



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Environment &
Transportation**

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SPC/2016-17/2

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*Date
Dyddiad:*

7 July 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation following the meeting of the Committee on 9 May 2016. It is about Commissioning Reviews, Recycling, Road Maintenance & Repair, Bus Services, Parking Services, Streets, Parks, Dog Fouling, Swansea Marina and Safe Routes to School.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 9 May

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 9 May 2016 answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Environment & Transportation. We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to your areas of responsibility. Thank you for providing a paper that gave us the headlines from this cabinet portfolio. Thanks also to Stuart Davies, Head of Highways & Transportation, and Chris Howell, Head of Waste Management & Parks, who were present to assist the committee during the session.

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:

Commissioning Reviews

We noted the status of relevant Commissioning Reviews that you were leading (e.g. Waste Management, Parks & Cleaning, Highways & Transportation). You talked about the pressure on budgets and need to find

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sustainable solutions for future service delivery, including exploring opportunities to generate income.

Since our meeting the Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel has carried out pre-decision scrutiny on the Waste Management Commissioning Review and fed back its views to Cabinet on 16 June. Pre-decision scrutiny of future commissioning reviews is also being arranged.

Recycling

We asked about recycling performance and you stated that the service was performing well (currently 59.2%) against Government targets. You were confident about further improvement with a view to meeting the target of 64% by 2019/20.

We were interested in activities within schools to educate children about waste, recycling and litter. We were told that there was a limited resource but there is an education officer working with primary and secondary schools.

We also discussed the issue of excess packaging and its contribution to waste and litter. You told us that the Welsh Government has been lobbied on this issue to minimise waste, but there has been little progress.

Road Maintenance and Repair

We talked about the large backlog of road repairs (e.g. potholes), and inspection and prioritisation process. We were concerned about the condition of roads and how response to issues can be improved.

The process for dealing with reports of issues such as potholes was explained, and we noted that the level of response would be dependent on the severity of damage and potential danger. We heard that not every road was routinely inspected but there were criteria for intervention. However a balance had to be struck between planned and reactive inspections to counter any charge of any negligence.

Financial pressures meant that this was a very challenging area for the council because of the overall condition of roads - an issue not just locally but UK wide, and factors such as poor weather. However, you reported that despite limited resources Swansea was one of the highest performing councils across Wales.

Bus Services

We were very pleased to hear that there has been some progress in developing a Quality Bus Partnership with First Cymru. This has been an area of concern for scrutiny, as highlighted in our inquiry on public transport a few years ago. We heard that you have spoken at length with the Managing

Director of First Cymru, Justin Davies and that things were close to agreement, which will mean a close working arrangement and opportunity for proper engagement over service provision and quality. You stated that it could also provide more leverage for investment from the Welsh Government.

Parking Services

We asked about civil parking enforcement and the costs to provide Parking Services. You stated that you were trying to maximise income, and mentioned the plan to bring parking services across the council under a single umbrella for efficiency, as some are under the responsibility of leisure services.

We noted that the service generated an overall surplus in the region of £800k, against turnover of approximately £5 million. We were interested in the cost of the service and asked for a breakdown of the £4.2m, and particularly whether it covered the repair of the council's multi-storey car parks.

Streets

Street Closures

A question was raised about charges for street closures for example for street parties when there are national celebrations (Queen's Birthday etc). There has been concern at the money being charged and in light of statements by the Secretary of State and Department of Transport we asked whether such charges could be abandoned or reduced for occasions of national celebration. You gave assurances that this is being looked at with view to not making any charges in the future.

Street Cleansing

We asked about cleansing schedules and targeting. We were not sure whether the service provided for a weekly clean or whether there was any particular targeting of areas.

We heard that the service was becoming more agile rather than carrying out blanket cleaning through a scheduled fixed rotation approach, i.e. the aim was to HAVE clean streets, not TO clean streets. We agreed that areas of large volumes of footfall and traffic would need more targeting, such as the city centre, and other shopping districts, not least to ensure they are attractive places to visit.

We asked you to share with us the schedule of street cleansing.

Street Lighting

We noted the implementation of energy efficiency measures but discussed the effectiveness of LED street lighting. Committee members shared concerns about the limited spread of light making areas between lighting columns quite dark. You told us that there were no plans to increase the number of columns due to cost of new installations.

Councillors Environmental Allowances

We referred to the cost of works in relation to councillors' environmental allowances (e.g. wooden posts to prevent parking and protect grass verges). Some members have found quotes to be very expensive. You responded that both the level of members' environmental allowances, and the cost of works, was being looked at. It was emphasised to the committee that works such as that referred to had to be done in a proper and safe manner and cost comparisons needed to be on a like-for-like basis.

Parks

The committee noted that the Parks & Cleansing Service worked alongside colleagues in Culture & Tourism to actively work in partnership with in excess of 30 'Friends of Parks' Groups to encourage, sustain and develop each individual Friends Group and Park. We asked about grass cutting in parks / maintenance where managed by such 'Friends of Parks' Groups. We were told that no maintenance contracts with 'Friends of Parks' had been established to date.

Dog Fouling

We raised some concerns about the provision & high cost of dog waste bins. You explained the various costs associated with the installation and servicing of dog waste bins and stated that this was being reviewed.

There was also concern at the limited presence of wardens to help deter dog fouling, and questions were asked about the extent of enforcement activity. We were told that resources did not allow for constant patrols but the service aimed to be responsive to complaints so that problems are dealt with. We accepted it was difficult to catch people in the act but one of the ways to improve matters was to have more operatives working in communities trained to enforce and able to issue fixed penalty notices.

We acknowledged that there needs to be an emphasis on education first not necessarily patrol and enforcement. We asked you to provide us with a breakdown of penalty notices issued over the last year.

Swansea Marina

We talked about the operation of Swansea Marina. We noted the competitive environment and need to maximise income to offset the cost of maintaining and operating the Tawe Barrage. Given the crucial role played by the Barrage and consequences of failure we were interested in the maintenance regime.

Safe Routes to School

We asked about the programme for Safe Routes to School / 20 mph limits around schools. You explained that this utilises Welsh Government funding, which the Council bids for each year, and its use is prioritised based on risk assessments, looking at factors like traffic volumes, speed of vehicles, access, width of pavements etc.

We noted that unfortunately the fund is limited and does not stretch to cover all schools - typically resources enable a couple of schools to benefit each year. We understood that the aim was for all schools to be covered in time, subject to funding.

Home to School Transport

We asked about any development in relation to school transport, and relevant issues, including managing future cost.

Fleet Management / Depot Rationalisation

We noted that Central Transport Unit activities have recently been subject to an external review, as part of a depot rationalisation review.

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:

- information / breakdown on the cost of the Parking Service, and particularly whether it covered the repair of the council's multi-storey car parks;
- street cleansing schedules; and
- breakdown of penalty notices issued in relation to dog fouling

Please provide your response by 28 July. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

We look forward to meeting you again in November 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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