



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Mark Child,
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing &
Healthy City**

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SPC/2015-16/3

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*Date
Dyddiad:*

20 October 2015

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Healthy City following the meeting of the Committee on 14 September 2015. It is about Local Area Coordination, Smoking, Parks, Open Spaces, Japanese Knotweed, Healthy Eating, Allotments and Cycling.

Dear Councillor Child,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 14 September

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 September 2015 answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Healthy City. We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact in relation to your areas of responsibility. Thank you for the written information also provided to the committee that gave us the headlines.

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:

Local Area Coordination

We asked about the role of Local Area Co-ordinators. You talked about the rationale for Local Area Coordinators as an important preventative measure, with the aim of reducing demand on social services and health, and helping people to stay independent in their communities. You highlighted the personal support that they can provide individuals; it was not just about giving information. You reported that the 3 Local Area Coordinators in post since June appeared to be working well though it was too early to draw any major

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conclusions. We noted that there will be an effectiveness review late November / early December, carried out by Swansea University, which would help determine scope for expansion, depending on resources. The committee felt it was a positive step forward and looked forward to the outcome of the review. The committee also talked about importance of working with the Fire Authority who also did a good job in community prevention work, spotting vulnerable people and referring issues on.

Best Start in Life

You highlighted work being carried out so that everyone involved in the early years of a child's life in Swansea, is able to contribute to their development with the aim of them being ready for school. You stated that ensuring that children have the best start in life and are ready for school remained the most important thing. There were still examples where children were not toilet trained and unable to attend school and this was likely an indicator of other problems. However, you felt that progress was being made in establishing a shared approach by professionals across sectors so that parents are able to understand and support their child's development.

Smoking

You talked about plans to try to 'de-normalise' smoking, in addition to the direct support and encouragement provided to individuals to stop smoking altogether. For example: tackling issues around peer pressure, and visibility of smoking. You highlighted that smoking was still the biggest factor affecting health and health differentials across Swansea, and a major cause of early deaths in Swansea.

Parks

We heard that you had agreed to participate in the 'Park Lives' scheme, sponsored by Coca Cola, to get more people using parks and take part in activities. You felt this was a positive project which would otherwise be difficult to deliver given budget pressures facing the Council.

We asked about progress in relation to working with community organisations and 'friends of parks' organisations. We were particularly interested in progress with lease of Underhill Park which was a matter of pre-decision scrutiny last November. With regard to Underhill Park you stated that it has taken longer than hoped but the Mumbles Community Association was making progress now and things were on track to proceed with the lease of the Park. You were also pleased at the level of public interest in 'friends of parks' organisations.

We also asked about the use of playing fields by clubs and cost of pitches. You explained that permit fees had to be set in order to cover the Council's costs and were competitive, but clubs were encouraged to consider self-management, in the first instance.

Open Space Strategy

We asked about progress with the Open Space Strategy. You explained that you were working to produce this strategy as a document to support the Local Development Plan (LDP), as the quality of the built environment has a proven direct effect on people's health. You stated that it was important to consider the needs of each community when considering building on open spaces.

Commissioning Reviews and Finance

You talked about significant budget reductions across Leisure services, and need to consider alternatives in order to best maintain provision. You recognised there were difficult choices ahead given the contribution that leisure makes to healthy living, as well to tourism in the area. You highlighted the continued pressure across the Council and increasing reliance on communities to take control of local facilities. This was something the Council was keen to support.

Japanese Knotweed

We asked about specific efforts to adequately control Japanese Knotweed control on Council land. You stressed that the Council wanted to eradicate it, but it was a particularly difficult and resistant weed. You were pleased to inform the committee that the Council was now offering the service commercially to support funding to reinvest into treating Council land. You stated that you would provide a fuller response in writing in relation to work carried to adequately control Japanese Knotweed and resources. You encouraged committee members to contact you to flag up any issues within their local areas that needed attention. We also asked if you had any information about the outcome of trials in Swansea that involved the use of an insect to try to kill the Knotweed.

Healthy Eating

You called this an intractable problem, and a huge challenge. We asked about education in respect of healthy eating. You mentioned the LEAF (Learning about Exercise, Activity and Food) healthy lifestyle project delivered by Swansea Council for Voluntary Service. This project delivers 6 week programmes in family homes and group settings looking at cooking, nutrition and physical activity. You stated that you were also working with health and leisure centres on this important issue and that you were keen to encourage physical activity particularly amongst children and particularly girls to improve health.

We asked about obesity and encouraging walking to school. You were keen to encourage parents to avoid driving children to school and talked about the importance of school gate safety. Linked to anti-smoking efforts you stated that schools would be encouraged to make areas around school gates smoke free zones.

Allotments

We asked about allotments and community garden provision. You confirmed that you wanted to encourage new allotments wherever possible as they were positive for health and wellbeing.

During 2013 a Scrutiny Working Group looked at this matter and wrote to the then Cabinet Member. We were interested in how things have moved forward since then and for your awareness repeat the key points made at the time, for response:

- The Council provides an improved initial online point of contact that is free of jargon and encourages further interest
- Single indicators for community food growing and demand for plots are developed and updated regularly in order to chart progress.
- Usage and demand are mapped against geographic areas of the city and demographic groups
- Usage is benchmarked against other areas.
- Swansea Voices is used to gauge potential further demand.
- Frontline staff in other departments / partner organisations are provided with information about the benefits of community food growing and details of who to signpost people to.
- Community food growing is promoted through a communications campaign including Swansea Leader.
- Community food growing is promoted to and through community and town councils.
- Councillors should also encourage other forms of recreational gardening and growing (e.g. flowerbeds, community orchards, etc).

Cycling

We asked about safety on the Kingsway and the provision of a cycle lane. There was some concern about the temporary arrangements and cycling being restricted to one way only. Of course the concerns about vehicular transport and the safety of pedestrians needed to be addressed but perhaps it gave the wrong signal about cycling. You recognised the concern but felt that the Council needed to be ultra safety conscious, but having one cycling lane was a start, as there was no existing cycle lane, and should be welcomed.

Your Response

In your response we would appreciate your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to:

- our request for information about work and resources in relation to Japanese Knotweed; and
- whether issues raised by scrutiny in relation to allotments and community food growing have been taken forward.

Please provide your response by 10 November. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

Finally, we look forward to meeting you again to follow up on portfolio developments and hearing about achievements and impact.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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