



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Will Evans
Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty &
Communities**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:* Scrutiny
*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:* 01792 637257
*e-Mail
e-Bost:* scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk
*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:* SPC/2016-17/6
*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*
*Date
Dyddiad:* 11 October 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty & Communities following the meeting of the Committee on 12 September 2016. It is about Poverty Strategy, Communities First, Allotments, Community Cohesion, Homelessness and Digital Inclusion.

Dear Councillor Evans,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 12 September

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 12 September 2016 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty & Communities. Thank you for providing a written paper that gave some headlines from this cabinet portfolio in support of your appearance.

We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to your areas of responsibility. 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:

Poverty Strategy

We noted progress in the delivery of poverty strategies and targets. Amongst the things that concerned the committee was about the quality of existing measures to assess performance and outcomes, to enable an assessment of the impact of investment and current work / approaches. We were unclear about reporting mechanisms and statistics, and how this authority compared

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE
GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE

www.swansea.gov.uk / www.abertawe.gov.uk

with others. You told us about the performance framework, with a number of poverty indicators included in corporate quarterly performance reports, as well as regular reporting to the Welsh Government linked to funding.

We asked about various definitions of poverty and, notwithstanding that there are official indicators, you felt that the inability to meet basic needs was a key to describing poverty.

We also asked about the extent to which you engage with other Cabinet Members over their contribution to tackling poverty, such as economic growth, regeneration and job creation, and health.

You acknowledged and welcomed the contribution that scrutiny will make to help improve the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy. The Scrutiny Inquiry Panel (convened by Councillor Sybil Crouch) will aim to finish its work by December. You stated that the scrutiny findings, along with other pieces of work, will represent a comprehensive review of the current strategy and ensure that future approaches are effective and reflect best practice. Your aim was for a revised strategy to be produced in early 2017.

We noted that you have asked the Cabinet Advisory Committee to look at a research report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on addressing / solving poverty in the UK, to help inform improvements. You mentioned that an Integrated Impact Assessment had already been carried out and you were asked to comment on the key issues arising from the assessment and how it might impact the revised strategy.

There has also been some confusion whether a revised strategy has already been drafted. It was felt that if this is the case the Tackling Poverty Inquiry Panel would benefit from having sight of it as part of its evidence gathering to provide a sense of possible future direction. You stated that you had not seen any revised strategy but undertook to look into this.

Given that our Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry is in progress it would be helpful if you could liaise directly with the convener of the Panel, Councillor Sybil Crouch, on these points.

Communities First

We talked about the impact of initiatives such as the LIFT project, and targets for the new Communities for Work Programme to help get people into work, which will be operating across the five Communities First 'cluster areas'.

We heard that the new Communities for Work Programme would focus on tackling poverty through sustainable employment and help to provide mentoring and support for employment in order to get people back into work to assist with economic growth and prosperity. The importance of education, economic prosperity and employment in tackling poverty was recognised but the committee expressed concern about reported job losses and difficulty in attracting jobs to the area.

We noted that the new Head of Poverty and Prevention is due to be in post in October.

Allotments

We followed up on our previous discussion with you on allotments, and developments following operational review. You reported that the operational review was ongoing but the current focus was on officers working with Allotment Associations to support the transfer of management to enable future self-management. You stated that the only feasible way for any growth in the number of allotments in Swansea was if it was driven by communities and self-managed / financed.

Community Cohesion

We talked about the importance of action to address issues surrounding community cohesion with the City and County of Swansea, particularly with reports of an increase in hate crimes across the UK in the aftermath of the EU referendum, and tension around issues such as immigration.

The committee felt that this was an issue on which you should be reporting to Council (or if not, scrutiny) to ensure there is good level of awareness about what is going on here (including reported incidents) and the efforts to develop community cohesion to provide some assurance. We noted that Swansea is recognised as a 'City of Sanctuary' and therefore it would be helpful for some regular reporting on community cohesion actions.

Homelessness

We raised with you some concern that I had been made aware of by Councillor Ioan Richard in relation to families apparently living in tents in certain parts of Swansea. He has already raised this matter with the Welsh Government but wanted me to bring this up at the committee as a possible poverty / homelessness issue. I have already sent you some additional information which Cllr Richard shared with me for you to look into this further, and clarify the situation.

Digital Inclusion

This is an issue of concern which has been identified by scrutiny and we anticipate a Scrutiny Working Group will look at this later in the council year. We asked about your views on the issue, given the considerable shift towards on-line council business and communication. There is obviously concern about the extent to which it may be excluding people with little or no access to IT, most likely those in poverty. Clearly this needs to be considered and alternative methods of contact need to remain available as much as possible.

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:

- liaise with the convener of the Tackling Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry Panel on the key issues arising from the Integrated Impact Assessment of the Poverty Strategy and how it might impact the revised strategy, and whether a revised strategy has been drafted;
- consider making a regular report on Community Cohesion to Council (or other appropriate body); and
- clarify the situation in relation to those families reported to be living in tents;

Please provide your response by 1 November. 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,

Mary Jones

COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

✉ cllr.mary.jones@swansea.gov.uk