



**To/
Councillor June Burtonshaw
Cabinet Member for Better
Communities (Place)**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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22nd March 2019

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Better Communities (Place). The Panel met on the 6th March 2019 to discuss the Community Centres and Friends Group Update.

Dear Councillor Burtonshaw,

On the 6th March 2019 the Panel met to discuss the Community Centres and Friends Group Update.

The Panel are grateful to all officers who attended to provide information and answer questions.

The Panel do have some thoughts and observations to share with you.

Community Centres and Friends Group Update

We note that this item started with you, Councillor Burtonshaw extending your sincere thanks to all volunteers who give their time to support community activity. Each Panel Member agreed that this work is invaluable to the Council and also extended their thanks. They agreed that, as Councillor Burtonshaw stated, "Communities would fall apart without them".

We heard about community activity in relation to both buildings and green spaces. It was explained how the current community development model which has been in place since a governance review in 2016. This means that the Council now acts as the building/green space landlord with the buildings and green spaces remaining in the ownership of Swansea Council but managed by the groups which run them. The relationship with the groups who run these venues has been maintained and encouraged by the Council with a team in place to provide advice and guidance.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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We heard how there is support for volunteers to apply for funding externally and there is help from the team to do this. Buildings and spaces run by volunteers can access grants which the Council cannot. As a result, a large amount of external funding (a mix of grants and group funding) has been achieved to support these venues with £300k of external investment in parks to date. This is a tribute to the hard work of the team and the volunteers involved.

We heard how maintaining long term sustainability of resources is part of the Corporate Strategy and that the community development model which is currently being used demonstrates best practice and savings made as a result. It is apparent that community groups are still enthused about participating in community activities despite the change in relationship. This is apparent in the involvement of the Senior Citizens Pavillions Group which has been a huge success including the hall in Glais which is an excellent example of successful partnership working.

We heard that as a result of austerity the amount of staff working on community development has reduced dramatically despite the substantial amount of work which has to be undertaken to keep community centres and community spaces as an essential part of community life. It was explained that the team have a folder of standard documents in relation to policies and procedures and advice on things like how to constitute groups. This is extremely useful so new groups can easily get established and continue to contribute to community development.

A copy of the standard building/space licence was provided for our perusal and we were told that the costs to the Council in relation to the buildings and spaces are specific to maintenance and health and safety issues only. There is an ongoing relationship with Beyond Bricks and Mortar, an organisation representing a holistic approach to regeneration, particularly bringing economically inactive people back into the labour market.

We understand that community buildings and spaces are invaluable but committees need new people to become involved to carry on the duties. Volunteer recruitment and volunteer burn out are very real issues but it is encouraging to hear that younger people are starting to become more involved. It is important to prioritise volunteer support, as without it we may lose essential community hubs in the form of community groups. It is important to note that Swansea is recognised as an example of good practice and with 38 thriving community centres there is much for the team to be proud of.

There was some discussion at the meeting about how volunteers are recognised for their work. This ranges from local reward schemes such as the event which takes place in Penderry to informal thanks in other wards. We would like to recognise the substantial work of all volunteers involved in this work, however, we do realise that this may be achieved more practically at a local level within the wards themselves. The Panel is in agreement that volunteers should be recognised more and we extend our thanks for all of their hard work.

Regarding the report itself we do have some observations;

1. The report should outline the links with Community Councils and Swansea Council for Voluntary Services.
2. The license should be clear about the difference between the current arrangement and Community Asset Transfers.
3. The Panel feel that all community functions (including community asset transfers) should sit under one service.

We welcome your thoughts on any aspect of this letter but would specifically like your response to the three observations above.

This letter seeks a response by 12th April 2019.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'CH Holley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Chris Holley
Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
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