



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

To/	<i>Please ask for:</i>	Scrutiny
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	<i>e-Bost:</i>	
	<i>Our Ref</i>	SPC/2014-15/8
	<i>Ein Cyf:</i>	
BY EMAIL	<i>Your Ref</i>	
	<i>Eich Cyf:</i>	
	<i>Date</i>	26 January 2015
	<i>Dyddiad:</i>	

Dear Councillor,

Re: Cabinet Member Question Session – 22 December

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 22 December 2014 and answering questions on your work. Thank you for also submitting a written report ahead of the meeting to provide a focus for the session and help us to explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to areas of responsibility.

We thought it advantageous to meet with you together given your focus on children and young people and linkages between your portfolios, though acknowledge that the committee spent much of the session discussing education matters.

As stated we are writing to you in order to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the committee, and raise any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

Quality in Education (QEd) 2020 Review

We asked about what work you were doing to gain the confidence of schools, which is key risk to the programme.

We were informed that:

- The QEd 2020 programme was long standing policy of the Council.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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- The QEd programme phase B was under review due to the severity of current financial pressures. Alternative funding may need to be identified to continue the programme and meetings were ongoing with headteachers, governing bodies and the Welsh Government. A decision will be made following consultation with stakeholders.
- Many Headteachers were already active members of a number of committees set up by the schools to liaise with the Council and were well aware of the changing financial situation.
- A number of meetings have been held with Headteachers of Primary and Secondary Schools and the response had been very positive.

School Land Sales

In view of reduction in central funding and requirement to achieve budget savings, and possible impact on the QEd 2020 programme, we heard that the Council was looking at all assets, including Council owned land adjacent to schools. You stressed that it was for School Governing Bodies to consult with staff and pupils and expressed some disappointment that a number of schools had not yet participated in training on the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) following adoption by the Council in 2013.

You praised those schools which have given up land assets as this has made a real difference to many other schools desperately in need of repairs / investment. It was reiterated to the committee that this whole process was about providing excellent schools for all children across the City and County of Swansea.

The committee felt that the money received from the sale of school land should always be used for the benefit of schools e.g. investment in school buildings, and whilst you supported this you it could not be guaranteed in the current financial climate and depended on support from the Welsh Government.

Childhood Obesity

In respect of concerns regarding childhood obesity, we were informed that the Welsh Government had a series of initiatives to combat the growing issues of obesity. However, you stated that the issue was one that could not be resolved by schools alone and parent's contributions were required in dealing with the levels of obesity, through walking to school for example.

School Surplus Places

We asked about the current position with regard to surplus school places and whether this was still an issue. We were told that the Welsh Government considered the level in Swansea to be acceptable. Nevertheless, options (e.g. federated schools) may have to be looked at but the Cabinet will be guided by Headteachers on this.

School Performance

We asked about how cabinet is kept aware of school performance and steps being taken to improve poor performing schools. The committee was informed that a lot of good peer to peer work was being done by secondary schools but there was, however, a need to work with the primary schools.

Later in our agenda we heard from Councillor Fiona Gordon, convener of the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel. She attended to give an update on the work of the Panel, its effectiveness and impact. Amongst matters discussed was the issue of data sharing and whether information about missed EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) visits could be used to highlight possible cases of risk – the general point that data protection should not override child protection and there they may be some loopholes. There was also some concern that regional structures (e.g. Education through Regional Working) could act as a brake on our development if we are more forward thinking than others.

As you know we had set up an Inquiry Panel to look at Education Inclusion, convened by Councillor Cheryl Philpott, which was put on hold pending the outcome of the departmental review of the EOTAS service. Although that review was completed in September and the report subsequently shared with the Panel it is still awaiting the action plan that will then guide whether and what scrutiny is required. Could you confirm when that action plan will be available to scrutiny? Also, we are aware that a review of EMLAS (Ethnic Minority Learning & Achievement Service) is being carried out – could you confirm timescales for the completion of this review?

Proposed Sale of the Parklands School Playing Fields

The committee welcomes suggestions from all scrutiny councillors and members of the public to help the committee ask the right questions. We received a number of questions relating to the proposed sale of school land, questioning the council's policy and actions in this regard.

Whilst the committee was interested in discussing the general issue of school land sales and good decision-making we agreed that we would forward you the detailed questions received given they specifically relate to the proposed sale of the Parklands School Playing Fields (**see attached**).

You did inform us that you had already received various correspondence from members of a Parklands Action Group, and that there have been positive discussions with residents around the school. The committee nevertheless is interested to know your response. We also recognised that you may not have had the opportunity to fully consider these questions at the committee meeting.

We noted that although it was identified that Parklands School had an excess of land compared to many primary schools in Swansea, it did not mean the disposal of all of the area of identified land. We understand that a report is due to be considered by Cabinet in the next few months.

To sum up we would ask you to:

- Comment on the issues raised in this letter;
- Confirm availability of the EOTAS Review Action Plan;
- Confirm timescales for the EMLAS Review; and
- Provide response to the questions in relation to Parklands Primary School

It would be helpful to receive your reply to this letter by 16 February so that it can be included in the agenda of a future committee meeting at the earliest opportunity.

We look forward to meeting you again 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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Questions:

1) The disposal of school playing field land as set out in 21st Century Schools is of concern not just to current pupils, parents and staff but also to future pupils, their families and to the wider community as a whole.

It is not the responsibility of school governing bodies to carry out public consultation regarding local authority policy and CCS cannot delegate their duty to consult in this way. *Please can the councillors explain, in the context of the existing proposals to dispose of school playing fields e.g. Parkland Primary School, how they will fulfil their commitments to engagement and consultation as set out in:*

- the CCS 2011-2014 consultation and engagement strategy;
- the CCS Children and Young People's rights scheme (which aims to ensure compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child);
- recommendations from the recent Swansea Scrutiny Panel report (about wellbeing in schools) which emphasise the vital importance of involving children in decision-making?

2) *Regarding the proposals to sell areas of school playing fields, could the cabinet member for education please clarify how a 'surplus' has been identified?*

The outline proposals of the City and County of Swansea (CCS) state that 'surplus' land '... is calculated using 'Building Bulletin' guidance endorsed by the Welsh Government which provides area guidelines for school buildings and sites. The surplus is the excess between what the calculation says should be made available and how much the school site actually has.'

<http://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/8556/Parkland-Primary-School>

However the Report of Cabinet Member for Education and Skills Cabinet on 25th April 2013 states that "the possible disposal of land on school sites would only apply to an area that was of little or no use - in other words, surplus to Educational requirement. Any statutory process would need to be complied with to ensure that this was the case. "

- a) Does CCS accept that the correct guiding principle in identifying areas of school sites for disposal is whether an area is of little or no use to educational requirement?
- b) Can you please specify how a surplus has been identified at Parkland Primary School, in particular how the net site/playing field area recommendations of the Building Bulletin have been factored into the calculation?
- c) Does CCS accept that the minimum standards to be applied to the playing field area size need to take into account the size of the building area (net and non-net footprint) for each school as set out in the Building Bulletin guidance endorsed by the Welsh Government?

3) The United Nations Convention Measures for the Rights of the Child adopted by the Welsh Government require careful scrutiny of any proposals that could be detrimental to children's health and well being. *Why at a time when the Welsh Government wishes to combat the growing issues of obesity does the Council wish to take away a playing field currently in regular use by school children for team games and exercise?*