



Council – 7 October 2021

Councillors' Questions

Part A – Supplementaries

1 **Councillors Lesley Walton, Cyril Anderson, Wendy Lewis, Mandy Evans, Mike Lewis & Sam Pritchard**

Please can the Leader tell the council how much the rise in National insurance will cost the local authority taxpayer in employer contributions, and how much employees will pay (by pay band).

Response of the Leader

While we of course support the need for extra investment in NHS and social care the way in which the funding is being raised, falling as it does on the lowest paid rather than those most able to pay is disappointing. It will also place significant cost on the Swansea taxpayer. The initial estimate of extra cost to Swansea Council taxpayers would be £3.625m a year or, put another way, equivalent to a council tax rise of around 3% if U.K. government do not provide the required financial support.

It can only be an initial estimate at this stage because the precise detail will follow but also because the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have “guaranteed” in their Build Back Better document that all public sector bodies will be fully recompensed for the cost. Let’s see how long lived that part of this new double lock guarantee holds come the comprehensive spending review, national budget, Barnett consequential and local government finance settlements.

Of course as the levy is longer term to be part ring fenced for adult social care I also look forward to the second part of the double lock, seeing specifically the tens of millions of pounds of extra funding this Council can expect to receive from the levy. Assuming that bit of the lock doesn’t jam shut in practice either. Furthermore this new levy only pays for an element of the care cap and reorganising health and social care in England, not the costs of living, accommodation or food, not the growing costs of social care provision which will fall to councils. No wonder the sector is very worried. The U.K. Government document clearly states, all the costs of prices, pay, demography et al will continue to be met by council tax rises, (in England) the social care precept, and “long term efficiencies in the care sector”, for which we can presume the same old austerity cuts!

The levy on employees is an interesting one at a headline 1.25%. Despite pledges from the prime minister of having a ‘ready to go’ plan to solve social care, the last minute microwave meal rather than oven ready nature of it means for next year it’s just done via national insurance contributions, it will take a further year for the levy to be applied.

	<p>In the meantime, until that levy is sorted. those on just over £50k a year will pay just 3.25% (2% plus 1.25% levy) NICs above that threshold!!, Those employees on below £50k, almost our entire workforce, left paying the full 1.25% increase of course on top of the current underlying 12%. Of course if you are self-employed or pay voluntary top up contributions for your state pension you don't face an increase. One crumb of comfort, the levy won't be taken from pension income, only earnings, presumably to soften the blow of the ditching of the pension triple lock, we are about to come on to.</p> <p>No wonder the TUC, the CBI, the IFS, the LGA and others are deeply troubled by this half-baked plan on the back of a pin head. It's a tax on lower paid jobs and a tax on lower paid workers. It doesn't guarantee the necessary funding for either social care or the NHS. Those who voted for Brexit will wonder why it's is needed at all, after all £350m a week or £18.2bn a year was promised to be on its way to the NHS as part of the PM's Brexit divided. Which if it were true would deliver more annually than the proposed rise in NI.</p> <p>The care sector which is in crisis already is now facing cuts to take home pay for the lowest paid carers, and increases in care sector employer costs, truly the economics not just of the madhouse, but of the workhouse.</p>
2	<p>Councillors Wendy Lewis, Mandy Evans, Mike Lewis, Cyril Anderson, Lesley Walton & Sam Pritchard</p> <p>We applaud the free bus travel initiative which has allowed many families and residents the opportunity to travel in Swansea for free this summer. Can the relevant Cabinet Member confirm how many extra journeys were taken by bus and what the potential saving was to families in Swansea.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management</p> <p>As a result of the free bus travel scheme on 5 weekends during the summer holidays over 226,400 benefitted from free travel. This figure is in addition to the trips made by concessionary bus pass holders who already travel for free.</p> <p>The cost of an adult day ticket with First Cymru is £4.70 on bus or £4.20 for an M ticket and for under 16's is £3.10. The cost of a family day ticket is £12.50 (1 adult and 4 children or 2 adults and 3 children). The free travel scheme has therefore enabled significant travel savings to be made throughout the summer holidays.by residents and visitors.</p>
3	<p>Councillor Irene Mann</p> <p>I would be most grateful if the council re evaluated its policy regarding the booking of time slots by residents who wish to use the Councils' waste amenity sites to dispose of garden / household waste". The policy was necessary at the height of the Covid Pandemic.</p> <p>However it (the policy) has led to a significant increase in fly tipping and complaints from residents regarding the storage in gardens of waste and detritus in neighbouring properties. Some residents who now have to wait weeks for an allotted time slot to attend the amenity sites are either flytipping or storing quantities of waste materials in their gardens.</p>

This situation has created increased pressure on an already over burdened "Environmental Health Department."
I would hope that Councillor Thomas would consider reverting back to the original pre Covid procedures and policies. Residents could attend the sites at a time convenient to themselves but would have to wear face masks and practice social distancing when on site.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

For clarity, I would confirm that the only site which had a booking system introduced was the Llansamlet Recycling Centre. This site previously experienced significant queuing on peak days, which worsened significantly due to Covid restrictions. The booking system has been well received by site staff and visitors who no longer have to experience extensive waiting times to enter the site.

