



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

**To/  
Councillor Mark Thomas,  
Cabinet Member for Environment &  
Transport**

**BY EMAIL**

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*Our Ref  
Ein Cyf:*

**SPC/2014-15/12**

*Your Ref  
Eich Cyf:*

*Date  
Dyddiad:*

**12 March 2015**

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport following the meeting of the Committee on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015. It reflects on the question and answer session held with the Cabinet Member about their portfolio responsibilities, including recycling, waste management and highways. It includes conclusions and proposals for the Cabinet Member.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

**Cabinet Member Question Session – 16 February**

Thank you for your attendance at the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 16 February 2015, answering questions on your work and for submitting a written report ahead of the meeting. This report helped to provide a focus for the session and explore priorities, actions, achievements and impact, in relation to your areas of responsibility.

We recognised that you are a newly appointed Cabinet Member and it was good to have this initial meeting with you in order to understand your thinking and plans ahead. We noted however that the last few months of your time have been dominated by the budget, and pressures to meet efficiency and savings targets.

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 session largely centred on recycling, waste management and highways. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU**

**CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE**  
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## **Recycling Performance**

We asked about current performance in terms of recycling rates against targets. You informed the committee that you were anticipating meeting the target of 56% this year. You added that targets are increasing for future years and though challenging you congratulated the public for their participation to date in both household recycling, and their response to the new 3 black bag limit. Clearly this service remains a priority given the strict penalties for not meeting recycling / landfill targets.

Following a discussion about black bags and some issues that have arisen with dumping in certain areas, you stressed that, apart from reporting, any investigation should be left to officers from the department who where possible will take action against those found to be responsible.

We also asked about the use of pink bags to collect plastic recyclables and whether there was any review given that they are prone to being blown about in the wind. You informed us that a trial was about to take place in 2 areas replacing the pink bag with a hessian sack. Whilst more expensive to provide if it is successful a further roll-out would be considered, although you stated that no budget has been identified for this purpose. There was also some uncertainty about how the actual plastic recycling bags are disposed of, which you agreed to clarify.

## **Civic Amenity Sites**

The committee asked about the Garngoch household waste recycling centre. We were aware of issues relating to the site and asked about plans to upgrade and expand the operation. There was some concern about the limitations at the site and risk of fly tipping. You informed the committee that Cabinet had agreed to apply for planning permission to enlarge the site however this has been held up pending agreement of the budget. There was also concern about congestion at the site, caused in part by apparent illegal use by some businesses.

## **Commercial Recycling**

We asked about your influence over commercial recycling given the significant amount of waste generated by businesses, particularly major food outlets (e.g. Mcdonalds). You explained that, although our service is offered, businesses are free to use private contractors to collect their waste. The challenge for the authority was to compete with the private sector, but you felt that the authority was already very competitive in respect of food waste. You added that food waste was now representing a significant proportion of recycling and a growing business. One of the issues you pointed out with the collection of food waste was that it had to be segregated from general waste. We also heard that the authority was in some cases working in partnership with other collectors, e.g. taking bulk waste off their hands.

## **Waste Collection / Street Cleansing**

We raised an issue about mess left behind after waste collections and sought clarification about responsibilities. You confirmed that the refuse collectors are meant to clear up after themselves but accepted that this did not always happen. We heard that it was a common complaint and your view was that if the council was reliant on householders participation in recycling then it would be letting them down if the service at the road was failing and risked future non-participation. We took the opportunity to remind you about the recommendations made by the Streetscene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel which, amongst other things, called for greater coordination between the collection and street cleaning arrangements. We are expecting the Cabinet response to that report shortly and would urge you to do this. There were also some complaints about containers not being returned to the place they are left. You assured the committee that steps are taken to remind collectors of their responsibilities and standards, being such an important front facing service. You welcomed any feedback from councillors or members of the public and promised to take action.

## **Highways Planning**

The committee asked what plans there were for the road network and infrastructure particularly given the Local Development Plans to deliver thousands of new homes e.g. around the M4 Junction 47, which of course will have an impact on road traffic, as well as services, schools etc. We heard there were no definite plans, although you were aware of the situation in that area and accepted the need for alterations should development take place. You stated that it was not prudent to undertake works ahead of time and that it was potentially an opportunity to use Section 106 planning agreements to deliver for improvements. You assured the committee that all assessments and impacts would be highlighted at the planning stage for any housing developments and advice given to ensure the best decisions are taken. There was a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of Section 106 agreements but you were clear that there was a rigorous process in place to ensure maximum benefit.

## **Safe Routes in Communities**

We noted that the council has successfully bid for £550k from the Welsh Government's Safe Routes in Communities scheme for the Townhill area. We understand this scheme aims to improve accessibility and safety, and encourage walking and cycling within communities. The committee was particularly interested in the demonstration of value for money and would ask how the results from any work carried out (whether in Townhill or other similar) would be measured to enable judgements about impact and success.

## **Highways Maintenance**

We were interested in the work of the Neighbourhood Working Team and planned highways maintenance, specifically the PATCH programme. You confirmed that a programme of repairs (such as resurfacing) was about to be published and provided to all councillors so that they would have an indication of when work in their areas was likely to take place, but of course would be weather dependant. This should give councillors notice to identify and raise any specific repairs needed with the team.

## **Transport**

The committee talked specifically about the public transport system and despite discussions over the last few years, including a scrutiny inquiry, the committee was not clear about how things have moved forward. We were concerned that progress has not been made in terms of looking at a Quality Bus Partnership or Quality Bus Contract. You accepted that progress has been slow but were keen to take action to ensure that public transport delivered for customers. We look forward to hearing more on this.

More generally, in light of much discussion at the moment about city centre regeneration we asked about your thinking and any plans to improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists above motor vehicles. Although city centre regeneration was under another portfolio you stated that you were confident about cross-departmental working on this matter. Your view was very clear that the city centre offer can only succeed with better provision for all modes of transport. You stated that it needed to be attractive to get into the city centre. You also agreed that the pedestrian access along the Kingsway was not satisfactory but were confident that this would improve in line with overall plans for the city centre. You also stated that you were working with organisations such as Sustrans. A car parking review was also being undertaken.

## **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:

- The request for further information in respect of the disposal of plastic recycling bags;
- Our reminder about the Streetscene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel Report so that Cabinet can make a decision on the recommendations; and
- The request for further information to explain how the results from any work carried out (whether in Townhill or elsewhere) under the Safe Routes in Communities scheme would be measured to enable judgements about impact and success.

Please provide your response by 2 April. We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available committee meeting.

Finally, 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.

**COUNCILLOR MARY JONES**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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