



Council – 3 December 2020

## Councillors' Questions

### Part A – Supplementaries

1	<p><b>Councillors Wendy Fitzgerald, Mary Jones &amp; Chris Holley.</b></p> <p>The Leader has stated that he is putting in place a recovery plan – post Covid – that will lay the foundations for the future transformation of the Council. Included as part of this plan are some fresh approaches to education such as Blended Learning.</p> <p>Could the Leader/Cabinet Member explain how they see Blended Learning making a difference to children’s education, what challenges does Blended learning present for teaching staff and how are these challenges being met.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement Learning and Skills.</b></p> <p>During the course of the pandemic, the education system has had to adapt and innovate in many areas and no more so than in the area of blended or remote learning.</p> <p>However, a few aspects are important to note.</p> <p>Firstly, children have missed face-to-face teaching. Therefore, blended learning is not something that is going to replace the main bedrock of children’s educational experiences.</p> <p>Secondly, blended learning is not a new <i>pedagogy</i>. The underpinning pedagogical approaches remain the same, but blended learning is a different method of <i>delivering</i> teaching and learning.</p> <p>This is an important point. High-quality learning, regardless of the means of delivery, consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building on prior knowledge, skills and experiences</li><li>• Providing clear instructions and explanations</li><li>• Modelling approaches and scaffolding work</li><li>• Choosing activities and resources that develop continuity and progression in learning, and provide appropriate practise and challenge</li><li>• Providing opportunities for assessment and feedback to strengthen learning</li></ul> <p>Swansea’s blended learning strategy is built on these pedagogical foundations.</p> <p>The difference that blended learning can make to children’s education is that it has upskilled teachers to enable them to create additional resources and ways to</p>
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support learning. For example, recorded lessons and related resources can be accessed remotely after lessons have been delivered. These can be made available to help pupils revisit and refresh previously taught work, or to support pupils who have missed lessons. In addition, schools have developed online assessment techniques that can quickly provide efficient feedback to teachers and children. Live sessions have proved effective in engaging and supporting children's wellbeing, particularly some of our most vulnerable. Live sessions and a range of home-support resources have been used to engage parents and to support them with helping their children to learn at home. Further areas that we can look to develop include, collaborative blended learning between schools, including the post-16 sector.

The main challenges faced have centred on the upskilling staff and pupils to use digital platforms and software efficiently and effectively. Also, the associated workload around creating and designing resources is significant. It is also clear that a blended learning approach still includes paper based learning and pupils often express their preference to working through additional work packs.

Schools and teachers have responded to these challenges incredibly well. Using guidance provided by the Education Directorate, leaders have adopted strong, evidenced-based approaches to their planning. Many have used the Education Endowment Fund's (EEF) tiered approach as a framework for their work along with our blended learning guidance. The EEF's first tier is to ensure high-quality teaching for all. To do this, professional learning for teachers and other practitioners has focussed on the science of learning through high-quality instruction, scaffolding, metacognitive strategies, high-quality assessment, flexible grouping and digital skills development.

Officers have supported schools where needed, and our secondary and primary networks have been used well to share best practice and to create professional dialogue.

In addition, staff in schools have also supported each other exceptionally well during this period. For example, teachers have shared good practice by running twilight sessions on live-lesson walkthroughs, pop-up workshops on Microsoft Quizzes and drop-in digital surgeries in the staff room. Again, our networks, including the virtual school website, have been powerful vehicles to share and develop good practice.

Importantly, schools have used staff, parent and pupil surveys well to design, improve and refine their provision. For example, pupil-survey information has indicated that staff were generally sending too much work home when pupils self-isolate. Following this feedback, teachers have responded by being more measured in what they send.

Overall, whilst challenging and certainly not perfect, blended learning has allowed teachers and pupils to develop strong strategies to support learning well. We look forward to developing this work further within the Policy Development Committee for Education.

**2 Councillors Mary Jones, Mike Day & Wendy Fitzgerald.**

Since our schools went back in September thanks to the efforts of staff and cooperation of pupils there appears to be very few cases of Covid-19 within the

school community. Will the Cabinet Member update Council with the number of pupils and staff that have been diagnosed with Covid-19 from September to date

**Response of the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement Learning and Skills.**

Up until lunchtime on 12 November 2020 there had been 180 pupils and 102 school staff that had a positive test for Covid-19.

