

**Providing Council with Written Responses to Questions at Council –
31 March 2015**

1. Councillor M H Jones

Question

In relation to revised figures verbal provided by the Cabinet Member do these include the staff who were on temporary contracts of under a year and had already been given notice? (Councillor M H Jones indicated that she would provide notes regarding this matter in the new term).

Response of the Cabinet Member for Education

The notes you were asked to produce do not evidence the claims you made in Council. Both the email and the Spending Restrictions paper contain sensible and prudent advice. Both documents offer advice to schools. School Governing Bodies are responsible for the management of their own delegated budgets. Information on staff on temporary contracts is held by schools.

At the present time I have no information on temporary contract staff.

2. Councillor M H Jones

As a result of the emphasis on Numeracy and Literacy in recent years, can the Cabinet Member indicate how schools were going to manage to help all children to be able to read at their chronological reading age when the staff schools are mainly losing Teaching Assistants that work with these children? How do you expect them to access the Curriculum when they get to Secondary School.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Education

The recommended ratios of teaching assistants to pupils will be preserved through the Education Improvement Grant. Older children, who are still learning to read will receive differentiated support from their class teachers, in the first instance, as well as a level of enhanced support to improve their basic skills. However, it must be acknowledged that as budgets become tighter, the expectations of class teachers will increase in terms of the level of differentiated support required.

This will be a challenge for schools but it must also be recognised that short term interventions using teaching assistants is not the most effective way of improving reading skills. Good quality teaching of early reading skills by qualified teachers is key here. The most effective teachers are successful in meeting the needs of a wide range of learners and this is not wholly dependent on teaching assistants.

Children who have poor literacy skills on transition to secondary schools will continue to benefit from additional support and differentiation to ensure that the curriculum is appropriate to their ability.

Secondary schools are working effectively with cluster primary schools in Swansea to ensure that there is an early recognition of pupils with low reading

ages. Support is planned for at a much earlier stage so that provision can be adapted in good time.

Again, research tells us that teacher assistant intervention is not always appropriate, sustainable or useful to a learner. In times of tighter budgets schools will be required to make the best use of the resources they have and this may mean adapting teaching to ensure that learners continue to access the curriculum appropriately.

3. Councillor P M Meara

How does the table produced in respect of the number of liability orders issued in respect of the past financial years compared to the collection rate differ from that in other cities?

Response of the Leader

There are no comparative figures published for all Welsh Authorities that state the number of liability orders obtained individually each year.

We are part of the CIPFA Benchmarking Club for Council Tax. This has members from both Welsh and English Authorities and the annual reports do contain average figures as follows:

Year	In Year Collection Swansea	Group Average	Number of Liability Orders per 1000 dwellings Swansea	Group Average Liability Orders Per 1000 dwellings
2011/12	96.2%	96.8%	74.60	94.48
2012/13	96.7%	96.7%	93.83	94.87
2013/14	96.8%	96.4%*	87.21	118.33

* Reduced figure for 13/14 reflects the removal of 100% Council Tax Reduction in England.

4. Councillor P M Meara

What support do people get from the free debt advice organisations?

Response from the Leader

The organisations I referred to last time provide various types of free, practical support to people with debt:

National Debtline

National Debtline is a free, confidential, debt advice service for people in England, Wales and Scotland, run by the charity the Money Advice Trust. They offer website and telephone advisory help. Their website offering includes guides, fact sheets, budget tools, sample letters to help people write to their creditors, and an option to email questions to advisors.

Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice service helps people to resolve their problems. They offer to deal with any issue, from anyone, spanning debt and employment to consumer and housing plus everything in between.

They offer online website advice, a now fully operational national telephone advice service in Wales, and access to local Citizens Advice Bureau. Citizens Advice Bureau offer free, confidential, impartial and independent advice from over 3,500 locations. Their advice helps people resolve their problems with debt, benefits, employment, housing, discrimination, and many more issues. It is available to everyone. Advice may be given face-to-face or by phone. Most bureaux can arrange home visits and some also provide email advice. A growing number are piloting the use of text, online chat and webcams.

Step Change

This charity deals with clients with a range of debt problems. They offer free expert debt advice, based on people's personal circumstances, including specific advice and support on various debt repayment plans and options. They offer guides and tool online including a Debt Remedy online advice tool which gives a debt solution tailored to personal circumstances on an anonymous and free of charge basis. Alternatively they offer a debt telephone helpline and advice on how best to deal with debts.

Money Advice Service

The Money Advice Service helps people manage all aspects of their money, not just debt. They do this directly through their own free and impartial advice service but also work in partnership with other organisations, and this is especially true of their debt advice work, predominantly signposting to other services and providing direct funding to partners to provide debt advice, including Citizens Advice. They offer a website presence with online tools, calculators and factsheets, a national telephone helpline and a web chat service.