

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

PART A – SUPPLEMENTARIES

1.	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker</p> <p>There were 244.5 more children in Swansea schools at year end 2014/15 than anticipated. In view of the impact on school budgets could the Cabinet Member clarify the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. How many children were in the system in April 2014 and September 2014?b. How many children were in the system at the end of January 2015?c. Where have all these additional children come from? <p>Response by the Cabinet Member for Education</p> <p>In April 2014, there were 35,888 pupils attending Swansea schools.</p> <p>In September 2014, there were 34,758 pupils attending Swansea schools.</p> <p>As of 31 January 2015, 35,602 pupils were attending Swansea schools.</p> <p>At 31 March 2015, an estimated 36,003 pupils were in Swansea schools. This figure can only be an estimate at this moment in time as end-of-term data is still being processed and, as such, this figure is currently unverified.</p> <p>We are unable to determine exactly where pupils have come from.</p>
2.	<p>Councillors C A Holley, M H Jones, J Newbury</p> <p>In a written response (Council Summons 31st March) to a question asked at the Council meeting on the 3rd March 2015 the Leader responded that “general building maintenance is undertaken on a prioritised basis” he further states that “there is no programme for non-essential planned maintenance such as painting and decorating” Can the Leader explain to Council how our assets are going to be maintained given the amount of money that has been spent especially on the Guildhall in recent years or are they going to be left to deteriorate as has happened previously?</p> <p>Response by The Leader</p> <p>As previously stated, all works are based on a prioritised basis with an emphasis on H&S, business continuity and statutory compliance. This work in itself means that the building is maintained and all essential elements and services are maintained and are fit for purpose. The reference in the response relates to the original question and the example of painting and decorating, for which there is no essential need and given the stark choices the Council faces in difficult economic times, it is an element that would not figure in the programme of works. The actual reduction in the backlog maintenance figure since 2012 is £36m.</p>

3. Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker

School governors across Swansea are alarmed that the projected reductions in delegated funding for 2015/16 onwards is unsustainable and will have a significant adverse effect on the delivery of education to children in Swansea and also impact on staff. What advice can the Cabinet Member give to reassure governors?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Education

Swansea Council is committed to giving relative prioritisation to school budgets. We have to achieve at least £81m of cuts over the next few years and other areas of the Council are seeing much greater budget reductions so that we can minimise pressure on school budgets as much as possible.

School delegated budgets are being reduced by 5% in real terms this year while other services will see planned reductions of up to 50% in the next few years. Delegated cash budgets under the school funding formula will see an average 3.2% reduction.

It is important to remember that school budgets are facing a range of pressures beyond the Council's control, including teachers' pay and pensions, future National Insurance changes, changes in pupil numbers and a 12% reduction in Welsh Government grants. These additional cost pressures have been estimated and included in the Medium term Financial Plan going forward and as such are currently proposed to be funded within the savings targets currently identified.

To help ease the pressure on schools, Swansea's Education Department has also cut almost £2m from its own budget in savings in 2014-15 and a further £1.4m in 2015-16. Delegated cash budgets to schools have grown to more than 86% so that schools can take more responsibility for managing services they wish to provide based on local need and expectation. It is the responsibility of individual governing bodies to set a budget for their schools.

Our commitment to education as a top priority remains clear. Should additional funding or resources become available over the coming months or years, these will be directed towards education.

Earlier this month, we established an Education Strategic Group to act as an innovation and ideas forum, drawing together schools and local authority Members and officers. This group, which includes a number of headteacher and governing body representatives, will advise on the development of coherent financial strategies for education in the City and County of Swansea.

4. Councillors M H Jones, J W Jones, A M Day

With all the cuts that are being made to Budgets can the Cabinet Member for Anti -Poverty tell Council what effect he thinks these cuts will have on:

- a. The Third sector being able to deliver their Anti- Poverty work and;

b. The 5% cut to the schools Delegated Budget will have on opportunities for Children and Young People as a large number of schools will be losing experienced and valuable staff?