We have developed a very cautious approach in listening to the advice of NHS Test Trace Protect (TTP) here in Swansea. As a result, schools in Swansea are not the source of Covid-19 transmission and children and young people are protected when in school.

All children and young people are following the school rules and are careful about washing hands and wearing a face mask if they need to.

However, schools and providers of education are being disrupted when a community transmitted case comes in from the outside. We continue to urge everyone to keep a close eye on symptoms and to follow the rules.

**3 Councillors Mike White, Robert Smith, Sam Prichard, and Wendy Lewis**

This has been a difficult year with Covid-19 and the impact on all businesses. What effect has this had on delivering Swansea Council's Education capital projects, the new builds and modernisation programme and the classrooms for Reducing Infant class sizes.

**Response of the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement Learning and Skills.**

This indeed continues to be a difficult year with Covid-19 and it has presented additional challenges to the delivery of the scale of capital investment that we are delivering across schools within Swansea.

Particular challenges relate to matters such as the capacity of contractors to maintain progress of schemes to timescales with the impact on the availability of staff, the impact on the procurement and supply chains involved for materials, and the limitations of meetings on site.

However, we are determined to continue to deliver the investment required across our schools for the benefit of learners and mitigate as far as possible any impact on timescales and cost.

Although working within heightened safety rules due to the coronavirus pandemic, it is pleasing to see contractors on all the sites are continuing to make very good progress.

This was exemplified in September when Gorseinon Primary School opened to pupils as planned.

Five major school investment projects are underway in Swansea, with more than £50m currently being spent on new buildings and improved facilities at Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr, Bishopston Comprehensive School, the new Pupil Referral Unit in Cockett (known as Maes Derw) and new schools for Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tan-y-lan and Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tirdeunaw. This all part of a further £150m

	<p>investment in schools in Swansea, jointly funded by the council and Welsh Government under the 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme.</p> <p>We are also continuing to deliver investment opportunities through other initiatives such as Reducing Infant Class Sizes, with the project at Hendrefoilan Primary School on site and due for handover in December and the Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Bryniago project due to start on site in January 2021. The annual capital maintenance programme is still progressing as planned.</p> <p>In Swansea we are seeing the biggest ever investment in school buildings and facilities which is resulting in old and outdated buildings being transformed and new schools replacing those that are no longer fit for purpose, as well as supporting local businesses and local jobs.</p>
4	<p><b>Councillors Cyril Anderson, June Burtonshaw, Gloria Tanner, and Mike Lewis.</b></p> <p>During the current pandemic the hospitality industry has been hit extremely hard. Can the Cabinet Member tell us what has the council provided, both financially and in other ways, to ensure that safe outside trading can be continued.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Investment Regeneration and Tourism.</b></p> <p>Support has been multi-faceted, with cross departmental collaboration seeking solutions and opportunities wherever possible, to assist the sector through the pandemic.</p> <p>Rent concessions have been offered, to support small businesses who have been prevented from trading. Temporary planning and licensing processes have also been created to permit outdoor trading, including the use of tables and chairs on land next to premises and the designation of new mobile trading sites. To help coordinate activities for the City Centre, a multi-agency group has been active from the beginning of July, Chaired by the City Centre Manager, supported by other services and the private sector, which has helped facilitate a range of practical measures. These include extending the closure of Wind Street to enable businesses there to use more outdoor space, the relaxation of the Pavement Café application process including the freezing of fees and the provision of grants to fund the purchase of outdoor equipment.</p> <p>Our Special Events team has applied its experience in reviewing safety and operational plans, identifying suppliers for items such as fencing, signage, waymarking and providing stewards and support for ‘reopening’ the City Centre and outdoor premises, stakeholder engagement, and the creation of ‘pop up’ offers. This, along with the provision of information, advice and guidance, signage and promotional material from Tourism and Marketing, has provided a much needed support network for the sector and enabled those businesses to retain a significant number of their employees and supply chains. Some examples of new initiatives that were enabled include the use of Southend Gardens, the successful Swansea Bay pop up in Singleton Park and use of Wind Street and pavements in the City Centre, providing residents with much valued opportunities to enjoy the city, responsibly.</p> <p>In support of those that operate and ‘enjoy responsibly’ (a key message in our covid campaigns, that has been widely distributed through marketing material across the city centre, prom, beaches, parks and districts, by Tourism team); additional Enforcement Officers and City Centre Rangers are also in the process of being</p>

appointed, who will be deployed alongside our existing staff teams to support the evening and night time economy. Their role will aid the sector's recover and engage the public to promote responsible behaviour and Covid safe activity.

