



**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA**  
**DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**

Cllr Fiona Gordon  
Convener, Schools Performance  
Scrutiny Panel

Please ask for:  
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Councillor Jennifer Raynor  
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Our Ref / Ein Cyf: JR/HS

Your Ref / Eich Cyf:

Date / Dyddiad:

6 October 2016

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I dderbyn yr wybodaeth hon mewn fformat arall, cysylltwch â'r person uchod.**

Dear Councillor Gordon

**Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel**

I refer to your letter dated 20 September 2016 sent in your role as Convener of the Schools Performance Scrutiny Panel.

I am happy to provide the following responses to the issues raised:

1. We recognise the benefits of a mixed economy of challenge advisors and see the experience and expertise that this brings, however, we would like to see more consistency and less movement of challenge advisors for the most vulnerable schools. We would recommend that a challenge advisor is allocated in these cases for more than one year, where possible.

**Response:**

In future, the Education Improvement Service will ensure that vulnerable schools in Swansea are provided with challenge adviser continuity (at the annual planning stage of allocations of challenge advisers to schools) where possible, during the period of vulnerability.

**COUNCILLOR/Y CYNGHORYDD**  
**JENNIFER RAYNOR**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION /**  
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2. What is being done to address the issue of some schools in Swansea having such high individual reserves? Who is responsible for addressing this with schools? *(Please note: the item regarding school reserves has, subsequent to the panel meeting, been answered after correspondence was had between the Performance and Finance Performance Panel and the Leader on 7 September 2016)*

**Response:**

Please refer to the PDF attached.

Please note that on Page 12 the WAO guideline figure is 5% and not 3%.

The responsibility for setting budgets and agreeing the level of reserves lies with the Governing Body of each school. I will be meeting with the Chairs of Governors and the Headteachers where the level of reserves is well in excess of the WAO guidelines. I am very pleased the Panel wishes to see children currently in our schools benefit from some of these reserves.

Yours sincerely



**COUNCILLOR JENNIFER RAYNOR**  
**CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION**

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Councillor Chris Holley  
Convenor, Service Improvement &  
Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

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7 September 2016

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Dear Councillor Holley

**SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL –  
27 JULY 2016**

I refer to your letter dated 18 August 2016 sent in your role as Convenor of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Panel.

I am happy to provide the following responses to the issues raised:

**i) Capital Outturn 2015/16  
Capital Programme Underspend**

During our discussion we were concerned to note that the Council is consistently underspending on its capital programme and would like to know the reasons behind this. In order to gain a better understanding we would like to be provided with a breakdown of the different elements of the programme showing where the specific areas of slippage are. We would also like to receive details regarding the measures that are in place to manage slippage in the programme.

Please also provide an up-date on how the Council's capital programme is supporting the Beyond Bricks and Mortar policy.

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**Response:**

**Summary Capital Programme 2015/16 Outturn – Directorate Comparison**

The table below shows the underspend on the Capital programme for 2015/16 in summary across the Directorates, showing where the specific areas of slippage have occurred during 2015/16.

<b>Directorate Comparison</b>	<b>Original Budget 2015/16</b>	<b>Revised Budget 2015/16</b>	<b>Outturn 2015/16</b>	<b>Net Over / (Under) spending</b>
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Resources	2,388	2,321	209	-2,112
People	15,453	12,951	10,351	-2,600
Place	75,354	104,379	78,536	-25,843
<b>Total</b>	<b>93,195</b>	<b>119,651</b>	<b>89,096</b>	<b>-30,555</b>

Below is a list of Capital Projects with underspends in excess of £250k, this shows individual projects within each Directorate and provides an explanation of why these underspends have occurred.

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<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<b><u>PEOPLE</u></b>		
<b><i>Education</i></b>		
Burlais Primary New Build	515	School complete, underspend relates in part to retentions and any savings in overall scheme costs would remain within the uncommitted C21st Schools Band A funding envelope for other schemes
Gorseinon Primary New Build	1,139	Scheme delayed due to Village Green Application, in large measure offset by bringing forward spending against the YGG Lon Las scheme with WG support
Morrison Comprehensive Refurbishment	225	Balance relates to retentions
<b><i>Poverty &amp; Prevention</i></b>		
Mayhill Family/Medical Centre	593	Contractor went into liquidation and scheme delayed
<b><u>PLACE</u></b>		
<b><i>HRA</i></b>		
Wind & Weatherproofing - Jeffreys Ct Penlan	1,476	Delay in starting scheme
Pitched Roof Blaenymaes	291	Delay in start of work budget slipped to 2016/17
Elec Rewire Communal Blocks	260	Additional budget allocated as part of revised budget in December 2015 but not all additional funds required.
Kitchen & Bathrooms	3,134	Budget slipped into 2016/17
Kitchen & Bathroom Electrical Rewiring	441	Expenditure charged to HRA Kitchen and Bathrooms

