



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Enterprise,
Development & Regeneration**

BY EMAIL

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SPC/2016-17/7

25 October 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration following the meeting of the Committee on 10 October 2016. It is about City Centre, Civic Centre, City Region / City Deal, Suburban Centres, Culture (Arts), Support for NEETS, Enterprise Education, Universities, European & External Funding, Tree Preservation and Planning.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 10 October

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 10 October 2016 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration. 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:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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City Centre

St. David's

We noted that an outline planning application is being prepared for submission in March 2017. The committee acknowledged that the development process was unavoidably lengthy. You felt that people needed to be patient about progress, given the various stages that have to be followed, but you stated that you were trying to move things on as quickly as possible, as this was a priority area.

The Kingsway

We noted the plan to transform the Oceana site (demolition scheduled for completion end March 2017) into a mixed use office development focussed on Tech Businesses. You told us that several properties have been acquired in and around the site to create a critical mass for future development.

We raised with you the importance of developing the skills base locally so that we have the people who can benefit from this development (and other innovation projects), and ensure take up of space. You stated that discussions were being held with the Universities on a range of matters, including issues around developing the skill base.

The committee recognised that this was a significant development and many other improvements hinged on its delivery, such as public transport, including the connectivity between Orchard Street and The Kingsway.

The committee looks forward to more information as things progress.

Housing

The need for more housing for families in the City Centre was raised, given the vision of the city as a place to live and work.

We noted the growth in student population and need for good quality accommodation. You felt that increasing the number of HMO properties was not the best way forward given the impact on certain communities; therefore the city centre needed to provide a balance of different types of accommodation, including residential units and purpose built student accommodation.

You felt that the Civic Centre site had the potential to deliver an increase in residential housing which would be within walking distance to retail and leisure sites.

Civic Centre

We asked about the marketing of this site and progress. Committee Members noted that it had been lauded as the most valuable piece of real estate in

Wales, and queried whether it has failed to attract the interest perhaps anticipated, given that Council was now acting as developer for the site.

You explained that the priority was to develop St David's and The Kingsway first, which will provide alternate accommodation for council staff so that the Civic Centre site can be cleared, and with the City Centre developing hopefully it will increase the value of the land as the Civic Centre site. We felt that the demolition of the site (and associated cost) may be a significant issue.

You explained that it was becoming the norm for Councils to act as (or partner with) developers and invest in development, and pointed out that there could be financial benefits to the Council from more direct involvement in the development process, given the current cost of borrowing.

We heard that discussions were ongoing with Swansea University regarding the potential for a 'hydro hub' that could include a public aquarium and research centre. You stated that the site would not be developed without getting the best return and value for Swansea, and were confident about prospects.

City Region / City Deal

We asked about progress with the City Deal proposal. You stated that the City Region innovation proposal was positively received by UK and Welsh Government. Dubbed 'The Internet Coast', we understood that the key project centred on developing world-leading digital telecommunications capacity in Swansea Bay to transform economic activity and performance in the area. You also talked about the importance of a strong City Centre to the success of the region.

We were interested in the work of the Swansea Bay City Region Board, chaired by Sir Terry Matthews, and would like to see the publication of minutes to ensure transparency in this work. You accepted that minutes should be made available, and the importance of good governance and accountability for such bodies.

We were interested in work to attract inward investment generally. As you know this was the subject of a scrutiny inquiry a few years ago. You highlighted that a Regional Marketing Suite had now been established at the new University bay campus, as an innovative approach to promote the region on an international platform, providing interactive information to potential investors. You added that on-line tools were being developed as well. We noted your strong recommendation for committee members to visit the Suite.

We asked whether the absence of a ferry link with Ireland has had a negative impact on investment and Swansea's economy. You did not think that this put Swansea at any major disadvantage and there were better links elsewhere in

South West Wales. We accepted that whilst a direct link from Swansea might be desirable, it very much depended on its commercial viability.

Suburban Centres

We asked whether there were any plans to introduce chargeable parking areas in suburban centres, as a means to raise funds, and ensure a turnover of shoppers and visitors. This is something which has been mentioned in previous years.