In addition to the relief and collateral offered to the sector, staff in Economic Development have coordinated the Premises Outdoor Adaptation Grant. This scheme was created rapidly, working with Welsh Government Regeneration to enable grants of up to £8k to be made available for businesses to create additional outdoor trading space, and help compensate for loss of internal trading area due to social distancing. 207 grants have been awarded with an approximate value of £1.2m. A high quality standard has been maintained to ensure longer term benefit of this investment.

**5 Councillors Mike Day, Peter Black & Susan Jones.**

With reference to assessments for adaptations, the Cabinet member gave a response at last Council, which is appreciated. In the light of Covid-19, many people are choosing to stay at home rather than go into hospital but, needing adaptations to their living space to enable them to remain at home. Reference was made in the answer to the service is in the process of increasing resources to address the current backlog of assessments. Could the Cabinet member tell Council what actions are being taken to reduce the waiting time for adaptations, for example, have additional OTs been recruited. The current waiting time is 3 to 4 months. What is the target for waiting times. And when do you anticipate that those waiting times will be achieved.

**Response of the Cabinet Member for Homes, Energy and Service Transformation**

In response to current demands for adaptations and in support of improving waiting times the Housing Renewals and Adaptations service has contracted an additional external part-time Occupational Therapist (OT) resource to carry out additional assessments. This is in addition to the 3 OTs employed directly by the service and will be used to provide additional capacity during periods of high demand.

This arrangement has previously worked well and prior to the Covid lockdown resulted in the service reducing waiting times for an assessment to around 3-4 weeks for applicants who had made an enquiry for adaptations at the end of February 2020. We will review the effectiveness of the additional resource and consider increasing this should that be required.

The Covid period did however impose unrepresented restrictions on the service and applicants who made an enquiry at the beginning of March 2020 were not able to be assessed by an OT until the end of May / beginning of June at the earliest. Due to Covid working restrictions in place OTs could only carry out telephone / video assessments of the clients at that time, these assessments were only suitable for some of the enquiries received, with others having to wait for restrictions to be lifted. As a result a backlog of assessments has arisen.

OTs have now returned to carrying out assessments of clients within the home, but due to social distancing restrictions still being in place a dual assessment is undertaken with some details taken over the phone prior to the home visit assessment taking place. This together with other Covid restrictions such as need

for PPE, is impacting on the numbers of assessments OTs are able to carry out compared to pre-covid service and productivity.  
As a result of the reduced numbers of assessments being carried out by OTs due to Covid restrictions, the service has not been able to keep up with demand resulting in the backlog increasing. The additional OT resource will assist in keeping up with current demand but will not address the backlog of cases. To mitigate, the service is intending to further increase Occupational Therapist capacity short term. This is however subject to a procurement exercise and OT expertise is in acute short supply. The service is also competing with other South Wales Local Authorities in the same position of seeking additional OT resource to address covid related backlogs.

Given the ongoing operational difficulties the Covid restrictions have imposed on OT assessments, we cannot commit to a target for waiting times for a client to receive an assessment. This is however the service's top priority. Until the Covid pandemic has been resolved and restrictions cleared allowing the service to operate as normal, there will be some inevitable disruption to the service with clients having to wait longer at times.

For those clients in need of adaptations to allow them to remain at home and avoid hospital admission, many of those clients will already be known to Social Services when assessing care provision needs. The Social Services OT service have confirmed at present they are concentrating their resources on clients / carers who require adaptations to avoid any immediate risk of injury to avoid hospital admissions.

The Housing Renewals and Adaptations service also works in partnership with Western Bay Care and Repair to carry out urgent minor adaptations for clients to prevent hospital admissions and assist in hospital discharges.

**6 Councillors Lynda James, Jeff Jones & Susan Jones.**

Swansea Council has been trialling non- chemical methods of eradicating Japanese Knotweed. Have these trials been successful in removing the plant from the test site and if so what variety of insect was used.

**Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management**

Since 2011, Defra in partnership with the Welsh Government and Natural England has been funding specialist scientists to investigate the scope for biological control of invasive, non-native aquatic and riverside weeds.

CABI (Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International) has been the lead organisation for the natural control trials of invasive species types Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam in Swansea, working with the Council's Environment Officer in the Nature Conservation Team

Japanese knotweed

In May 2011 the psyllid *Aphalara itadori* (a type of leaf hopper) was released by CABI at an undisclosed site in Swansea. This site was monitored for around 4 years. The psyllid was later introduced at a second site in the area and monitored over the period 2016-18. Swansea Council's involvement in this project ended in 2018.