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<b><u>Housing (GF)</u></b>		
Disability Facility Grants	1,513	Remaining budget committed for expenditure in 2016/17
Sandfields Renewal Area	1,284	Budget to be reduced by £600k for ECO grant, together with delay in commencing
Emergency Repair Fund	255	Budget to be transferred to Property Appreciation Loans (with carry forward exercise)
Property Appreciation Loans	408	Underspend will be committed this financial year. Large pipeline confirmed
Houses into Homes Loans	629	Budget will be committed in 2016/17.
National Home Imp Scheme (new scheme)	885	Budget included in 2015-16, work has been undertaken with the loans due to be paid out in 2016/17
Houses into Homes Loans (New scheme)	885	Budget included in 2015-16, work has been undertaken with the loans due to be paid out in 2016/17
<b><u>C&amp;T</u></b>		
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery Refurbishment Works	269	Main build complete, budget remaining is to cover retentions and fit out
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery HLF Equipment	478	GVAG construction achieved practical completion Feb 2016 the fit out costs will be spent in 2016-17 with the Gallery due to open in Autumn 2016
<b><u>REGENERATION</u></b>		
Waterfront BEP Grants	2,156	The balance of spend relates to CCS funded schemes - Market Roof £2.15m. Waterfront scheme complete June 2015, scheme requires completion FPR7 to reflect reprofiling

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Waterfront - Boulevard LC to Strand Design	1,617	Waterfront scheme complete June 2015, scheme requires completion FPR7 to reflect reprofiling
Waterfront - Gloucester Place Public Realm Work	300	Waterfront scheme complete June 2015, scheme requires completion FPR7 to reflect reprofiling
Vibrant & Viable Places - Property Enhancement Development Grant	289	Grants not fully committed in 2015/16
Vibrant & Viable Places - Llys Dewi Sant Site	1,184	Scheme delayed as a result of further flood consequence investigations to support the planning application. Deposit paid and will be delivered in 2016/17
<b>CBPS</b>		
Guildhall Relocations	256	Ongoing budgets, not profiled across years
Guildhall Accommodation Strategy	299	Ongoing budgets, not profiled across years
LC2 Roof Repairs	468	Delayed due to insurance sign off, design, waivers to procure original roofing contractor, awaiting a period of better weather.
<b>RESOURCES</b>		
<b>IT</b>		
School Network Upgrade Ph 3	401	IT budgets ongoing budget for delivery in 2016/17
Telephony System Replacement	500	IT budgets ongoing budget for delivery in 2016/17
Digital Business Strategy Phase 1	760	IT budgets ongoing budget for delivery in 2016/17
<b>Finance</b>		
Finance Contingency Fund	319	Unallocated Finance contingency to be allocated in 2016/17

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<b><u>VARIOUS DIRECTORATES</u></b>		
Other	7,326	Various projects with underspends less than £250k
<b>Total underspend 2015/16</b>	<b><u>30,555</u></b>	

***Measures that are in place to manage slippage in the capital programme***

It should be noted that Capital schemes are often complex schemes which are subject to numerous variables which determine the delivery of the project, including Planning, Procurement, Design, Consultation, Funding and Construction. A delay in any one of these variables will impact on the delivery timetable.

The responsibility for delivering the projects lies with the teams of project managers and technical delivery personnel. As noted above underspends are predominantly a result of delays in the scheme delivery.

The Capital finance team prepares Capital budget monitoring reports which are sent to project managers and delivery teams on a monthly basis with under / over spends being reviewed throughout the year.

Gordon Rees, the Corporate Buildings and Property Services manager, has provided the following comment - *“Design team staff levels have been increased to process and manage all schemes. We have increased programme and spend profiling monitoring process to ensure all spend risks are addressed in a timely manner to ensure maximum annual spend.”*

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***Up-date on how the Council's Capital Programme is supporting the Beyond Bricks and Mortar policy (supplied by Andrew Shaw)***

All Capital Programme projects have included the Beyond Bricks and Mortar policy since 2009. In total 6500 person weeks of training have been undertaken by 195 unemployed people. 21 of these have been full apprenticeships in craft trades of bricklaying, carpentry, plastering, plumbing and electrical. Higher level opportunities have also been created for site engineering training at HNC and degree level. Just under 3000 person weeks of training were undertaken on the Council's Housing renewal programmes, 1700 on 21st Century Schools and 1800 on other Capital Programmes, including Glynn Vivian and Waterfront City.

