



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Christine Richards
Cabinet Member for Services for
Children & Young People**

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 637257

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:*

SPC/2016-17/3

BY EMAIL

*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

14 July 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Services for Children & Young People following the meeting of the Committee on 13 June 2016. It is about Corporate Safeguarding, Children & Young Peoples Partnership, Youth Leaders, Youth Offending Service, Flying Start, Children Educated at Home and the Budget.

Dear Councillor Richards,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 13 June

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 13 June 2016 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Services for Children & Young People. We wanted to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to your areas of responsibility. Thanks also to Dave Howes, Chief Social Services Officer, who was present to assist the committee during the session.

You talked about your regular contact with scrutiny through the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel and we were pleased to hear you praise the valuable work of that Panel which you stated made a significant contribution to service improvement. You recognised the important role played by scrutiny to help ensure the service does not return to the time, just a few years ago, of intervention. You also spoke about your meeting with the Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel over the last year which covered a number of aspects of your portfolio including the budget.

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 referred to partnership working as one of the main issues and challenges ahead, and an area of increasing emphasis within the public sector, and between local authorities, despite the likely absence of major local government reorganisation.

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:

Corporate Safeguarding

The committee discussed the Corporate Safeguarding Annual Report for 2014/15 and update for 2015/16. As Cabinet Member with lead responsibility for safeguarding you provided a background to this work and explained that the report covered the activities of the Corporate Safeguarding People Steering Group, formed in response to a Wales Audit Office review of Local Authority arrangements to support the safeguarding of children.

We recognised that 'Safeguarding Vulnerable People' was one of the Council's five Corporate Plan Priorities, and perhaps the most important. We noted that the annual report for 2014/15 represented the first year's work of the Steering Group in establishing clear corporate safeguarding arrangements.

The committee was made aware of work carried out over the past 18 months to promote the idea that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility, and other achievements, including:

- identifying clear safeguarding leads across all Council services
- provision of on-line and/or face-to-face training, appropriate to job roles
- developing a performance framework to provide adequate assurance that systems are working effectively
- a training event on child sexual exploitation

The committee noted that approaches in Swansea were attracting interest elsewhere.

Overall the committee was pleased with progress and endorsed actions taken. However, we asked about progress in relation to the effectiveness of arrangements with partners, including contractors, and their engagement with safeguarding standards / issues. We were told that that this remained an area of development but actions have been identified to extend responsibilities across external organisations carrying out work for the council and ensure that they have a level of safeguarding understanding. The committee was keen to see progress in this area and timescales.

The committee was also interested in how the work of the Corporate Steering Group complemented the work of the Western Bay Safeguarding Board, Public Protection Executive Board, and local operational groups.

Children & Young Peoples Partnership

Following our meeting with you last September and subsequent correspondence you said that work was being undertaken to re-establish the Children & Young Peoples Executive Board. This is important for strategic direction and coordination of work to ensure good outcomes for children & young people across the partnership. One of the issues was around how this fits within the bigger Single Integrated Plan / Public Services Board agenda.

Although no longer statutory, you confirmed that the Board has now met and referred to a new draft of the Children & Young People Strategic Partnership Plan which has been developed. The Plan provided clarity about the vision, priorities, and outcomes.

We asked about the process of monitoring progress to improve outcomes. You said that one of the objectives was around promoting children's rights and talked about the progress made in embedding the UNCRC across schools, as an example of actions being monitored. We asked about your role and involvement in the Public Services Board. As well as sitting on the Children and Young Peoples Partnership Board you confirmed that you were a member of the Public Services Board.

Youth Leaders

We asked about the work of Youth Leaders and level of service across Swansea. You said you would provide us with information about the number of youth workers and the areas that they were operating within.

Youth Offending Service

We asked about the regional Youth Offending Service. You said that the arrangements were working well however this was a challenging area with room for improvement.

We discussed early intervention initiatives and whether any improvements to outcomes for young offenders had resulted since restorative practice had been introduced. We were told that although there was evidence of successful outcomes for some children there were still a small and significant number of children being incarcerated, many with developmental needs such as speech and language.

Committee members queried the availability of reports on performance about the Youth Offending Service. We were unclear about the reporting mechanism for this body. Can you give us overview about this service with links to any published reports?

Flying Start

We asked about the continuity and evaluation of the Flying Start scheme since it had moved into the Education Portfolio. You felt that the move to Education was a positive step to ensure better links with nursery / school provision, and stated that you would continue to work with the relevant Cabinet Member and retain interest. We agreed that working with families was critical to help break the cycle of deprivation. The committee asked how the scheme is being monitored. We understood that there was a performance framework which is used for reporting back to the Welsh Government. We have identified 'Preparedness for School' as a potential scrutiny inquiry topic that will be starting soon. I would expect that this will explore the success or otherwise of Flying Start, and other initiatives, during any evidence gathering.

Children Educated at Home

We asked about the welfare of those children being educated at home. This is something which has concerned a number of scrutiny councillors in various forums and there has been surprise that the council has no power to see those children to check on their welfare. We acknowledged the need to remain vigilant, ask questions, offer help, and not be afraid to report any concerns. You stated that this was an issue that the service was aware of and has been in contact with the Welsh Government about. We noted that there was joint working between social service and education officers to ensure any concerns can be addressed at the point any request for home tuition is made.

Budget

We asked about the budget for the Children & Young People portfolio, particularly any financial pressures / challenges over the past year. We were told that the service was within budget, and financial management was strong within the service with an emphasis, like other parts of the council, on working smarter.

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:

- more information about arrangements with partners, including contactors, on safeguarding;
- information about Youth Leaders; and

- a performance report on Youth Offending Service.

Please provide your response by 4 August. 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jones".

COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

✉ cllr.mary.jones@swansea.gov.uk