

Council – 26 January 2017

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A – SUPPLEMENTARIES

1	<p>Councillors C A Holley, J W Jones & P M Black Will the Leader/Cabinet Member tell Council if we have been successful in having the City Deal and (a) What will be the cost of the borrowing both supported and unsupported to the Council and (b) What contributions will be made from the Welsh Government and the Westminster Government.</p> <p>Response of the Leader Discussions on the City Deal are on-going with both the UK and Welsh Governments, and the outcome will be communicated to Council as soon as possible. The total cost of the City Deal will depend on the composition of the deal that is finally approved, and this will determine the contributions that will be made from the Welsh Government, UK Government and Council.</p>
2	<p>Councillor T J Hennegan Can the Cabinet Member tell us how many people benefitted from the excellent 'Together at event' at the Brangwyn hall on the 20th December which was supported by the Council.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty & Communities This event organised by JR Events and Catering in partnership with the Council was an open invitation and opportunity to those persons throughout our City, who found themselves facing homelessness, the most vulnerable and in need, to enjoy a free 2 course Christmas Lunch including a soft drink, which they may otherwise have been unable to afford. The Brangwyn Hall event was promoted and supported by the Tackling Poverty Team together with our partner agencies including local Homeless Charities and proved to be an excellent success. On the day, 162 hot Christmas lunches were provided to those in need and Community First support and engagement Officers were available to provide support, advice and signposting. The kind of support offered included: Job searching and CV writing. Support in finding work. Benefits Advice. Reducing energy bills. Learning courses. Volunteering.</p> <p>10 attendees were supported to fill in forms and all are in the process of being referred onto employability support, housing, learning support, communities for work and welfare benefit support, as many of these individuals are in need of help from all these services. 20 persons also took advantage of the offer of a free haircut, which was being provided by a local hair stylist. A vote of thanks</p>

	<p>must be extended to JR Catering and Events for their kind hospitality and generous donation in providing all meals free of charge, to all the volunteers who gave up their free time to assist in making this a very worthwhile and successful event, even arranging free transport where necessary and finally, to those members of the public in Townhill who donated 4 food hampers, which were shared out at the event to those in need. It was very pleasing to receive 'Positive' feedback from those attending and it is our intention to repeat this event in the year ahead.</p>
3	<p>Councillor C Thomas Can the Cabinet Member tell us how many pot-holes have been repaired since the introduction of the new task force team? Can he also confirm how much additional investment has been made in the road network in the last 4 years.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation 1,700 potholes have been repaired by the pothole repair team since the initiative was launched in August 2016.</p> <p>The Authority has provided an additional £1m per annum for the last three years (£3m total) for planned highway maintenance works. In addition to this £150k per annum has been provided for the pothole initiative.</p>
4	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, I M Richard & K E Marsh Could the Cabinet Member suggest why Wales continues to languish at the bottom of the UK nations in the international PISA tests despite apparent year on year improvements in GCSE results.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Education The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students.</p> <p>In 2015, over half a million students, representing 28 million 15-year-olds in 72 countries and economies, took the internationally agreed two-hour test. Students were assessed in science, mathematics, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy.</p> <p>The results of the 2015 assessment were published on 6 December 2016. The performance of students in Wales was below the PISA average score. Students in Wales also performed worse than their counterparts in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the assessment.</p> <p>However, these results are a Wales-wide average and are not broken down into local authority level figures.</p> <p>The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) administers the PISA tests to a representative sample of schools in Wales. The sample for all countries is selected by an external organisation on behalf of the OECD. The sample (which is of pupils rather than schools) is then passed to NFER. The PISA tests therefore differ to GCSEs which are undertaken by almost all Year</p>

