



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**To/
Councillor Mark Child
Cabinet Member for Wellbeing &
Healthy City**

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SPC/2016-17/4

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*Date
Dyddiad:*

27 July 2016

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Healthy City following the meeting of the Committee on 11 July 2016. It is about Tethered Horses, Local Area Coordinators, Parks, Sports, Japanese Knotweed, CCTV, Houses in Multiple Occupation, Community Buildings / Asset Transfer, Healthy Cities and Anti-Social Behaviour.

Dear Councillor Child,

Cabinet Member Question Session – 11 July

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 11 July 2016 and answering questions on your work as Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Healthy City. 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:

Tethered Horses

We had received written questions from a member of the public in relation to the recent Tethered Horses Scrutiny Working Group and your response to that work. The questions were from Mr David Grimsell, on behalf of Friends of Swansea Horses, who was concerned about the amount of horses kept on public spaces, particularly Council land, without authorisation, with many kept tethered and suffering poor welfare. The questions were accompanied by comments about the number of horses that have had to be seized,

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impounded and destroyed by the Council, and complaints that are made to the Council about horse welfare and management issues. He wanted the committee to ask you:

- how is it that the Council presumes to do nothing and to continue with a reactive approach that has proved entirely ineffective in addressing the needs of the horses and the concerns of the community that has allowed these problems to continue year-in year-out without change?
- how is it that it presumes to disregard the recommendations of the 'Tethered Horses Working Group' for fundamental change?

You provided some assurance to the committee that you are keen to meet with all interested groups in order to make progress, but drew attention to financial pressures on the service that may affect possible investment to deal with this issue. You pointed out that improved partnership working has already seen a big fall in the number of stray horses having to be put down.

You told us that a full written answer would be sent to Mr Grimsell, and copied to Members of the Committee. We note that you have already done so.

One of the issues discussed during the Working Group had been signage put up by the council at hotspots in Swansea deterring people from tethering horses. Members understood that signage was in place however this was called into question by some committee members, for example in Mynyddbach. We asked you to check on this matter.

Local Area Coordinators

We asked about progress including coverage across Swansea and how this initiative is being evaluated. You told us that steady progress was being made although not as rapid as desired. You stated that there was growing interest in this approach and were encouraged by the fact that Neath Port Talbot Council was also adopting this model.

The planned expansion of Local Area Coordinators (LACs) in further areas of Swansea was noted – which would mean a total of six LACs in place. Although the aim is to cover all areas we noted that you felt an increase by three each year would be a good achievement, with a total of 16 anticipated to provide coverage across the whole of Swansea.

You argued that LACs was something that should not only fall on the Council to fund, given mutual benefits for partners such as health, public health and police, and would press for a shared contribution that will enable swifter expansion. This was about reducing demand on services, and increasing independence and support within communities. You felt this should be a key element of collaborative working.

We noted that a report from Swansea University will be coming soon, evaluating this work, though there was anecdotal evidence of success. We look forward to seeing this report – please share with us as soon as it is available.

Some members stated that there has been some confusion about the exact role of LACs – you agreed to send us a job description. You clarified that the previous role of Community Connectors was now obsolete however the budget for that work has been used to increase recruitment of new LACs.

We also suggested that there should be regular feedback to local councillors from/about LACs to ensure their awareness and engagement with this work. You stated that there was an existing quarterly report that could be shared with councillors however you encouraged local councillors to personally make contact with Local Area Coordinators to share knowledge etc.

Parks

You previously mentioned agreement to participate in the ‘Park Lives’ Scheme, sponsored by Coca-Cola. We noted that this is now underway with a number of activities being arranged, encouraging use of parks and participation – efforts that would otherwise not have been possible without funding.

We shared with you some concern about examples of ‘Friends of Parks’ groups being charged £35 by the council for community events. We asked you to explain the rationale for such charges. Although we understood that in certain circumstances a charge may be appropriate it was apparent that a flat fee was being charged regardless of the type of event. You told us that you were aware of the issue and were looking into it.

We talked about the number of bowling clubs which have collapsed with greens no longer in use. We asked about the maintenance of these unused greens. You confirmed that there were six greens not in use, one of which was now used as a children’s playground. You stated that others were being cut within the normal park regime though not maintained as bowling greens. We asked that you check that this is happening.

You praised the work of the recent Scrutiny Working Group which looked at Tree Preservation and its findings as they related to your portfolio, particularly the fact that significantly more trees were being cut down than planted. You accepted the need to reduce the imbalance between felling and planting, and need to develop a policy about the management of trees which at the very minimum should justify why we are not replacing trees in certain circumstances.