The large number of slots available means that there are always slots available to be booked on the same day, so there is no waiting of weeks as suggested, and there is no evidence that the booking system has created any increase in fly tipping or storage of waste in gardens.

The other 4 Recycling Centres across the Authority can be visited without the need to book, and there is no current intention to remove the highly successful booking system at Llansamlet Recycling Centre. Indeed, in the Brynmill and Uplands area, the nearby site of Derwen Fawr is receiving material from residents as normal.

4 Councillors Lyndon Jones & Brigitte Rowlands

Following the success of Emma Raducanu at the US open it is clear that tennis is a popular national sport and our recreational spaces should be protected for young people to keep active and enjoy sports.

Cabinet has decided to not proceed with any of the schemes submitted for the double tennis court site at Langland. This location is a key tourist destination and deserves better.

Could the Cabinet Member give a commitment to a time scale on making a decision on this site or is he waiting until after the next election.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism

We made it clear that we want the very best for Langland Bay and rest of Swansea's beautiful coastline – and we were delighted with the interest that developers showed in this site. We thanked them for their interest.

There were a number of innovative and interesting schemes submitted. However, we don't think that any one scheme quite matched our ambition to deliver the best solution for Langland, its residents and its visitors.

It's an important location and we want to get it right with the right mix of top-class facilities and will therefore be preparing a more detailed development brief.

Along with a detailed development brief of this Langland site we're also ensuring we have a clear strategy for other defined sites around the bay

We'll let developers know of any future opportunities and will keep everyone up to date with the progress that we make.

5	<p>Councillors Chris Holley, Jeff Jones & Mary Jones</p> <p>This year is probably the worst year for weeds growing by the roadside and pavements. Although the schedule on the website states that the work has been carried out the results have been abysmal. Will the Cabinet Member please confirm that spraying has actually taken place in all areas and has the normal mixture been used.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management</p> <p>I can confirm that the weed spraying has been undertaken as shown on the website (<u>Weedspraying schedule - Swansea</u>) and that the same chemicals have been used. The first spray was started on time however the heavy rainfall in May delayed the spray by around 5 weeks allowing weeds to take root. This has led to a catch up situation were the second spray was also delayed, this is now nearing completion and the third spray will follow immediately afterwards. The contractor continues to work with us and recognises the affects the delays have caused. Any areas of significant weed growth that are present two weeks after a spray has been completed should be reported and our weed spraying contractor will revisit.</p> <p>Additional resources have been approved from the recovery fund, approximately £160k 21/22 and £600k 22/23 to tackle the areas where unacceptable overgrowth has occurred. This will include purchase of specialist equipment including two sweepers with weeding attachments.</p>
6	<p>Councillors Cheryl Philpott, Kevin Griffiths & Chris Holley</p> <p>Would the Cabinet Member agree that 'one cap' does not suit all when it comes to recycling. The City and County of Swansea is home to a number of high rise properties, sheltered housing and other areas of communal properties where recycling is not accountable to one particular household. Would the cabinet member agree that there should be a high expectation of recycling within these areas but that those who do recycle should not be penalised by those who, due to physical/mental (or both) disabilities are not able to fully understand the rudiments of recycling. For example - using green bags but mixing paper and glass and tins. As these bags are considered 'contaminated' the recycling crews do not collect them and they are then left. Outside of a particular address the issue could be addressed by the recycling team but in a communal recycling area this is close to impossible. What solution would the Cabinet Member offer.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management</p> <p>Our Waste Service has never adopted a "one cap" approach when dealing with recycling.</p> <p>The Waste Service works hard to engage with residents using communal collection points, including liaison with resident associations where beneficial, to assist residents to recycling, and adapt collection methods where appropriate.</p> <p>Residents are also approached individually, when there is evidence found of them not complying with the recycling scheme, to seek to resolve any issues they have, and a fully pragmatic approach of support is taken where residents are genuinely unable to recycle for a variety of reasons.</p>

