



**To/  
Councillor Clive Lloyd  
Cabinet Member for Business  
Transformation & Performance**

**BY EMAIL**

cc Cabinet Members

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**SPC/2019-20/4**

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 12 August 2019. It is about Portfolio Responsibilities, Universal Review of Council Land, Pension Fund, Corporate Plan – Natural Resources & Biodiversity, Commissioning Reviews, Community Safety, Agile Working, Strategic Estates & Property Management, Financial Services and Loss of Community Banking Services.

Dear Councillor Lloyd,

### **Cabinet Member Question Session – 12 August**

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 12 August 2019 and answering questions on your work as Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member for Business Transformation & Performance.

We appreciate you providing a written paper in support of your appearance. The Q & A session gave us an opportunity to explore priorities and achievements in relation to your areas of responsibility.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, and share the views of the Committee, and highlight any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues are summarised below:

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

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## **Portfolio Responsibilities**

You highlighted two key areas that you have taken on lead responsibility for: Public Services Board (PSB) and Community Safety.

We noted that the Council have taken over the chairing of the PSB following Andrew Davies stepping down from his role as Chair of the Local Health Board. You confirmed that you have been tasked by the Leader to Chair the PSB (having been vice-chair last year), and spoke about the developing the PSB following a governance review and its role in tackling priorities. You reported that one of the key changes focuses on placing the four Local Well-being Objectives at the heart of the PSB, each co-ordinated by a Statutory Member accountable for its delivery.

On Community Safety you updated the Committee on the Critical Incident Task & Finish Group which has been established to address issues and concerns on the High Street, primarily to ensure there is strategic oversight in addressing the issues. These issues included anti-social behaviour, substance misuse / county lines, sexual exploitation. However, you felt positive about the future of the High Street and highlighted the investment and regeneration that has happened in recent years and lay ahead. In contrast to recent negative press reports you informed the Committee that High Street had been shortlisted for a national award for best High Street in the UK, following a submission by Swansea BID.

As lead for both the PSB and Community Safety you placed emphasis on improving partnership working and felt that there would now be an overarching link between the PSB and Community Safety to help ensure swifter action in tackling the big issues, including the High Street. We welcomed this linkage and efforts to develop multi-agency working.

## **Universal Review of Council Land**

You were asked from the public gallery a number of questions in respect of progress with the Universal Review of Council land and potential areas of land for disposal. This matter had been referred to in correspondence between the Committee and yourself following the previous Q & A Session.

The questions focussed on the following: -

- Date of the Universal Review and whether this is accessible to the public?
- How much surplus land in acres was identified in 2016/2017, 2017/2018 and 2018/2019?
- The efforts that have been made to market surplus land?
- What is the percentage of surplus land that had been sold and amount remaining?

You stated that you would provide a full response in writing to the member of the public, and it would be helpful to have sight of your response.

We noted that you were keen to highlight that revenue was also being generated from acquisitions / investments.

### **Pension Fund**

We followed up on previous discussion about progress with the divestment of the Council's Pension Fund from fossil fuel companies. We were aware of the commitment made by the Pension Fund Committee, towards a 50% reduction in such investment by 2023, but Committee Members were keen to ask about timescales and whether the pace of divestment needed to be faster, given declared climate emergency, including the need to give consideration to total divestment. We asked whether the Pension Fund Committee would be reviewing its position.

It was clear that you understood the issues, and acknowledged the need for divestment, given investment in carbon-based fossil fuels was not sustainable in the long-term. Furthermore, you stated that the level of current investment in fossil fuel companies has been established to be below national average and action has been taken to progress investment into low-carbon investment funds, and there is work in progress to assess alternative investments, to ensure the best sustainable financial return for members of the Pension Fund over the long term.

You stressed that progress here was relatively advanced when comparing with others, however the Pension Fund Committee would keep its commitment under review. You added that even full divestment would need to consider that fact that all businesses carry some carbon footprint, so you argued that stakeholder engagement around environment-friendly practice and cultural change was important as the first strategy with divestment following if necessary.

