



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

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

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 637257

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

BY EMAIL

*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:*

SPC/2015-16/7

*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

10 February 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty following the meeting of the Committee on 11 January 2015. It is about Tackling Poverty, Food & Growing, Homelessness, and Community Action.

Dear Councillor Evans,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 11 January

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 11 January 2015 answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty. We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact in relation to your areas of responsibility. We noted that there have been some changes to your portfolio since we last met with you – now taking on responsibility for Community Cohesion, Community Development, Homelessness, and Neighbourhood Working.

We are writing to you in order 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:

Tackling Poverty

You stressed the commitment to reducing poverty in Swansea and its impacts. You stated that poverty had an effect throughout society and tackling poverty was not something that the council alone could deal with. You highlighted in particular the part education and employment played in helping to reduce poverty, and outlined work to deliver poverty strategies and progress against targets for 2017.

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

You pointed out that this was a generational issue and whilst there may be some short-term actions, the life of the strategy and its delivery needed to be seen over a 5-10 year+ period. We asked about the balance between quick wins and long term impact for anti-poverty work. You stated that you were happy with the current plan, which you oversee, though we pressed you on your personal objectives for the next two years. You again stressed the need to focus on education and getting people into employment. You also wanted to see the development of a food growing enterprise by the end of this year. You stated that a food poverty conference was in the works. You also talked about the new 'Communities for Work Programme' within Communities First areas, which will focus on tackling poverty through sustainable employment and help to provide mentoring and support for employment. We asked about the funding for this scheme and any financial risk to the Council in relation to objectives. You confirmed that this was European funding via the Welsh Government, therefore there was no risk to the Council.

The committee asked about the effectiveness of established indicators that are measured in order to affect poverty and its outcomes. You referred to a framework containing a range of national and local indicators, measuring income levels, standard of living, and deprivation. This led to a discussion about who qualified as being in poverty and other relevant factors, e.g. rent levels. You referred to the current Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for the UK which is one of the key measures, and the Living Wage which is linked to the MIS. There was some surprise to find out that current MIS identifies a two-child family as needing to earn at least £40k combined to achieve MIS.

There was some concern for those living outside of target areas / Communities First areas not having the same access to support. We also asked about how councillors should be involved in tackling poverty. You acknowledged that poverty existed in all areas and stressed the role of ward members in understanding the issues, community engagement and signposting to help. You stated that helping members to embed community development in their roles was within the Poverty Strategy action plan.

You acknowledged that the next Scrutiny Inquiry will be based on the 'Tackling Poverty' Corporate Priority, and offered some ideas about the contribution that scrutiny could contribute to improvement. Aside from scrutiny of the performance management framework and monitoring the delivery of outcomes, you invited a view about the focus and effectiveness of current strategy / plans, multi-agency working, whether there were gaps in services, and whether more could be done, and the resourcing and sustainability of work to tackle poverty.

Food and Growing

We wanted you to advise as to whether targets for increasing the number of allotments, community gardens and other food growing opportunities have been met and advise as to what work was being done to encourage and support this work.

Grow Local Scheme

Given the levels of poverty and establishment of food banks we asked for an update on the Grow Local Scheme, which has the potential to alleviate poverty. You explained that the Scheme was continuing albeit with reduced funding. Although the Scheme began with a £50k budget, this became £30k in 2014/15 and was further reduced to £20k for 2015/16 and will continue at that level for 2016/17.

We learned that for 2014/15 there had been 8 applications received to date, (total amount requested £12,968), of these 6 awards have been made, to the value of £9.4k, 5 of these in respect of new growing spaces. Two applications have been deferred and are pending. Further applications are expected and it was anticipated that the £20k budget would be spent by the end of March 2016.

You informed that committee that you were looking at ways in which to maximize funding for the Scheme in the future. We asked if you could you provide a list of Grow Local Grants awarded in the past 12 months, as well as any more information about plans for the scheme for 2016/17. We were not sure whether local councillors were automatically informed of grants awarded for schemes in their areas but felt that they should be.

Could you also advise on progress towards setting up a social enterprise for a Community Cooking organisation as per the model in Liverpool?

Allotments

You confirmed that there were currently 16 allotment sites, 5 of these managed by the Council. You stated that the budget has been overspent for some time and therefore an operational review, including management / leasing arrangements, costs (including rents), and the support provided by the Council, has been undertaken. You told us that existing leaseholders would be consulted before any changes were made.

We were aware of waiting lists for allotments and healthy living strategies having targets for introducing new allotments, so we asked how that was consistent with your statement that there were no plans to identify and introduce new allotments. You clarified that an increase in the number of growing spaces was encouraged, but there was some disagreement with your comment that these could be effectively regarded as allotments.

Homelessness

We noted work in relation to homeless prevention. We asked about the number of homeless presentations and anticipated rises due to issues such as welfare reform. It was interesting that 63% of cases presenting in 2014/15 were prevented or found not homeless, and we discussed some of the reasons why. We asked if you could provide a more detailed breakdown of homelessness figures.

Community Action

We noted information about the Community Action Transformation Fund created in 2014 to support the delivery of the aims of the Community Action strand within the Sustainable Swansea strategy. We understood that Community Action was all about finding new, innovative methods of delivery to save facilities and services for the benefit of Swansea residents.

You reported that there have been 3 rounds to date, with funding aimed at proposals from community groups to:

- develop proposals to run Council services locally and/or
- facilitate the transfer of community assets.

We would appreciate a list of what services / community assets have been transferred to date or in progress.

Your Response

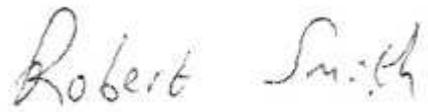
In your response we would appreciate your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to:

- our request for a list of Grow Local Grants awarded in the past 12 months, as well information about any plans for the scheme for 2016/17;
- ensuring that local councillors are automatically informed of Grow Local grants awarded for schemes in their areas;
- progress towards setting up a social enterprise for a Community Cooking organisation as per the model in Liverpool;
- our request for a more detailed breakdown of homelessness figures; and
- our request for a list of what services / community assets have been transferred to date or in progress.

Please provide your response by 2 March. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Smith". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

COUNCILLOR ROBERT SMITH
Vice-Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee
✉ cllr.robert.smith@swansea.gov.uk