7	<p>Councillors Lyndon Jones & Brigitte Rowlands</p> <p>As we understand Mumbles Community Council submitted a proposal to take over all of the Langland tennis Courts and refurbish them and add provision for other sports such as basketball and netball. What did the Cabinet Member not like about this scheme specifically.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism</p> <p>Please refer to response to Q4</p>
8	<p>Councillors Mandy Evans, Mike Lewis, Cyril Anderson, Wendy Lewis, Lesley Walton, & Sam Pritchard</p> <p>Can the Leader give an indication of the potential loss to Swansea pensioners from the decision by the U.K. Conservative government to not implement the rise from the Pension triple lock.</p> <p>Response of the Leader</p> <p>The U.K. state pension provision is one of the lowest or put another way, the meanest in Europe. It is at best shambolic and divisive, at worst it is downright unfair and rarely worth the repeated promises this government makes.</p> <p>You may be aware the headline “new” full state pension, which hardly anyone can currently actually get, is £179.60 per week,</p> <p>Almost all existing pensioners can at best get the maximum old basic state pension of £137.60 per week, and many get much less than this, especially married women as a result of repeated inbuilt unfairness in the system and bungling by the DWP over NIC stamp contributions.</p> <p>Of course even this meagre basic provision offered the promise of the government’s “guaranteed” triple lock worth the higher of earnings growth, inflation or 2.5%. Everyone now knows the Prime Minister’s pledges and guarantees are as worthless as a slogan on a Brexit battle bus.</p> <p>Inflation is currently all over the shop and due to covid, brexit and more supply side issues (including especially gas and electricity and food which will hit pensioners hardest) we are going to see prices likely rise significantly later in year , Conveniently for this government just after the all-important September inflation figures are revealed of course!.</p> <p>So let us assume the 2.5% double lock guarantee holds rather than the conveniently ditched triple lock, just as pay is above 8% growth at present.</p> <p>That maximum basic state pension will rise to £141.04 per week instead of an expected £148.61 per week, a loss of £7.57 per week or just under £400 a year per pensioner. Midyear population estimates (2020) from Stats Wales indicates there are just under 26,000 residents over 65 meaning over £10m less in the pensioner economy in Swansea as a result of this callous decision.</p>

	<p>As pensioners mourn the loss of nearly £400 a year of their uplift, the one consolation they can have is the triple lock ditched by this government is at least only around one third of the callousness shown with the government's proposed £20 a week, or over £1,000 a year cut, to the poorest residents receiving Universal Credit <u>from 1 October</u>.</p> <p>On top of this all pensioners and residents face the prospect of rising prices, food shortages, significant rises in gas and electricity this year. The triple lock should have been honoured, and the £20 per week universal credit uplift retained to help mitigate the impacts of the Covid pandemic and the Tory Brexit deal disasters.</p>
	<p>Part B – No Supplementaries</p>
9	<p>Councillors Mike Day, Cheryl Philpott & Wendy Fitzgerald</p> <p>I'm sure that the ParksFest was enjoyed by all those who could attend. Can the Cabinet Member tell Council how the venues for ParksFest activities were selected. And how were the events funded.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism</p> <p>This summer just under 8000 people were able to visit and enjoy one of the Council run ParksFest events, welcoming our local communities back to events, confident that they were doing so in a safe and managed environment.</p> <p>These two-day family based events included two outdoor cinema screenings on the first day, followed by children's activities including circus skills workshops, craft sessions, bouncy castles, children's rides, walkabout characters, sports activities and live music on the second day.</p> <p>The parks were selected primarily for geographical spread of activity across the City & County as possible (given limited human and supply resources) and also because they met a range of other key criteria e.g. their size, topography and the availability of suitable access points etc. All events were advertised across the whole of the City and County as part of the Enjoy Swansea marketing campaign and all were welcomed.</p> <p>These new, one off events, complemented a range of other summer events and activities which have included a number of concerts in Singleton Park, Outdoor theatre in Mumbles along with the Admiral Swansea Bay 10k. The emphasis was on supporting people, businesses and communities, as we emerge from the long lockdown of the pandemic. The events were funded in part by the annual Events budget, supplemented by a small amount of sponsorship and trade and ticket income, with any defined shortfall supported by the Council's Economic Recovery Fund.</p>
10	<p>Councillors Mike Day, Jeff Jones & Wendy Fitzgerald</p> <p>We know that our staff dealing with the Ash Die Back disease and planting new trees have been doing a fantastic job. But can the Cabinet Member confirm that the</p>

Council is not able to allocate enough resources to ensure regular maintenance of trees and hedgerows on Council land, and will now only be able to respond to calls involving dangerous trees.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

Trees are managed by the Tree Services Unit within the Parks Service Area and hedgerows are managed under the grounds maintenance responsibilities of Parks therefore are separately managed. There is a defined works programme for each ward in relation to grounds maintenance which includes maintenance of hedgerows that are maintained depending on their species however generally done so annually and avoiding bird and bat nesting.