Sports

We noted that two full-size all-weather 3G pitches had been secured for Penyrheol and Morriston, improving upon current facilities in these communities. You added that discussions were also underway about a further two pitches.

We asked about funding for Community Sports Clubs and Groups. You told us that funding was largely accessed through external bodies such as Sport Wales. You stated that part of the money for the new 3G pitches was coming from Sport Wales.

Japanese Knotweed

We followed up on our discussion with you last September about efforts and progress in controlling knotweed and the commercial service now provided. You talked about the income that has been generated (circa £45k) which will help tackle efforts to treat Council land, but stressed that knotweed presented an ongoing challenge and resources were limited. You hoped that an experiment currently underway in an area of Swansea involving the use of a special insect to try to kill knotweed would prove successful. The committee felt that the council should set an example to private landowners by dealing with knotweed on our own land.

CCTV Service

We noted that a review of the CCTV service was being carried out. We asked about use of CCTV and coverage particular in communities where there are nuisance problems such as off-road vehicles, or problems relating to tethered horses etc. You doubted whether CCTV could prevent such problems, and argued that it was as much about education, however would refer members' concerns to relevant officers.

One of the long-standing issues has been about funding for the service, with the Police being a major user of the service but not actually providing any funding. Despite difficulties regarding joint funding we agreed with you that like Local Area Coordination this was a service where some pooling of funding was merited.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

We asked you about the impact of new University campus on the number of HMOs in the east side of Swansea. The committee was interested in whether there has been a big increase and what effect this was having in the area. You referred to the close working relationship with the University to manage accommodation issues. We noted that there has been a change in definitions meaning that any house with at least three individuals (not a family) with shared facilities is classed as a HMO. You told us that you would provide

figures to show the intensity of HMOs and what impact the new campus has had on the spread.

Community Building and Asset Transfer

We raised an issue, which you acknowledged, about the length of leases for community buildings which impact on whether community groups could bid for funds to improve buildings. You highlighted that any agreement to asset transfer would depend on a viable business plan, where there is financial benefit to the council (i.e. a cost saving) and remain a community asset.

There was some concern raised by committee members that those working in community centres were not feeling valued. You were disappointed if this were the case as you praised the work community volunteers and thanked them for what they did. You stated that a lot of advice and support was provided and available to community groups and volunteers.

Healthy Cities / Greener Cities

We were pleased about progress in work to develop an Open Spaces Strategy which, when complete, should help inform and influence future decisions on development and quality of the built environment.

We understand that a survey / assessment has been carried out of open spaces as part of this work, which shows any deficiencies or surplus land which qualifies as open space across each area of Swansea. You felt that this will provide an opportunity to influence the anticipated City Centre development with focus on building design and healthy urban space with safe access for the public.

We asked if you could provide us with some information about the activities and achievements of the Healthy City Partnership, and who is involved. Members remarked that it was something which very little is mentioned about.

Anti-Social Behaviour

We asked about your work in relation to tackling anti-social behaviour, but you appeared to be confused about its relevance to your portfolio. We would be grateful for clarification about cabinet responsibilities as it is clearly referenced within the Wellbeing & Healthy City portfolio.

Challenges for the year ahead

We asked you to indicate some of the challenges ahead in your work and hopes for the next year. You mentioned the following:

- Budget – dealing with continuing financial pressures
- Local Area Coordination – recruiting of a further two or three coordinators to ensure half of Swansea is covered
- Best Start in Life – progressing work to improve children’s readiness for school. You were expecting the launch of fresh work, through the new Public Services Board, for all involved in early years across all sectors
- Anti-Smoking – evaluating of the pilot smoke-free beach at Caswell and possible expansion to the areas. Also developing smoke-free school gates.
- Purple Flag – continuing the success in relation to managing the evening and night time economy
- Sports – having four 3G pitches in operation
- Commissioning Reviews – making a positive impact from relevant reviews, keeping facilities / outdoor attractions open whether provided in-house or externally. You referred to example of ‘FootGolf’ which is generating income for the council and encouraging participation in sport
- Parks – hoping that all parks can develop a ‘Friends’ group

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:

- Check on the issue of signage relating to tethering of horses;
- Share:
 - any evaluation report on Local Area Coordinators
 - the job description of Local Area Coordinators
 - regular news about their work, with local councillors
- Clarify the charges to ‘Friends of Parks’ groups for events;
- Provide confirmation about maintenance of unused bowling greens;
- Pass on our concerns about CCTV coverage;
- Provide HMO figures in the East side and analysis of trends since the new University campus has opened;
- Give information about the Healthy City Partnership;
- Clarify cabinet responsibilities in relation to anti-social behaviour.

Please provide your response by 17 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 black ink that reads "Mary Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'J'.

COUNCILLOR MARY JONES

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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