



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA
DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

Councillor Mary Jones
Chair
Scrutiny Programme Committee

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MC/CM

5th January 2014

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Dear Councillor Jones

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORT – PROPOSED LEASE OF UNDERHILL PARK TO MUMBLES COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

In reply to the pre-decision scrutiny letter from Councillor Day dated 14th November 2014 regarding the Proposed Lease of Underhill Park to Mumbles Community Association, firstly I would like to thank Scrutiny for this session. It highlighted some improvements to the process which may be made. As this is the first such lease and there may well be more to follow it was an important addition to the process. I also believe it was one of the first pre-decision scrutiny's to be carried out recently, a tool which I feel is under-utilised, and so welcome for that reason too. I was also pleased that the Community Association participated in the event as I feel they have the ability and desire to not only take over maintaining the park, but to provide much needed improvements there for the community.

On the specific points you raised, I wholly agree with point 1, it is an excellent example of community involvement in local services, and may well serve as a template, refined by the Scrutiny process, for other cases, particularly because of the financial situation the government has put local authorities in.

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On 3a, I agree, public access to Underhill Park is sacrosanct, and the Lease will need to make that absolutely clear.

3b, between the lease and the management agreement, exactly what is included and how it is to be managed will need to be made clear. The motion at cabinet was an enabling process, and these details will have to be agreed by both parties at each stage as the ambitions for Underhill Park develop.

As not every aspect of the Park is planned to be transferred there will be a remaining cost to the council for maintenance, and whilst this is not part of the lease, Council and other parties need to be clear of its continued responsibility and the cost of that. In future this will need to be included in the information provided for decision making. (3c)

Fees and charges (3d) need to be kept commensurate with the facilities, and these facilities need to be available to the community, and it is agreed that this element should be included in the Management Agreement.

3e, a mechanism within the lease for disputes resolution, I understand is a normal part of most leases and would be part of the one for Underhill Park.

In the more general recommendations made in section 4 of your letter,

For 4a, I agree that the rationale for the proposal needs to be clearer, In the case of Underhill, it was twofold, to enable the improvement of the facilities for community use, and the reduction in costs to the Council; but this was not as clearly stated as it should have been. I am not sure what alternatives would have been considered, certainly I have no desire for any of our parks in Swansea to be anything but Parks. Our effort should be mainly focused on encouraging and supporting strong community based organisations to take up these opportunities.

In helping such initiatives it is important that we develop, as far as possible, templates to help them. Although each case is likely to be different and unique, it is hoped that we can provide a template / guidelines / advice and a network to enable local groups to more easily understand and take up levels of service provision. (4b & 4c).

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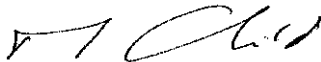
Your suggestions in 4d that a clear consultation strategy be developed and demonstrated in each case is a good one, and local councillors have to be respected in that strategy. In the case of Underhill, whilst there had clearly been significant consultation, a strategy could not be discerned.

I will say that as a local councillor, I always felt informed, or knew who to ask to be informed about this welcome proposal, without feeling the necessity to be spoon-fed information or a need to be present at every discussion.

Thank you very much for the points made, which have clearly added value to this particular decision and similar potential decisions in the future.

May I also take this opportunity of congratulating you on your appointment as Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Yours Sincerely



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