You told us that did not feel that charging would strengthen the suburban shopping centre, and saw no great value in doing so. Whilst a turnover may be desirable to enable as many people to find parking, you did not want to deter people from visiting suburban centres. As an aside you felt that the idea of free parking in the city centre around the late afternoon / early evening could encourage more people to visit, e.g. families after school.

Culture (Arts)

You highlighted that Swansea was a pilot city participating in the 'Agenda 21 for culture' programme; a programme adopted by the United Cities and Local Governments which is for cities aiming to evaluate, design and implement cultural policies contributing to sustainable development. We understood that it was an important reference point to developing a strategic culture / arts policy for Swansea.

We noted the long-awaited re-opening of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and asked about plans in place to celebrate and promote this event.

We also talked about learning points from the 2017 City of Culture bid a few years ago.

Support for NEETS

We invite all scrutiny councillors to suggest questions to the committee for every Cabinet Member Q & A session. One of these was about the support for those not in education, employment or training (NEETS). You were asked, on behalf of Councillor Mike Day, to update the committee on the current performance and the measures that are in place to ensure that young people are given life chances that might be denied them if they are NEET. You were also asked about what assurances you can give that the Council will continue to allocate resources to ensure the figures move down further.

You talked about the joint working with other Cabinet Members, including Cabinet Member for Education – who is the main Cabinet lead for NEETS. You referred to various projects and schemes to help NEETS, and spoke about the way outcomes are being tracked. You undertook to provide a full response to the question in writing.

Enterprise Education

Another question received by the committee (also from Councillor Mike Day) wanted to know about the development of enterprise education. Councillor Day pointed out that Swansea has been recognised as a leader in the field of enterprise education and the encouragement to young people to set up businesses. We asked how important you believed it was to have effective actions to promote enterprise education and support new businesses, especially those set up by young people. We also wanted to know what actions the Council is currently taking to ensure enterprise education is supported; also, what assurances you could give that every effort will be made to ensure resources continue at the current level at least for the next 5 years, if not increased? Finally, we wanted you to tell us what applications for funding would the Council be making to support its actions in enterprise education and business start-ups?

Whilst you recognised the importance of this work you did not think anyone could provide guarantees about resources for the next 5 years. The committee was happy to receive a written response for a full answer to these questions.

Universities

You told us that the relationship between the council and the two universities was very good and that a Memorandum of Understanding had recently been signed. We would like to see a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding.

European and External Funding

We noted that a number of programmes and projects are either already in receipt of European funding or looking to secure such funding, and we asked about the impact of the EU referendum result on our ability to deliver improvements not only in the City Centre but across Swansea. You told us that the future impact was not quantifiable at this stage and it remained to be seen whether Swansea would benefit or not; but you would continue to chase any available funding whilst it was available.

Tree Preservation

We wanted to follow up on the recent Scrutiny Working Group that looked at the issue of tree preservation. Thank you for providing us with a written progress report.

We had invited the convener of the Working Group, Councillor David Cole, to attend and raise any issues with you and the committee on actions taken, in response to recommendations made to you by the Working Group. Councillor Cole was happy with and encouraged by progress that has been made, and praised the efforts of the Council's Landscape Team. We welcomed the

development of a Tree Policy, which will amongst other things cover the replanting of trees on Council land.

You welcomed this piece of scrutiny and assured the committee that the findings have been considered fully. We noted there were some recommendations still in progress, and amongst these you confirmed that the implications of placing Tree Preservation Orders on Council land prior to sale was being discussed. There was concern amongst councillors that many trees have been lost through sale of council land because of the failure to protect trees.

Planning

We will follow up the work of the Planning Scrutiny Working Group which was meeting in October. We have discussed planning matter with you previously, however, Scrutiny Councillors wanted to opportunity to raise questions and discuss some outstanding issues relation to the planning process, including Section 106 agreements, and the call in-process.

You reported significant progress in the Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation. We noted that consultation responses are being assessed and a further report setting out any revisions to the Deposit LDP will be made in early 2017.

Your Response

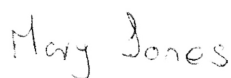
In your response we would appreciate your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to our request for you to provide:

- access to minutes of the Swansea Bay City Region Board;
- a full response to the questions on support for NEETS and Enterprise Education; and
- a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Universities.

Please provide your response by 15 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,



COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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