	<p>11 students.</p> <p>PISA assessments taken in November 2015 are not currently comparable with GCSE examinations taken in summer 2016 in Wales. Over time, the new GCSEs in Wales will be aligned to PISA-type skills and question types. The examination specifications have now changed and in future there will be a closer link to how pupils apply their skills in a range of contexts. However, it is not guaranteed that there will be a close correlation between results immediately because new qualifications mean new grade boundaries. It may take a few years to see a worthwhile comparison.</p> <p>All available evidence shows Swansea is performing well above the Welsh average. We have evidence here that progress against key indicators has been positive in Swansea since 2013 and the recent Estyn inspection of the regional school improvement service reinforces progress is being made across the board. Although PISA uses its own examination papers and only publishes a national average, pupils in Swansea performed well in these subjects at GCSE level in August 2016.</p>
5	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, I M Richard & K E Marsh</p> <p>Does the Leader consider that a £4million spend to demolish a building represents good value for Swansea taxpayers.</p> <p>Response of the Leader</p> <p>The question typifies the negative attitude of the questioners. Yes the total cost of the demolition phase is more than anticipated but when we consider that the council did not hand over any cash for the site, but instead swapped a small lease for the entire Oceana site, the overall cost are still within the range for a site development of this significant size and scale. Major regeneration schemes often require the removal of derelict buildings to facilitate new private sector investment and job creation opportunities. Demolition costs can vary significantly depending on the type, age and size of the building to be removed. An assessment of value for money should consider not just these costs, but the overall costs and the benefits, both financial and economic, they produce. Once complete the building will provide income for the council as well as providing accommodation for new businesses and new jobs for the people of Swansea. The complete lack of vision and progress shown by the previous administration damaged our city centre and is continued by the questioners today. Swansea fell behind other cities and tumbled out of the top 30 retail centres in the U.K. during their time in office. Local businesses and local people suffered as a result. If we want Swansea to be successful and local people to have opportunities then we have to get on with rebuilding our city, create more jobs, attract more investment and make a better future for the people of Swansea. It is a pity the questioners have no interest in any of that and just want to do nothing. We know as their time in office demonstrated, doing nothing gets you nowhere.</p>
6	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald & I M Richard</p> <p>Why does the Leader believe that concentrating so many units of student accommodation in the City Centre is a positive move.</p>

	<p>Response of the Leader Investment interest for Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) schemes has grown strongly in recent years, outperforming many other more traditional property sectors. This has been a national trend within large university towns and cities, which is now affecting Swansea. The growth in such investment is set against a backdrop of our expanding universities, which are so important for the economic and cultural future of Swansea. The Council needs to take a sensible strategy for directing such investment to appropriate locations, in the interests of facilitating sustainable regeneration, meeting the accommodation needs of students, ensuring our universities are not disadvantaged and respecting the amenity of residents. The planning strategy for directing such investment is set out in the UDP (Policy HC11) and emerging LDP (Deposit Policy H11), which seek to prioritise the mixed use central areas of the city, as well as within existing campuses, rather than so called 'out of centre' locations and residential neighbourhoods. This approach represents a sustainable way of planning for the future accommodation needs for students, in particular by encouraging use of cycling, walking and public transport rather than car use. The approach also supports regeneration initiatives and helps avoid adverse amenity impacts that large developments can sometimes cause within low density residential areas. The Planning Authority is to undertake a public consultation in early 2017 on draft supplementary planning guidance relating to PBSA and Houses in Multiple Occupation, which ultimately will be used to determine planning applications. Members are encouraged to feed into the consultation process, which will run for a minimum of 6 weeks, to ensure that any re-draft of the planning guidance takes account of all views expressed on this important matter.</p>
7	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald & I M Richard Have any discussions been held in recent times with potential partners to revive the Swansea/Cork ferry.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation We are not aware of any discussions regarding a new Swansea/Cork ferry service since the previous operators Fastnet Line ceased operations in February 2012.</p>
8	<p>Councillors C A Holley, J N Newbury & A M Day The very interesting plans for the redevelopment of St David's will have elements of residential flats and housing as well as retail. Is there any element that includes student accommodation.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation There are no plans for student accommodation within the St Davids scheme now known as Swansea Central. This development will introduce a vibrant mix of uses that are needed to create vitality and footfall within the city centre. The scheme will consist of a new digital arena, digital square, new retail and leisure offerings, and residential uses. It could also consist of new university facilities, but these would not be student accommodation. Whilst student accommodation is not being considered for the Swansea Central development, there is potential for student accommodation in the city to meet the needs of our expanding</p>