Our work on trees falls into the following categories:

- Urgent work: if a council-owned tree is in such a condition that it poses a very high risk to people or property, we will attend the site as an emergency, normally within 2 hours and always within 4 hours unless there is a major weather event in progress. If work cannot be completed, areas at risk will be cordoned off until resources are available. During major storms and weather events, we will respond as quickly as possible but will need to focus our priorities on keeping roads open for emergency services.
- Essential work: trees that are perceived as high risk but present no immediate risk to the public will be made safe within an adequate timescale depending on the level of perceived risk identified at the time of inspection.
- Desirable work: works on trees that are not considered urgent or essential will be classed as desirable and go into our low risk work programme. Desirable and low risk work will usually be carried out within one year where possible, unless unforeseen circumstances such as storms delay the work further.

With the resource pressures brought about by ash dieback there is a backlog in the delivery of Desirable work however this work has not ceased. Urgent and Essential works are still being delivered within appropriate timescales allowing adequate management of the authority's tree stock.

11 **Councillors Mike Day, Jeff Jones, Cheryl Philpott & Mary Jones**

We all appreciate the need to get people out of their vehicles and walking, running and cycling more in order to protect the environment. Can the Cabinet Member tell Council what calculations were done on what environmental damage would be done before the decision was taken to tarmac previously natural paths in Clyne Valley. How was the balance between benefits gained to the environment from encouraging people to use the routes more and the disbenefits caused by tarmacking the routes.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management

The Council commissioned an independent Ecologist to support with the delivery of the scheme. They carried out an assessment of the ecological impact and provided a watching brief for the duration of the works to ensure that the scheme was delivered without causing any environmental damage. This included an assessment of the alignment, material specification, size and type of construction plant, as well as the methodology for construction.

	<p>Significant effort was made to ensure that the extent of works did not exceed beyond the footprint of the existing path to safeguard the identified ecology. Amendments were also introduced to provide low alkali sub-base, bird boxes and additional tree planting to support long term environmental gain as part of the councils ongoing commitment to provide biodiversity enhancement when delivering infrastructure.</p> <p>The majority of the route was an existing footpath which has now been resurfaced to facilitate cycle usage and support greater inclusivity for the wider community. A number of which have already contacted the authority and welcomed the fact that they are now able to take advantage of the space and have acknowledged the effort taken to ensure that the works did not cause any environmental harm to the surrounding area.</p> <p>Some of the route was previously tarmacked, but the new and improved route provides the benefit of a uniform surface, but with a surface dressing that reflects the character of the former track. Much of the work was done with small sized plant to avoid impact to the mature trees and adjacent ecology to ensure that the route not only serves as a strategic connection to the wider active travel network, but also provides infrastructure that is inclusive to all users and enables them to continue to enjoy the character of the surrounding environment.</p> <p>The ultimate aim of the Active Travel programme is to encourage healthy and sustainable alternative modes of travel for the benefits afforded to the community and local environment. It is therefore disputed that the works were developed at the compromise of the local environment and it is proposed that the new infrastructure will ultimately offer environmental benefit.</p>
12	<p>Councillors Jeff Jones, Chris Holley & Peter Black</p> <p>Can the Leader/ Cabinet Member tell Council when the iconic Guildhall clock will be operational.</p> <p>Response of the Leader</p> <p>A contractor has been appointed however the repairs required are of a very intricate/specialist nature potentially requiring recasting some of the original mechanism. We remain hopeful of progress over the next few weeks.</p>
13	<p>Councillors Mary Jones, Lynda James & Jeff Jones</p> <p>Driving along Oystermouth Road during the summer months which is peak season we have noticed that a large number of the Guest Houses have been shut. Can the Cabinet Member shed any light on this.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism</p> <p>We are not aware of hotels/ b&bs being closed to business. We are aware that several have diversified their means of income during covid, when restrictions on travel and hospitality were high, by supporting temporary housing options for the homeless and vulnerable, but no concerns have been raised via our partners, visitors or other tourism bodies in recent times.</p>

	<p>We will monitor the situation as part of our bed stock monitoring, which forms part of the STEAM assessment of the volume and value of tourism and which understanding available bed stock is a vital element of.</p>
14	<p>Councillors Jeff Jones, Mary Jones & Kevin Griffiths</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member tell Council if litter bins are ever cleaned in addition to them being emptied.</p> <p>Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement & Infrastructure Management</p> <p>Cleansing Operatives who empty bins are expected to carry out clearance of all litter and waste in the vicinity of any bin however historically did not clean the bin itself due to resources and time constraints. The Cleansing service area received additional resources this year to tackle a number of non-routine works that includes the deep cleaning and maintenance of bins. With a stock of circa 2000 bins within the authority this work will take some time however these deep cleans have commenced and are ongoing.</p>