We believe that the Council should be looking at ways to maximise its spending in this area for the benefit of the public and Swansea's economy, therefore we recommend that the overall strategy in relation to the capital programme should be reviewed.

***Glynn Vivian Art Gallery***

We discussed the Glyn Vivian and wish to find out what the current completion date is and whether there has been any slippage in the project.

***Response:***

Handover of the Building was in February 2016 and the public opening of the building is scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> October 2016 allowing for the public collections being put together. Delays to the project and the reasons behind them have been reported to Cabinet on previous occasions.

***Guildhall relocations and accommodation strategy***

We would like an up-date on the current position with the Guildhall Accommodation Strategy and the related relocations.

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***Response:***

As was reported to Corporate Briefing 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016, the wider Accommodation Strategy has seen the successful relocation of over a 1,000 staff with increased densities of accommodation.

Other benefits include Revenue savings which will be in excess of £1M per annum, the generation of capital receipts expected to be in excess of £3M, reduction of backlog maintenance, carbon emissions and provision of shared accommodation to other public sector organisations.

With regards to the Guildhall, the relocation of staff into this building is reaching the end of the programme seeing approximately 900 staff accommodated at the building. With ongoing improvements around the agile working environment, increased densities will continue to be seen.

To enable the ongoing roll out of the Agile working Programme further ICT capital investment will be required for staff based at both Civic buildings. This will lead to the eventual number of full time equivalents based at the Guildhall to be circa 1,000 subject to carefully targeted capital investments.

***Telephony System replacement***

We would like to be provided with details on the underspend in this area.

***Response:***

**Background**

A £500K capital budget was initially included in the capital programme for the replacement the Council's Corporate telephony, due to the following reasons:

- The telephony cabling system was installed when the Civic Centre was built, and added to in the intervening years. The connection frame is difficult to work on and prone to failure and needs upgrading.

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- The telephone switch is end of support in 2015 and will need replacing with modern, fully digital components and is not able to expand to meet future needs of the organisation as part of the Digital Strategy.

**Progress to Date**

The capital for the project was awarded in 2014/15 as part of a bid to upgrade the ICT infrastructure including a new voice system. Progress on the network upgrade to Guildhall and Civic Centre was initiated. However the telephone element was a major strategic challenge and the skills required to provide the vision and ambitious technical design the Council needed, were not available.

As part of the exit from the Capgemini contract a new and ambition Digital Strategy was approved. The Council were also able to recruit new skills to support the new ICT structure as part of the new In-house managed service. The delay in initiating the project has actually been an advantage as the Council are now able to take advantage of the new opportunities that partnership working provides.

The Council has actively engaged in collaboration with Neath Port Talbot (NPT). who are also planning to replace their existing telephony system. Options are being jointly considered and investigated. ABMU had currently upgraded their telephony system and we have engaged extensively across all three bodies to consider a joint telephony option. This has resulted in a potential opportunity for us (both CCoS & NPT) to join ABMU's telephony platform on a tenancy basis which could provide additional benefits of resilience, proven working solution, cost reduction and collaboration.

ICT are currently in the design phase working with both ABMU & NPT. This phase is due to be completed end of September 2016 with potential implementation by March 2017 subject to contract evaluation and approval in the normal way..

Additional requirements have been identified as a result of the Contact Centre project. Design features from this project have overlapped into the Telephony project causing additional delays due to ensuring that the integration which this will provide can be delivered.

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**Spend to Date**

It's expected that the budget will be fully spent by end of March 2017 assuming that the current investigation work results in a solution that is acceptable both from a procurement, operational and cost perspective. To date we have committed a spend of £79,464 on a new Auto attendant product (NetCall) which will provide a voice recognition switchboard for the Contact Centre. Following completion of the system design phase by the end of September 2016, the remainder of the equipment will be procured. Migration to the new system will then be in progress for the 5 main sites of Civic Centre, Guildhall, Heol-Y-Gors, Clydach and Oldway as identified as part of this project.

**ii) Revenue Financial Outturn 2015/15**  
***Employment Figure - General Fund Budget***

We discussed the savings that have been achieved via the staff budget. In order to better understand the extent of savings made/required we would like to be provided with further information on the actual numbers involved for each service unit including, the original number of staff in 2012, the number of posts that have been cut and the current staffing figures, along with the resulting savings.

***Response:***

The following table analyses FTE equivalent staff numbers by Directorate as at year end from 2012 to 2016.

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### **School Reserves**

We were concerned to learn that Swansea has the highest amount of school reserves of any local authority area in Wales. Whilst we recognise that some schools may have good reason to have reserves of more than 5%, for example if they have a large capital project planned, we would like more information on what we are doing as an authority to encourage those schools with high reserves to address this?