	<p>universities and student population. A planning application for this site will be considered in March.</p>
9	<p>Councillors M Lewis, G J Tanner & C Thomas Can the Cabinet Member tell me what level of investment has been made in upgrading the council house stock to WHQS over the last two years and what investment is planned in the coming years and in which areas of Swansea.</p> <p>Response of Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services To date, around £120m will have been spent improving the Council's housing stock up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard since 2014/15.</p> <p>Council will be asked to consider the detailed budget and programme proposals when it meets on February 23rd. The proposals for the 2017/18 year include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wind and weatherproofing schemes in Penlan, West Cross, Loughor, Cwmbwrla and Pontardulais; • Repairs to system built housing in Craig Cefn Parc, West Cross, Caemawr, Winch Wen, Sketty and Dyfatty; • Roof renewals to properties in Blaenymaes, Bonymaen, Townhill, Port Tennant and Gower; • Sprinkler systems to Sheltered complexes in Gorseinon, Loughor and St Thomas; • Kitchen and bathroom renewals to properties in Morryston, Clase, Clydach and Pontardulais; • External facilities within the curtilage of properties in Penlan. <p>In addition, programmes that will include selective properties in most areas where there is Council housing include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chimney Repairs; • Electrical Rewiring; • Boiler replacement; • Meeting the needs of tenants with a disability. <p>In total, over £200m will be further invested to ensure full achievement of the standard by 2020/21.</p> <p>Schemes are developed based on the results of the most recent stock condition survey. Further details regarding the location of the various schemes will be made available to Ward Members after Council has made a decision on the proposals.</p>
10	<p>Councillors C A Holley, M H Jones & J N Newbury A letter in the local press on Tuesday 20th December 2016 about the City Deal, Councillor J Raynor gave the impression that the Labour Party in Swansea would be in a position to run its own bus company. Will the Leader please explain to Council if this is correct and if so why has Council not been told that this was part of the City Deal.</p>

	<p>Response of the Leader</p> <p>The city deal is making very good progress and we hope to formally sign the deal in the next few week. The city deal provides funding for a number of projects. Alongside the defined projects we are looking at regional transport developments. One of the key challenges will be to provide a successful modern affordable integrated transport system to support the new city and region economy. This may include new bus and other public transport operations being provided by new operators which may include the authority.</p>
11	<p>Councillor N J Davies</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member confirm that performance of this authority has improved over the last four years. Can he provide independent evidence of that Improvement.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance</p> <p>I can confirm that performance has improved across the Authority over this period examples being improved examination outcomes for our pupils, reductions in the number of looked after Children across the Council with more localised care packages aimed at better outcomes, increased recycling rates for our domestic refuse and improved performance in terms of pothole repairs to highlight just a few.</p> <p>Evidence to support this can be found in the quarterly monitoring reports that are taken to Cabinet, from the external audit reports (such as the Annual Improvement Report, Annual Audit Letter, etc.) received from the Wales Audit Office and the reports arising from statutory inspections of our education and Social Services functions undertaken by Estyn and CSSIW respectively.</p> <p>Congratulations should also go to our schools for their continued performance evidenced by individual ESTYN inspections.</p> <p>Of course it is not just public services that have shown an improvement; The national and international standing of the Council has improved greatly arising, amongst others, from the adoption and development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which is now embedded across the Council and within schools, which has led to a generation of Children being made aware not only of their own rights but of course the rights of others, together with international recognition as a UNESCO City of Learning.</p> <p>This improvement has been brought about by developing a culture of setting clear and unambiguous Council priorities, consistently applied and promoted by Members and staff alike. It has been further developed by a collaborative and open dialogue with our external inspectors and a commitment to develop and implement action plans to address any issues which they identify. Key to the improvements has also been the significant effort that has been made in terms of collaborative working with our Public and Private Sector partners.</p> <p>Of course none of this improvement would have been possible without input from staff at all levels of the organisation; There have been many instances over the past four years, and particularly in the last year, where Council has had the</p>

	<p>pleasure of seeing staff receiving awards for innovative, creative and ground breaking work as well as for evidencing high performance. Indeed, during the term of this administration Swansea Council was voted the most sustainable organisation in the UK - an outstanding achievement by any standards.</p> <p>All this has been achieved against a background of fiscal austerity which has required the Council to make considerable savings across all services; such is the size and nature of the financial pressures facing the Council that no services can be exempt from these cuts; However, in line with the Council's stated priorities relative protection continues to be afforded to Social Services and Education within the overall Council Budget.</p> <p>It has also been achieved against a background of continued but significant developments in terms of the legislation which we have to adhere to such as the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, the Future generations (Wales) Act, the impact of legal cases such as the Deprivation of Liberty Standards and of course the implementation of Welsh Language standards.</p>
	<p>PART B - None</p>