### **Corporate Plan – Natural Resources & Biodiversity**

As lead for performance management and improvement, we asked about progress in developing suitable and robust performance indicators that would enable the Council to measure and monitor its progress against the new corporate priority / well-being objective in relation to Natural Resources and Biodiversity. This is clearly important to our new Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel who will be monitoring and assessing Council activities and performance in this key area.

You reported that it is challenging to fully, and quantitatively, measure the Council's contribution to improving environmental well-being through the new Corporate Well-being Objective, and is work in progress. However, we heard that officers have identified a small number of measures as a starting point,

which have the potential for integration into the suite of corporate performance indicators and reported on within the regular monitoring reports to Cabinet. We noted that measures focused on issues such as emissions / carbon reduction, waste for reuse / recycling, tree / wildflower planting, air / water quality. However, you highlighted it was an area that would depend on qualitative, not only quantitative, data to assess performance, impact and difference made. So performance reports will benefit from a narrative to explain how well the Council is delivering on its commitment. You told us that work will continue to explore further data development opportunities during 2019/20.

## **Commissioning Reviews**

The Committee asked about your specific role, responsibility and involvement in the various Commissioning Reviews that the Council has carried out, and future programme of reviews.

We understood that Commissioning Reviews were a vital part of the overall Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future Programme, with the need to review the effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness of services and explore with an open mind new models of delivery. Your particular concern was around the quality, consistency and timeliness of the Commissioning Review process, and ensuring adherence to the principles. You indicated that you oversee the whole programme and have attended most scrutiny meetings, at which final Commissioning Review reports have been discussed, along with the Cabinet Member(s) responsible for the particular service(s) in question.

Noting that there have been 17 Commissioning Reviews we are interested in the costs and benefits of these reviews. We look forward to your next update report to the Committee on progress with the implementation of service changes following Commissioning Reviews and outcomes (last provided in December 2018). You quoted a figure of £30m as savings that have been derived. You also referred to reviews that have shown our services to be more cost effective and competitive than the private sector e.g. Corporate Building Services and Cleaning Services, with the ability to deliver savings through a degree of service reform. In contrast there was some services, such as Leisure Centres, that would benefit from external management with the ability to access grants. You stressed that the Commissioning Review process and cost of undertaking reviews were managed in-house, the majority of which was the time commitment of relevant officers involved.

## **Community Safety**

### High Street

Further to our discussion on the issues, challenges, and actions to tackle the problems on High Street, we asked you to confirm the membership of the Critical Incident Task & Finish Group, which you undertook to provide.

### CCTV Review

You reported that a CCTV review and option appraisal paper is being prepared, as the current system will be obsolete within 18-36 months, and no longer maintained. You highlighted that this was a resilience issue as the current system dated back the late 1990s, and has a limited lifespan. Whilst you recognised there was an element of risk you were confident about actions in place to consider options and replace the system in good time. You stated that this needed to be considered as part of the wider city centre regeneration project, and was a timely opportunity to integrate new CCTV coverage with the re-development and digital strategy for the city centre, taking advantage of new technology.

### National Serious Violence Strategy

You reported on the need for the Council to consider its role in supporting the National Serious Violence Strategy and the establishment of a Violence Reduction Unit in Wales. We noted that Swansea has been identified as one of five violent crime hotspots. You stated that you would pick this up with the Safer Swansea Partnership, as the Council's lead member.

### Safety of Children around Schools

We were asked by a councillor not on the Committee to question you on safety around schools. Whilst something perhaps more appropriate to raise with the Cabinet Member for Education, Learning & Skills, you talked about the Council's consultation and engagement with children and young people. You referred to 'Big Conversation' events, which are now well established, and Swansea's Pupil Voice Forum, in order to hear directly from children about how they feel and the issues which matter to them, including risks from a community safety standpoint. You acknowledged that children have, through such forums, raised concerns about bullying, safety on-line, respect/homophobia, healthy relationships, substance misuse, and personal safety. You stated that these were issues which the Council's youth support services, which are integrated with Child & Family Services, were helping to tackle. You also mentioned the work carried out in schools and the Police schools' programme to help build links and develop the relationship.

### **Agile Working**

We wanted to check your assessment of the agile working rollout programme and its success, and whether all staff were happy with new working arrangements.

