

Councillor Chris Holley
Convener, Service Improvement and
Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

Please ask for: Councillor Mark Thomas
Direct Line: 01792 63 6926
E-Mail: cllr.mark.thomas@swansea.gov.uk
Our Ref: MT/JW
Your Ref:
Date: 22 March 2018

BY EMAIL

Dear Councillor Holley

**SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL,
14 FEBRUARY 2018 - HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSIONING
REVIEW**

Thank you for your letter dated 6th March which included a number of positive observations and recognition of the work put in to this review. These compliments have been passed on to the officers involved. It is recognised that the Highways and Transportation service is a large and complex service and hence it is unavoidable that the commissioning review was a very significant piece of work. It is very important that the review was a comprehensive and thorough assessment of the Service and I feel that this has been achieved.

I respond to the questions raised as follows:

- 2. Regarding 3.2 the Central Transport Unit – we feel that combining services is the best way going forward and provides for more effective management of the services. A new site (yard) has been talked about for many years. Can you advise what progress has been made?**

In marketing the Pipehouse Wharf site (in support of the river corridor development) Cabinet and officers are committed to relocating the services currently based at the site, namely Central Transport Unit and Refuse and Cleansing, to alternative practical locations.

Whereas in previous years much consideration was given to a 'super depot', under current financial constraints this is not the most appropriate way forward.

Commercial discussions and background works are underway to facilitate:

- a) the movement of Refuse and Cleansing operations up to Ferryboat Close where they will be in close proximity to our other waste operations; and

- b) the movement of our Central Transport Unit (fleet management) to a site further east on the Enterprise Park.

Alongside the commercial acquisitions process for these sites, the Council is engaged in drawing up and pricing designs for groundworks as appropriate. Given the current state of play it is hoped that these moves will take place during Spring 2019.

4. It is important to remember that bus services are vital to many people. Any changes will be a huge pressure for the public and for us as a Council. We should have a clear view of the subsidies and the reasons for them. Can you provide this?

The majority of bus services in the Swansea area are provided on a commercial basis by the bus companies. The Council's role is to monitor the commercial bus service network and identify any gaps in provision. If there are gaps, the Council has the authority to fill them by seeking competitive tenders for services that it feels are 'socially necessary'.

At present the Council funding for these services is in the region of £1.13m per annum and of this, around £500k is from a Welsh Government Bus Services Support Grant. Services provided by the Council are not allowed to compete with or undermine the viability of services provided by companies on a commercial basis.

The services that receive funding are those that the bus companies do not consider profitable so they are at times and on days where fewer people travel. The contracts range from single journeys to several journeys at particular times of day to whole networks in rural areas, such as Gower. Many of the services operate on weekdays in the early mornings and evenings, in rural areas, to housing estates off the main bus corridors and on Sundays / Bank holidays.

A summary of the current contracts is attached and can also be viewed on the Council's website at: www.swansea.gov.uk/article/7026/Bus-services-funded-by-the-council

The next planned round of tendering will be in 2019 but there are ongoing reviews in the light of decisions made by commercial bus operators and the need to consider replacement facilities for any services they decide to withdraw.

In order to monitor usage, contractors are required to supply information on passengers carried on a monthly basis and this is supplemented by on bus passenger surveys carried out by the Council's monitoring staff.

- 7. Not enough money is being spent on roadway and network maintenance. Continually patching roads is not a long term solution. Accompanying this, the areas surrounding the roads need to be looked at and dealt with as part of highways maintenance. Insufficient drainage and water discharging directly onto road surfaces is also contributing to the poor state of roads and causing problematic driving conditions. There is no clear view on the cost effectiveness of patching, in relation to resurfacing a road. Can you provide this?**

It is recognised across the UK that there is a significant highways maintenance backlog and prioritising additional funding is the only way to tackle the problem. In Swansea an additional £1m of insurance fund money has been spent on highways every year over the last four years and a further £1.4m of expenditure has been allocated on highways this year in response to the commissioning review. In addition to this the Welsh Government have provided an additional capital contribution of £1.8m for highway maintenance during 2017/18.

There is a very clear view over the cost effectiveness of reactive repairs and patching compared to resurfacing works. In short it is an accepted industry fact that the most cost effective treatments are preventative, followed by large scale quality resurfacing, structural patching and finally reactive measures. These issues are well understood and form the principals of the All Wales Asset Management Programme of which the Authority is a lead member.

In terms of value for money reactive maintenance is far more expensive than resurfacing, with 8 to 10 times being typical examples being quoted. No exact figure can be given as it will vary between repairs and treatments but this is an accepted principal. The authority aims to maximise its spend on both preventative maintenance, resurfacing and proactive patching however safety maintenance is a statutory requirement and therefore as network condition deteriorates the percentage spend on reactive maintenance will increase.

- 8. Following on from this, can you advise whether there is a limit to the amount of road patching (in financial terms) which can be done in an electoral ward in one year?**

In terms of the PATCH programme we are currently committed to 1 week per ward per year with the remaining weeks of the programme allocated on an engineering needs basis determined by the condition of the road. In terms of safety patching this is carried out as a result of routine safety inspections. In terms of finance there is no limit as each scheme will be designed on need and costed accordingly.

9. We read about the money saving and environmental benefits of LED lighting. Which specific areas of Swansea are yet to have LED street lights installed? As a percentage, how much of Swansea does this represent?

In general all areas of Swansea have had LED street lamps installed. The exceptions to this are as follows:

- Columns that have been identified as needing to be changed under the structural testing programme (1.4% of the network).
- Main roads - due to the costs of lanterns for the taller columns (10M and 12M) dimming gear has been fitted as an economic alternative (13.5% of the network).
- Lights on non-adopted highway - these are spread through the County (3.8% of the network).

In addition, there are some lights in the City Centre that have not been converted, these being:

- Kingsway - omitted due to the proposed improvement scheme.
- Wind Street - L.E.D.s are unsuitable for the decorative columns.
- Princess Way - these are taller columns but dimming gear has not been fitted, in support of the night time economy and health and safety.

I trust this information provides a response to the issues recorded at the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel.

Yours sincerely



**COUNCILLOR MARK THOMAS
CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT SERVICES**