



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Andrea Lewis
Cabinet Member for Next
Generation Services**

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*Date
Dyddiad:*

30 March 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services following the meeting of the Committee on 14 March 2016. It is about Housing, Corporate Building & Property Services, Energy and Commercialism.

Dear Councillor Lewis,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 14 March

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 March 2016 answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Next Generation Services. We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to your areas of responsibility. Thank you for providing a paper that gave us the headlines from, and helped us to understand, this new cabinet portfolio. You helpfully identified the following as key areas within the portfolio: Housing; Corporate Building & Property Services; Energy, and Commercialism.

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

Housing

'More Homes' Programme

You talked about progress on the pilot scheme of the plan to build new council housing, under the 'More Homes' Programme. We noted the intention of the pilot to look at the viability of using in-house skills and resources where

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possible to build these homes. You stated that this would be a good test of the capability and capacity within our Corporate Building & Property Services and competitiveness.

We were impressed that you wanted to build to high energy specifications using the 'passivhaus' standard. We understood that this was a focus on the quality of build and materials providing excellent thermal performance, exceptional airtightness with mechanical ventilation, thereby reducing the heating demand of the property. Although this may add to the cost of construction you stressed that it was about sustainability. We felt this was an approach that could be very important in tackling fuel poverty – something that you stated would be assessed after the first year to measure impact.

We asked about timescales for the delivery of new homes and you stated that things were moving ahead in terms of survey work and having architects in place, and it was hoped that the first keys would be handed over by this time next year.

Welsh Housing Quality Standard

You highlighted achievements in relation to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. A Scrutiny Working Group recently met to discuss the Council's progress in achieving the standard and has written to you about this.

Disabled Facilities Grants

We discussed some of the challenges you identified including the need to reduce waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants. You acknowledged issues around the process, particular at the initial point of contact and involvement of Occupational Therapists (OT), which were delaying the delivery of vital adaptations. Given existing demand on the OT service and pressure on social services, we heard that, to improve matters, you have overseen the appointment of 2.5 FTE Occupational Therapists within the Housing Service.

Committee members shared their experiences about other delays in the process, for example around surveys, which you agreed to look into. You stated that every property was different and surveys were a critical part of the process but told us that you were happy to look into the overall process and timescales / waiting involved at various stages to see what could be done.

Corporate Building & Property Services

You highlighted the role of Corporate Building & Property Services in maintaining the 13,500 council-owned housing stock, within the property portfolio. You also gave a number of examples of achievements against key targets as well as various public service awards gained, which was pleasing.

We discussed your role in relation to the School Building Programme, which is listed amongst your portfolio responsibilities. You clarified that it was involvement in the maintenance and repair of school buildings.

Energy

We noted progress in relation to renewable energy projects within the Swansea Energy and Enterprise Scheme (SCEES), the establishment of a district heating network, and work to reduce carbon emissions.

Commercialism

We discussed the work of the Council's Commercial Team and opportunities for generating extra revenue for the Council. We noted a number of key projects and successes. We were particularly impressed that the Team has been looking at maximising income from the Council's public sector contracts with others (e.g. the Local Health Board), and has generated significant amount of income back to the Council. You mentioned a sum of £3m that has been generated in total so far. We were interested in a breakdown of how this amount has been achieved, and in particular how the Team has been able to maximise income from contracts.

We asked whether you were exploring the possibility of commercial opportunities in relation to our ICT services which are now back in-house. You stated that this is being considered although the main focus at the moment was to ensure that the in-house service has bed in.

We noted that £167k has been raised from external sponsorship and potential for even more income generation. We commented about the use of lampposts and pillar wraps for advertising and potential for being a blot on the landscape. You stated that no stone would be left unturned to identify commercial opportunities and raise income, but would be mindful of any concerns about over advertising. We heard that a Commercial Board has been set up involving Cabinet Members and officers to test / challenge ideas to ensure they are feasible and acceptable.

We noted that you are taking a report in the coming months to Council on the commercial plan and progress, and looked forward to this.

Portfolio Responsibilities

Finally, it was noted that your portfolio responsibilities include reference to Community Building & Asset Transfer. We are interested to know how you are involved in this and get some clarity about responsibility as there appears to be some cross-over with other Cabinet portfolios.

Your Response

In your response we would appreciate 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 look into the overall process in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants and timescales / waiting involved at various stages to see what could be done;
- a breakdown of the income generation achieved through the new commercial approach, and in particular how the Commercial Team has been able to maximise income from contracts; and
- clarity about your portfolio responsibilities in relation to Community Building & Asset Transfer

Please provide your response by 20 April. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

We look forward to meeting you again to follow up on portfolio developments and hearing about achievements and impact.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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