Unfortunately the results were not successful as the psyllid did not establish. However CABI are now looking to identify a new strain of psyllid that is more suited to the UK climate.

#### Himalayan balsam

Trials of a 'rust' fungus released for the control of Himalayan balsam commenced at two sites in Swansea in 2015 and monitoring continued to 2018. Early signs are encouraging and research is on-going but not at either of the local sites.

#### Floating Pennywort

The Council's Environment Officer discovered this aquatic invasive species in 2008 on Council land at Garngoch pond /common. This was the first recorded find in Wales and was put on NRW's rapid response list and treated by them over a number of years. In 2019 the pond was declared all clear following the 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of absence.

7 **Councillors Beverley Hopkins, June Burtonshaw, Gloria Tanner, and Sam Prichard.**

Can the Cabinet Member tell us how we compare to other areas in our unemployment figures and what actions has Swansea Council taken to protect Businesses and Jobs during this Covid Pandemic.

#### **Response of the Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities**

Latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the claimant count unemployment rate in Swansea stood at 5.7% in October 2020 - there were 8,905 residents of working age who were claiming out of work benefits and seeking employment. The claimant count unemployment rate in Swansea was below both the Welsh (5.9%) and GB (6.3%) averages. When compared with the other local authorities in Wales, Swansea was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> out of 22, and had a lower unemployment rate than the other cities of Newport (7.6%), Cardiff (6.4%) and Wrexham (5.9%).

The October 15<sup>th</sup> 2020 Cabinet Report on 'Supporting Economic Recovery in Swansea' gives an overview of the actions being taken by the Council to support businesses and jobs during the covid-19 pandemic.

<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s68193/12%20of%202%20Economic%20Recovery%20Report.pdf?LLL=0>

Actions have included:

- Administering Welsh Government grants to local businesses through schemes such as the covid-19 business rates grants, start up grants, cultural freelancer grants, firebreak/ local lockdown grants. Nearly £100m of grant support has been distributed to date:
  - £50.26 million pounds in grants paid out to 4,027 Swansea businesses in respect of the first round of Non-Domestic rates related grant (April to June 2020).
  - Almost £11m to 3,548 Swansea businesses in respect of the Firebreak Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) grants, most being in the bank accounts of the business 8 days after the scheme went live. Of the £30m of Firebreak grants that have been paid out to date across Wales, about a third of the total sum has been paid out to Swansea businesses. There

	<p>are different eligibility criteria for the two grant schemes which is why the numbers paid are different.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The estimated total amount to be awarded for 20/21 for the extended Retail Leisure and Hospitality Rates relief to eligible Swansea businesses is over £35m.</li> <li>• Businesses that are in difficulty have been encouraged to contact our Business Rates Team to discuss and remaining amounts outstanding. Where appropriate we have been able to reschedule payments over a longer period than normal, delay the start of payments and direct businesses to where further practical advice and support is available.</li> <li>• Launch of the Swansea Premises Adaptions Outdoor Trading Grant in July, using Welsh Government Transforming Towns Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) funding. Over 200 grant awards are being made to local businesses across the county.</li> <li>• The successful reopening of the city centre through partnership working between City Centre Management, Swansea BID, local traders and businesses. Data from Centre for Cities showed that Swansea was one of the most successful cities in the UK at attracting footfall back during the summer following the relaxing of covid-19 related restrictions.</li> <li>• Extended and adapted employability provision to continue supporting individuals throughout the pandemic, including short term unemployed. Over 300 people have been supported since the start of the lockdown in March, over 130 helped into employment and over 1,500 training weeks created through Beyond Bricks and Mortar.</li> <li>• The Council has also supported over 150 people to access sector specific training courses in line with labour market and client demand, including CSCS construction, Security and other training opportunities.</li> <li>• Employability Mentors and Advisors have linked with other internal and external services to help residents with a wide range of issues escalated by the pandemic including financial exclusion, access to welfare benefits and mental health support.</li> <li>• Three virtual Meet the Buyer events so that local contractors could take advantage of supply chain opportunities across a number of projects. The event on the 21<sup>st</sup> May was the first virtual Meet the Buyer event of its kind in Wales, setting the blueprint for other similar events across the country.</li> <li>• A Shop Local campaign is being launched this month to encourage people to support their local businesses and economy.</li> </ul>
8	<p><b>Councillors Chris Holley, Gareth Sullivan &amp; Kevin Griffiths.</b></p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member inform Council what is the timescale for the new link road for SA1 and will the Baldwins bridge be part of this project.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management</b></p> <p>The authority is seeking to progress the project in conjunction with Welsh Government, following their acknowledgement of the potential benefits of investing in infrastructure improvements along the Fabian Way corridor. Whilst the replacement of Baldwins Bridge itself is a key element of this programme, due to its condition and importance to the strategic network, a link road through to SA1 is also a key aspect. This aims to support the ongoing regeneration of the area and provide alternative and sustainable transport links through to SA1. Although no direct funding was allocated to the project by Welsh Government for the current</p>



