with council social services. The example of bed-blocking was cited which costs the NHS but raises the argument of whether funding is being directed at the right areas in order to ensure capacity within social services to provide suitable care elsewhere. We recognised it was a complicated picture and you stated that closer working with the health board and through the Western Bay Health & Social Care Programme will help ensure better service delivery, however things are funded.

## **Local Service Board**

The committee welcomed the news that the multi-agency Local Service Board (LSB), which you chair, will be meeting in public from July onwards. This is something which the Local Service Board Scrutiny Performance Panel has been calling for over the last year. It is very pleasing that members of the public will not only be able to observe but have a chance to ask questions at each LSB meeting. We understand that Swansea is the first LSB in Wales to do so!

A number of other matters were discussed:

**Inspection Reports** - You highlighted outcomes from recent inspections. You reflected on some very good reports, despite the financial climate, and praised the excellent work across the council which has led to positive reports from Estyn, CSSIW and Wales Audit Office.

**Anti-Poverty** - You informed the committee that tackling poverty was still a key policy commitment. We noted that whilst the approach to target the areas of greatest need was still prevalent, the impact of cuts across Swansea meant that any area of need must be covered.

**School Buildings** - You talked about investment in the school rebuilding programme. You referred to the recent opening of Morryston Comprehensive following a major rebuild, as well as future plans (e.g. Lôn Las and Gorseinon primary schools) as part of the Council's QEd 2020 programme.

**Local Government Reorganisation** - You cited Local Government Reorganisation as another challenge but we noted that ahead of formal changes you felt it important to be in discussion with counterparts in Neath Port Talbot about working together and relative strengths and weaknesses to identify where collaboration can make the biggest difference.

**Energy** - We asked for your thoughts on sustainability and in particular energy supply. We asked about the prospect of setting up a local energy company, with supply independent of the national grid. You stated that less local government funding has to come with greater freedoms and flexibility and with the available land in Swansea it was feasible that this could be used for energy generation. You stated that renewable and reliable energy in Swansea is something that you would be interested in.

**Ward Visits** - We noted with interest your programme as Leader to visit all wards in the City & County of Swansea. You stated that you had already toured a number of areas (e.g. Penderry and Cockett) to gain an insight and see first-hand what is happening in local communities. You indicated that you would be in touch with local members ahead of any planned visits.

## Scrutiny and Cabinet

We noted comments made by the Auditor General in the Annual Improvement Report about the role of Cabinet Advisory Committees (CACs) and need to avoid duplication with scrutiny. This issue was raised at our Scrutiny Work Planning Conference in June at which time the Director – Corporate Services indicated that you were preparing a report for Council to address this issue. We asked about progress in this regard. You agreed that there was a need to clarify the role of CACs and coordination with scrutiny in light of experience. We look forward to your report to Council.

We invited your comments on the scrutiny work programme and our interaction with cabinet members. We noted your positive comments about the way scrutiny has been working and the way cabinet members were being challenged and held to account. You felt that we were already looking at the major areas but of course the financial challenges facing the authority and its impact on services, as well as the cultural changes necessary, required scrutiny. You also welcomed any input on the commercialisation agenda.

We did raise an issue with the Cabinet Forward Plan (Forward Look) and limitations in the information provided as this is what use to inform opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny. We would welcome improvements in this matter.

## Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome any further comments however **we do not expect you to provide a response**. While no response is required we noted that you have agreed to:

- look into the cost issue identified by members in relation to environmental improvements in their local areas;
- respond directly to the member of the public who raised a question about adult social care, with a copy sent to the committee; and
- look at how the quality of information about future cabinet business can be improved, particularly to benefit the pre-decision scrutiny process.

Finally, we look forward to meeting you again in December when the committee will be able to focus on your specific Finance & Strategy portfolio responsibilities and follow up on developments.

Yours sincerely,



### **COUNCILLOR MARY JONES**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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