Response by Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty

Response A

As you aware the Council has to save from its budget £81m over the next three years. This figure is also likely to rise. With this enormous and unprecedented challenge in mind the Council has focussed its resources on achieving five clear priorities. One of which is Tackling Poverty. To continue our commitment we have safeguarded the Poverty & Prevention budget through the recent budget setting process with the smallest reduction possible, with reductions that have not and will not affect our ability to deliver this vital agenda. We have also committed across our Medium Term Financial plan a potential increase in the budget for tackling poverty by 5%.

The Council is continuing to commission and grant fund the third sector through multiple departments as they provide a vital often frontline service to many of our vulnerable people. This is not exclusive to the Poverty & Prevention service, but across the City & County's departments and services.

Response B

We will continue to liaise with schools to ensure all pupils receive the best possible education and support to provide our young people with an exciting 21st Century curriculum that best meets their needs. We will be working closely with schools to ensure the impact of any budget change is minimised. Officers, especially through Hub and regional working arrangements, will support schools to ensure the impact on pupils is minimised.

We are currently investigating how decreasing budgets might impact on schools in the medium and longer term. There will be implications, but a different way of organising schools and delivering teaching and learning could help to mitigate the effects of a reduction in funding. The Education Strategic Group, which includes a number of headteacher and governing body representatives, will advise on the development of coherent financial strategies to minimise the impact of decreasing budgets on learning opportunities.

Our commitment to education as a top priority remains clear. Should additional funding or resources become available over the coming months or years, these will be directed towards education.

5. **Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker**

Will the Cabinet Member for Education explain why the details of the cuts in payments for school breakfast clubs, applicable from 1st April 2015, were only supplied to schools on the 20th March 2015? This was just as the schools broke up for a two week break, giving them no opportunity to plan any changes or consult with parents. Is the Council prepared to reimburse schools to cover their losses until they are able to put into place reduced operating times or charge parents for the additional half hour?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Education

We recognise that this communication was distributed later than when we would have liked. Unusual operational difficulties within the Education Department during the period January to March 2015 have caused some regrettable delays in issuing certain notifications to schools, for which we can only apologise. This situation has now been largely remedied.

In light of the compressed timescale given to schools in respect of funding for breakfast club provision, we issued further advice to schools providing additional funding to cover the period up 1 June 2015 (i.e. Summer Half-Term Holiday). This will provide schools with over six weeks to notify parents/carers of the change in arrangements.

We also advised schools that funding would be allocated from 1 June 2015 for supervision staff for 30 minutes per day (the cook and food costs will continue to be met centrally) based on the required pupil to adult ratios. We have agreed additional funding for very large schools with daily pupil numbers exceeding 200 and to those with a split site.

Members will be aware that the Council is required to provide a free Breakfast Club where a Governing Body requests to run such a club. However, the only mandatory element is the breakfast provision itself. In order to support schools, we are also investigating sponsorship opportunities to support the cost of Breakfast Clubs in Swansea and we will contact schools again when we have further information.

6. Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker

“Educated Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Consultation Proposals” were not included on the Council’s website. This lack of consultation also affected schools and governing bodies even though the proposals will impact upon main stream schools. Additionally, Councillors were not notified of the proposals or asked for comments, although many Councillors are also school governors. Parents of children receiving EOTAS were only informed of the consultation meeting just three days prior to it being held. Therefore, is the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Education satisfied that this consultation process was adequate or fair to the children of this city who are in need of additional help with their education?

Response by the Leader/Cabinet Member for Education

As a council, we are committed to ensuring all of the children living in our city have the opportunity to make the most of their education and school years. The support we give is designed to help overcome barriers to learning so children have the opportunity to achieve educational, social, emotional and behavioural goals of which they can be proud and to support them to prepare for adult life.