	<p>year, they have provided an ongoing commitment to develop the project. Land acquisitions on a number of the key sites are well advanced and this will ultimately dictate the phased programme for delivering the infrastructure schemes. It is apparent that the link road element is likely to be delivered in advance of the bridge itself. We are currently working towards submitting a planning application for early 2021 with the aim of submitting a funding application to support the commencement of work works during that year. Although the decision to invest in the project is ultimately in the hands of Welsh Government, we are continuing to develop the project to enable delivery at the earliest opportunity.</p>
	<p><b>Part B – No Supplementaries</b></p>
9	<p><b>Councillors Lynda James, Peter Black &amp; Chris Holley.</b></p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member confirm if patient notes in nursing homes are audited to ensure accuracy and completeness as they are in the NHS.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Community Health Services</b></p> <p>I can confirm all patient records in Care Homes are audited. This is carried out by Swansea Bay University Health Board Nurse Assessors for nursing residents and Swansea Council Social Workers for residential residents. Care Plans and Risk Assessments are also updated monthly. Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Wales (RISCA) regulations make provision for a 3 monthly report with audit for Care Inspectorate Wales.</p>
10	<p><b>Councillors Mike Day, Jeff Jones &amp; Kevin Griffiths.</b></p> <p>At the last Council, the Cabinet Member responded to the question on mechanical street sweeping. Can the Cabinet Member tell Council where the public can find out which areas have been swept and what the schedule is for sweeping in each ward.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement &amp; Infrastructure Management</b></p> <p>I can advise that there is no set sweeping schedule for each ward, and there are no publically accessible records of street sweeping.</p> <p>Generally, the core city centre shopping area is swept daily, other main shopping areas are swept three times a week, other areas swept a couple of times a year, with additional sweeping prioritised on a needs basis.</p> <p>There is also prioritisation given to areas of high leaf fall during the Autumn.</p> <p>Details of sweeping at a particular location can be provided on a request basis.</p>
11	<p><b>Councillors Chris Holley, Graham Thomas &amp; Jeff Jones.</b></p> <p>Will the Cabinet Member inform Council as to whether the money needed to bring our Leisure Centres up to the required standard for transfer has now been completed.</p> <p><b>Response of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration &amp; Tourism</b></p>

The Capital improvement works in partnership with Freedom Leisure were due to be completed within the first two years of contract start date, therefore by October 2020. Some delays have been unavoidable due to Covid-19 interrupting some work, but the majority of the planned work has been completed on time and within budget. The budget for the improvements was agreed at £5,161,923 (£5.16M), and at time of reporting is 94% committed.

In summary, works carried out across the portfolio at all facilities include:

- Reconfiguration of public access and spaces to improve customer journey
- Improve management of safeguarding at a number of school sites
- Improvement, and increase size and capacity of gyms and studio spaces
- Creating welcoming entrances and offering catering services as appropriate
- General uplift in look and feel of the facilities, including within changing areas both wet and dry side
- Backlogged maintenance of mechanical and electrical equipment
- Energy reduction schemes
- Environmental, roofing, drainage and roofing works, as required

A number of additional schemes have been developed using grants and other direct Freedom leisure funding to maximise the improvements, and were over and above what was committed to within the original proposal. Feedback from users and key stakeholders has been really positive and the facilities are looking superb as a result of the improvements and are being well maintained under the partnership.

Of the £5.1M, there is a remaining sum of £314,000 which Freedom has budgeted to finalise improvements across the portfolio which specifically relates to residual backlogged maintenance issues and some final improvements to visitor spaces in line with the wider offering.

This will be spent within the remaining part of 2020/21 and into the early part of 2021/22.