You reported that the roll out of agile and mobile working has been a key focus over the past year. We noted that the transition to enable staff to work more flexibly is ongoing and is being rolled out to the Guildhall at end of the year. You stated that the programme has helped release significant space which has facilitated partnership working and income generation. In addition, staff are able to work more effectively reducing the need for business travel to meetings and reducing commuting to work, leading to positive impacts on carbon emissions, work life balance and finance.

You explained that agile working was part and parcel of the estates strategy and review of office space, and reducing costs. At the same time, providing staff with opportunities to work more flexibly. The roll out of agile and mobile working has also been supported by the digital roll out of Office 365.

You felt that most members of staff have welcomed agile working. You pointed out that agile working would not necessarily be appropriate for all officers, as there were some services that were more rigid and need to be delivered from a fixed location. Where agile working was in practice, you assured the Committee that managers would ensure this is being managed responsibly with regular team interaction maintained.

In terms of financial benefits from released accommodation in the Civic Centre, you reported that income has been generated from renting to Swansea University and the Local Health Board, as they have been interested in short-term office space. You reported that with the planned further release of accommodation, the potential annual income is estimated at around £500,000.

### **Strategic Estates & Property Management**

You reported that there have been major successes in terms of investment acquisitions generating in excess of £600,000 per annum. You pointed out that current low rate borrowing has enabled the Council to borrow for acquisitions / investments that will generate significant returns, and provide an additional income stream for the Council. This was something, you told the Committee, that has been a successful strategy in other local authorities.

We noted the intention to report to Cabinet on Prior Information Notice (PIN) responses for potential joint venture development. There was some concern amongst Committee Members that there has been little progress in relation to the setting up of a Council Working Group to discuss the future of the Home Farm Site located within Singleton Park. It was agreed by Council at the end of June that the Leader would set up the cross party group to consider viable options for the repurposing of the Home Farm Depot with report to Cabinet within the next 6 months. However, you assured us that nothing would be progressed in relation to the Home Farm site without the input of the Working Group, which will be set up.

With regard to the Public Interest Notices on Seafront Development, you confirmed that the West Cross Inn site was removed from the list of sites following public feedback.

### **Financial Services**

You reported that the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement Review has been successfully delivered - responding to a change from regulation to guidance on how local authorities account for capital expenditure on assets with a life expectancy of over one year. We noted that the Well-being of Future Generations Act was explicitly considered as a material factor influencing this change in policy. The adoption of 'prudent annual charge' will reduce the historic liability on future generations and generate short term savings. For the 2018/19 financial year and for the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 to 2022/23, revenue savings of circa £2.7 million per annum are projected. It should be clarified however that this will be repaid in due course, therefore not in essence savings but a short term reduction in payments that will be offset by an increase in payments over the longer term – which means over the term there will be nil cost and nil saving.

You told the Committee that the Council has undertaken substantial borrowing to lock in at historically low rates of interest to protect future generations who will benefit from large scale planned capital investment. We were interested in the actual amount of Council borrowing, and whilst sharing an approximate figure you agreed to respond to in writing with the accurate information.

### **Loss of Community Banking Services**

This was an issue raised by a councillor not on the Committee. We asked you to talk about what the Council could do to help to get some sort of financial banking services to come to the communities that have lost all their banks. Of course we understood that banks took commercial decisions, and whilst the authority and local councillors can lobby banks, the Council did not have any power to compel banks to retain facilities within communities. You focussed on the role and responsibility of the Council to ensure that its services are accessible to all, and where payments are necessary it is easy for people to do so, and referred to the Digital Inclusion Strategy that was being developed to support this.

We lamented the loss of community facilities including banks and post offices, and the erosion of face-to-face contact, particular for older people.

## Your Response

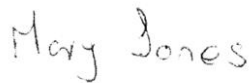
In your response we would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to our request for you to:

- Ensure that the public questions put to you regarding the Universal Review of Council Land are responded to, and copied to us;
- Confirm the membership of the Critical Incident Task & Finish Group that has been established to address issues and concerns on the High Street; and
- Tell us about the exact amount of Council borrowing referred to in your report

Please provide the response to this and any other comments about our letter by 30 September. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

We will arrange to follow up on portfolio developments and invite you to a future Committee meeting in due course.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR MARY JONES**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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