



**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA**

Dinas A Sir Abertawe

Cllr David Hopkins  
Cabinet Member for Housing &  
Communities

*Please ask for:  
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**Overview & Scrutiny**

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**15 December 2014**

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

**Affordable Housing Scrutiny Inquiry – Impact Report, 3 December 2014**

The panel met on 3 December 2014 to consider the impact report of the Affordable Housing Scrutiny Inquiry, which concluded in July 2013. The purpose of this meeting was to assess the impact of the report and its recommendations. The panel's role was to assess what has changed since the report was presented to Cabinet, whether the agreed recommendations have been implemented and what has been the impact of the inquiry.

The panel would like to thank you, Peter Williams and David Evans for attending the meeting to present the report and answer our questions.

We were pleased to see that our recommendation regarding making the case to Swansea's Local Service Board for the inclusion of affordable housing as a challenge in the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) is progressing. We hope that the Local Service Board Research Group (who is responsible for the Needs Assessment which provides the evidence base for the SIP priorities) is receptive to its inclusion. The addition of affordable housing into the Single Integrated Plan would significantly raise its profile amongst the partners of the Local Service Board and hopefully provide an important step forward in opening up the debate on making more publically owned land available for house building.

We discussed the new Housing Needs Assessment that the Council will undertake during 2015. We appreciate that the Council will be required to follow the new methodology issued by the Welsh Government; however we are pleased that

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councillors will be included in the process and consulted on the draft findings when they are available. We believe that the local knowledge of ward councillors will be an invaluable tool to help “reality check” findings from the assessment.

We were pleased to hear that good progress has been made in bringing empty private rented sector homes back into use through the implementation of the Council’s Empty Homes Strategy during 2013 and that further success is anticipated this year as the strategy gathers pace.

The panel were interested to hear about the progress officers are making in looking for solutions outside traditional methods of supplying affordable housing. In particular, we thought the idea of working in partnership with Bellerophon to provide homes for intermediate rent is a positive step to pursue. This was one of the examples we considered as part of our evidence gathering during the inquiry and we are pleased to see that the Department is considering this model. At the same time we agreed with the officer’s comments that other solutions will also need to be found in order to provide new homes at social rent levels. We hope that positive progress on this can be reported to scrutiny in the future.

We support the move to bring all elements of housing under one cabinet portfolio and we are pleased that our previously rejected recommendation to this effect has now been implemented.

We were also encouraged to hear that you strongly believe that the pursuit and enforcement of section 106 agreements is essential and we acknowledge your point that all ward councillors have a responsibility to monitor what occurs in their wards and report back any concerns over non-compliance. We also noted that councillors need to be mindful of the importance of maximising the benefits of section 106 agreements as part of their planning responsibilities.

One important aim of the meeting was to find out how much impact the inquiry has had. To this end the panel was pleased to hear that the report had made a useful contribution to an important debate about affordable housing in Swansea and had help to raise its profile. You advised us that affordable housing is now a key political priority and stated that that you intend to use the newly established Cabinet Advisory Committee to ensure that it remains highly visible.

Overall we were pleased that the majority of our recommendations had been completed and were satisfied that the work of the panel can now be concluded. There were, however, a couple of issues that we wish to highlight including:

- Affordable housing remains a key issue and we believe that scrutiny should be kept up-dated on progress in achieving the targets for developing new affordable housing and in particular progress towards the Welsh Government measure of “All additional affordable housing provision by local authority area”. This can be done through your scheduled attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

- We also believe that another aspect of affordable housing merits further scrutiny discussion, namely the Council's progress towards achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard within its social housing stock. We see this as an important issue as it represents a significant capital programme spend and the Welsh Government requires the Council to achieve this standard by 2020. We will be recommending to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that a working group is established for this purpose.

I hope you find this letter useful. We do not require a formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Hennegan', written in a cursive style.

**Councillor Terry Hennegan**  
**Convener of the Affordable Housing Scrutiny Inquiry Panel**  
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