A review of the EOTAS provision was commissioned by the Executive Board following the Estyn report published in September 2013. The review made three recommendations:

	<p>R1. Increase the number of pupils receiving effective support in mainstream schools and reduce the demand for EOTAS; R2. Reduce places and reconfigure EOTAS provision; R3. Improve standards and quality in remaining EOTAS provision.</p> <p>The recent consultation that closed 27 March 2015 related to addressing Recommendation 2 above. The consultation was not on the Council website as there is no mandatory requirement to do so.</p> <p>All schools have been sent the proposals which should have been shared with Governing Bodies. Secondary and Primary Head Teacher representatives were invited to formal consultation meetings and many have responded formally.</p> <p>All parents have been given the consultation paperwork and had an opportunity to respond in writing to the proposals. The questionnaires were designed to address the changes as they specifically impact on the various groups in the PRU portfolio in different ways.</p> <p>The pupil questionnaires weren't sent out at the beginning of the consultation period. However, the consultation period was extended to enable all pupils to respond. A large number of pupils have responded formally to the consultation.</p> <p>The views expressed by staff, parents, pupils and the trade unions will now be analysed before any decisions are taken.</p>
7.	<p>Councillors C A Holley, J Newbury, J W Jones</p> <p>Will the Leader/Cabinet Member tell Council if there are any plans to have one site for a Council depot?</p> <p>Response of The Leader</p> <p>A key strand of "Sustainable Swansea Fit for the Future Programme" relates to the overall asset management and the potential reduction and rationalisation in the total number of asset held by the Council. A project is currently underway as part of this strand and options for the future rationalisation of depots is due to be considered during 2015/16 financial year. This programme is considering all the options including a single location and this will need to take into account capital and revenue implications of all options being considered.</p>
8.	<p>Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker</p> <p>Swansea Council has a monopoly on the provision of many services, such as crossovers, but provides no time frames for the delivery of such services, sometimes leaving its customers waiting for six months after payment for the service to be delivered. Will the Cabinet Member for Place consider setting Service Agreements with time frames to ensure the provision of an acceptable level of service to the public?</p>

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transportation

The policy of allowing householders to construct crossings was changed several years ago due to:

1. The poor quality of workmanship with the resultant safety and maintenance issues.
2. Crossings were being constructed illegally.
3. The work was being undertaken by people/companies without a licence to open the highway.
4. The present system regulates the procedure, ensures quality of product and eliminates the additional safety and maintenance issues.

The process is that householders apply in writing for a crossing and following authorisation the work is priced and an estimate forwarded. Upon payment the details are passed to the operational unit who generally commence within 6 weeks.

It is stipulated that any internal works are completed prior to the crossing being constructed to avoid damage to the new crossing. This can delay the construction but this is clearly stated in the documentation forwarded and has proved to be a prudent measure.

There have, regrettably, been longer delays in the last two to three months due to requirement to complete externally funded works before the end of the financial year. These works have enabled high profile projects such as safe routes in communities (e.g. Townhill scheme) to be undertaken. Constructing crossings has now been prioritised and the current backlog will be cleared as soon as possible and officers will make contact with all affected residents to confirm a timescales for completion

However I will request that officers review the service performance over the coming months to see if it is necessary to implement Service Level agreements and the Head of Service has given assurances that he will investigate any specific examples which are causing/have caused concern.

9. **Councillors E W Fitzgerald, D G Sullivan, L James, S M Jones, K M Marsh, I M Richard & G D Walker**

Can the Cabinet Member inform Members what action is being taken to reduce the nuisance of pink bags put out for collection being blown around whenever there is a wind, resulting in unsightly litter spillages on roads, verges and pavements?

Response by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transportation

The Council is due to start a re-useable pink bag trial in April. These bags will be woven fabric, similar to the garden waste bags, but will include a recycled rubber mat weight sewn into the base to mitigate against the effects of high winds. The impact of high winds on the bags will be monitored through the trial.

10.	PART B – NO SUPPLEMENTRIES
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