We also would like to receive a breakdown of reserves by school, including an explanation of the reasons for any high reserves above the Welsh average.

#### **Response:**

Overall levels of reserves held by Swansea Schools remain significantly higher than the Welsh average and at 31<sup>st</sup> March 216 stood at 7.4% of Schools expenditure against WAO guidance of 3%.

Clearly that varies from School to School and there are a number of Schools that hold levels of reserves both above and below that number.

You are quite right that there are a number of good reasons to hold reserves of more than 5%, including the potential for large capital projects, planned or cyclical maintenance of for specific equipment. Equally at the present time Schools will be aware of the uncertain National funding position in respect of Local Government as a whole and, on a local level, will be concerned about potential cost pressures arising from the Pay and Grading Appeals process for non-teaching school based staff.

Notwithstanding this, there are many areas of challenge currently being offered to individual schools as detailed below:-

- ❖ The regional effectiveness process will scrutinise all schools. This complements the well established local processes.
- ❖ The importance of effective planning and use of reserves is consistently emphasised in Headteacher and Governor meetings and financial training sessions.

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- ❖ Schools have the support of a Primary Support Officer / Accountancy staff to advise on the appropriate level and use of any reserves.
- ❖ Each year schools are required to explain the level of reserves they are holding which may be, for example, to cover an anticipated short term fluctuation in pupil numbers, to address a particular building or equipment upgrading need, or to support a specific curriculum initiative. Schools are also asked to explain any differences between their planned use of reserves. Sessions are currently scheduled, involving the Cabinet Member, with Primary Schools holding reserves above the 5% threshold to explain their position and to emphasise the concerns that you raise.
- ❖ The level of reserves together with the responses from schools as to the reasons that balances remain above planned levels is attached as an appendix to this response and is considered each year in the School Budget Forum and the Finance Sub Groups.
- ❖ Wherever possible the level of a school's reserves is considered and taken into account in any separate allocation of council or grant funding.
- ❖ The level of reserves is a specific area of challenge as part of the School Challenge Advisor's Autumn term visit to each school.
- ❖ Schools with potentially excessive reserves are also reviewed through the monthly Performance & Financial Monitoring (PFM) and School Issues meetings held within the Directorate.
- ❖ Further targeted scrutiny of schools with reserves considered to be excessive can also be undertaken and in the current year will also involve the Cabinet Member directly in addition to Heads of Service.

The most recent Estyn Inspection report did not identify any particular issues of concern in relation to the level of school reserves or effectiveness of scrutiny processes in Swansea

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**iii) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2015/16**  
**Rent arrears**

We would like to know if there has been any increase in rent arrears in relation to Council tenants since the Welfare Reform changes which led to changes in how housing benefit is paid i.e. directly to the tenant rather than the landlord? And what measures have been implemented to mitigate any adverse effects?

***Response:***

There are 105 Council tenants in Swansea currently receiving Universal Credit (UC), the rent accounts of 84 of these tenants are in arrears. Whilst some of these were in arrears prior to claiming UC there has not been a significant impact on the arrears as so few in number are currently affected. Any increase in arrears is not unexpected as UC is paid four weeks in arrears with the first week of any claim being disregarded by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). To help mitigate against increasing arrears Rents Officers and New Tenancy Officers are working closely with tenants to offer them support and advise. In addition the Rents Team Financial Inclusion Officer will help those individuals who are experiencing complex debt and money management issues.

Sustaining tenancies by helping to limit end of tenancies and evictions is an important element of the Rents Officer role. Arrears recovery processes do however need to be robust, therefore intensive work is carried out with UC claimants to ensure they pay the housing allowance element of their UC payment to their rent account as soon as they receive it. If arrears accrue to over 8 weeks it is possible to apply to the DWP for direct payments, these "Alternative Payment Arrangement" (APA) requests are made by the Rents Team at the earliest opportunity. APA's are a key measure to help those struggling to manage their finances; currently 37 of the 105 UC claimants have an APA in place.

**Employment Figure – Housing Revenue Account Budget**

We would like to be provided with the numbers and cost of employees that are funded through the HRA budget?

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**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA**  
**DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**

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***Response:***

There are approximately 408 staff employed via the HRA budget at an annual cost of £10.325m

If you require any further details, please do not hesitate to contact me on the details provided.

Yours sincerely

**COUNCILLOR ROB STEWART**  
**LEADER & CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE & STRATEGY**

**COUNCILLOR/Y CYNGHORYDD**  
**ROB STEWART**  
**LEADER / ARWEINYDD**

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