



**To/
Councillor Will Evans
Cabinet Member for Stronger
Communities**

BY EMAIL

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SPC/2017-18/11

19 January 2018

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities following the meeting of the Committee on 11 December 2017. It is about the Relationship with the Third Sector, Communities First, Food Access/Growing, Drugs/Alcohol, and the 'Together at Christmas' Event.

Dear Councillor Evans,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 11 December

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 11 December 2017 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities.

Thank you for providing a written paper, giving headlines from the cabinet portfolio, 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 noted that there have been some portfolio changes since May, with responsibility for homelessness and digital inclusion moving out, and you taking on responsibility for community safety, domestic abuse, drugs & alcohol and the Families First Programme. You were still the lead on the Council's Poverty Reduction Strategy, one of the Council's five corporate priorities.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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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:

Relationship with the Third Sector

We asked you to talk about your relationship and work with the Third Sector (Voluntary Sector), in particular the contribution and involvement of the sector in helping to support and achieve portfolio priorities and objectives, for example in tackling poverty.

You spoke of a long and productive history of partnership working between the Council and Third Sector (otherwise referred to as the 'Compact'), and funding provided by the Council to Third Sector groups to support their activities.

You called the contribution made by the Third Sector valuable, referring, amongst others, to work of organisations such as the Swansea Citizens Advice (an essential partner for independent advice and information, including Welfare Reform), and those involved in dealing with safeguarding and domestic abuse.

The collaboration with SCVS - Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (the umbrella organisation for the third sector in Swansea) on a wide range of services was also mentioned. You stated that SCVS delivered a significant amount of training to volunteers and coordinated volunteers across Swansea, and was working with the Council to administer the award of Change Fund Small Grants to voluntary and community groups.

We recognised the sheer scale of the contribution made by the Third Sector but noted that funding was currently being reviewed. We noted that it is planned to move to a commissioned funding programme, with an approach to co-produce contract specifications based on need and awarded to the successful Third Sector applicants, measured against specific service delivery arrangements and outcomes.

Although we recognised the financial pressures on the council, which will impact on money available in the future to grant fund external organisations, there was some concern raised about the need for swift decisions to ensure that organisations such as the Swansea Environmental Forum can forward plan and deliver its work over the longer term. We understand that in December an extension of funding was granted by the External Funding Panel for six months to allow for continuity whilst the commissioning process is progressed. It was brought to your attention however that Swansea Environment Centre, jointly with the Environmental Forum, is in receipt of grants from Natural Resources Wales which will finish on 31 March - any new

grants, if awarded, will only apply from 1 July, leaving a three-month funding gap which may have significant consequences.

Communities First

We discussed the end of the Communities First Programme, transition / phase out arrangements, and the early introduction of a new 'Communities for Work Plus' Programme.

We raised some queries about your report to Cabinet on the allocation of Welsh Government Legacy Fund (Cabinet meeting - 14 December) which we understand is to maintain the most effective aspects of the Communities First Programme to support the development of resilient communities. The Committee noted that a significant share of this funding would go to the continuation of support of the activities of the 'Faith in Families' organisation, which focusses on supporting children, young people and parents.

We noted the rationale for use of the Legacy Fund:

- To tackle child poverty and mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences through the continuation of existing Communities First Third Party Funding arrangements.
- To support the development of Stronger Communities through the most effective interventions with a focus on employment within the context of early intervention and prevention.

What concerned the Committee, however, was whether there were indicators / measures in place to assess and evaluate performance against these objectives, and expected outcomes - to know that we will obtain good value for money from the funding pot of just over £0.5m. You undertook to write to us about what the money is going to be spent on (e.g. which specific projects) and performance measures and monitoring arrangements.

We understood that the new Communities for Work Plus programme was focussed on simplifying and increasing access to employability provision in Swansea, and will work alongside other employability provision delivered by the Council.

We read in your report that there will be closure reports and external evaluation of Communities First carried out and submitted to the Welsh Government. We asked whether these reports would be accessible to the public. You agreed to clarify with us the reporting process and availability.

Food Access/Growing

We talked about the importance of food growing in addressing poverty and improving health and wellbeing, and the need for greater opportunities to access this, e.g. allotments.

You explained that responsibility for allotments was now in the Future Generations cabinet portfolio, but told us that consideration was currently being given to the transfer of management to Allotment Associations, as part of a wider approach to looking for community asset transfer opportunities.

We were interested in developments regarding the creation of a Food Enterprise Community Interest Company, and asked about steps to encourage people to grow food, and food access and growing projects. You confirmed that food and growing responsibilities, and staffing had been transferred to the Food Enterprise. We heard that you were pleased with progress being made by the Food Enterprise and had confidence in its success. You told us that it will help raise awareness, signpost people and be able to attract funding streams to develop grow local schemes.

Drugs/Alcohol

We asked about your responsibilities in relation to drugs and alcohol, and advice for local councillors on support for drug and alcohol issues within their communities. You talked about service provision to deal with drug and alcohol addiction and agreed to provide us with more information in writing that will help local councillors be able to signpost more effectively when faced with issues within their wards.

'Together at Christmas' Event

We were pleased to see that arrangements had been made for another 'Together at Christmas' event at the Brangwyn Hall, to provide homeless, vulnerable and isolated people in Swansea with a Christmas dinner as well as free services, information and support. You told us that around 300 people were expected.

Some committee members queried whether there was enough information available, particularly for councillors to be able spread the message to relevant organisations and individuals. We would welcome a leaflet, for councillors to circulate, to raise awareness of future events to ensure as many people as possible benefit.

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 address:

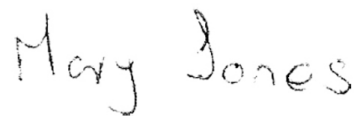
- how the outcomes and effectiveness of the work carried out as a result of the Legacy Fund will be measured and monitored;
- how much Legacy Funding would be allocated to 'Faith in Families' and the projects where the money would be used;

- whether closure / evaluation reports on Communities First will be available to the public, and;
- facilities / support available for drug and alcohol problems within wards.

Please provide your response by 9 February. 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 hearing about achievements and impact in due course.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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