



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Inquiry Panel – Regional Working**

Committee Room 5, Guildhall, Swansea

Tuesday, 15 October 2019 at 10.30 am

Present: Councillor L R Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)
C A Holley
R C Stewart

Councillor(s)
M H Jones

Councillor(s)
B J Rowlands

R C Stewart

Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy

Officer(s)

Michelle Roberts
Phil Roberts

Scrutiny Officer
Chief Executive

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): T M White

1 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

None

2 Regional Working Inquiry Impact/follow up Report

Cllr Rob Stewart (Leader) and Phil Roberts (Chief Executive) provided an impact report and attending the Panel meeting to discuss progress with the recommendations agreed by Cabinet on 18 August 2018 resulting from the Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry.

Since the inquiry concluded the following changes have taken place:

- The details of the Welsh Government proposals for improved collaboration and the operation of Joint Committees are becoming clearer
- WLGA have been involved in detailed discussions with Welsh Government
- A Bill is likely to be published in November
- The Chief Executive has held informal discussions with the Minister and with senior civil servants with a view to preparing a regional proposition following discussion with neighbouring councils.

The inquiry has:

- raised the profile of the issue in question

- helped to inform and provide clarity on the Council's approach to regional collaboration

Progress with Recommendations

Rec 1 Partially Completed - The senior management review has provided additional capacity. The Chief Executive has been re-appointed as CEO of ERW. The Leader and Chief Executive have held informal discussions with the Minister and with senior civil servants with a view to preparing a regional proposition following discussion with neighbouring councils.

Progress Rec 2 Completed - All three main collaborations (ERW, Swansea Bay City Deal and the West Glamorgan Partnership) have undertaken systematic reviews to ensure that resources are in place and barriers removed.

Progress Rec 3 Partially Completed - The reviews of the existing arrangements have informed the developing strategy for collaboration and the preference for a four council footprint in South West Wales as a basis for future partnership arrangements.

Progress Rec 4 Completed – All partnerships have been reviewed and improved governance arrangements are in place.

Progress Rec 5 Completed – The Leader and Chief Executive are taking the lead in all partnerships and in the communication with scrutiny.

Progress Rec 6 Partially Completed – All partnerships have been reviewed but there remain some anomalies in the administration arrangements between them.

Progress Rec 7 Partially Completed – separate reviews have been undertaken on all partnerships but with common themes on governance, management and value for money. Any regional proposition will need to address the need for rationalisation or amalgamation.

Progress Rec 8 Not Completed - whilst the use of Skype is increasing the level of technological capability and capacity varies between councils. A regional collaboration proposition will aim to address this and seek funding from Welsh Government to do so.

Progress Rec 9 Completed - third sector and private bodies are included in social care and economic development collaborations.

Progress Rec 10 Completed - extensive and regular representations have been made on all three partnership areas.

Progress Rec 11 Completed - All partnerships have undertaken detailed reviews. A progress report was agreed at Council on 25th July 2019.

The following points were noted from the discussion:

The Panel heard that since the inquiry concluded in 2018, there has been some movement in relation to regional working in Wales. This includes clearer details from Welsh Government on the proposals for improved collaboration and the operation of Joint Committees, the WLGA have been involved in detailed discussions with Welsh Government and a Wales Bill detailing these and other changes is now imminent.

The Panel were pleased to hear that the Chief Executive has been holding informal discussions with the Minister and with senior civil servants with a view to preparing a regional proposition following discussions with neighbouring councils.

The Panel heard that reviews of the existing arrangements have informed the developing strategy for collaboration and the preference for a four council footprint in South West Wales as a basis for future partnership arrangements. It was explained that the most logical footprint for Swansea is that of the City Region area, which includes the four Local Authorities of Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Swansea. Although, this would not include Health for the moment because considerations around this are rather more complex. The Panel felt that it is very positive that we have clarity amongst the four local authorities about the way to move forward. Councillors recognise that these four authorities have experience of delivering projects together and have many common strategies, especially around economic development and education improvement.

The Panel were pleased to hear that separate reviews have been undertaken on all three regional partnerships and are pleased to hear about the common themes of governance, management and value for money being looked at in particular.

It was explained that little progress had been made in relation to our recommendation about *improving modern technology in order to reduce travel to meetings*. That whilst the use of Skype is increasing the level of technological capability and capacity varies between councils. A regional collaboration proposition will aim to address this and seek funding from Welsh Government to do so. The Panel agree that standardisation and investment in the infrastructure across Councils in Wales is needed to move this forward and we agreed to write to the Minister in support this proposition.

The panel were interested to hear about the lessons that have been learnt from our current collaborative activities and how this learning will be of benefit to us in future collaborative activities, especially the need for good programme management, clear and strong governance and sharing of responsibility.

The panel heard that in November 2019 the Wales Bill is likely to be published and this will outline the new powers and responsibilities for local councils. It will create challenges and benefits. The general power of competence will be hugely important and it will sweep away unnecessary bureaucracy around continuous audit introducing peer review instead. Councillors agreed financial resources must come along with the new powers and responsibilities to ensure they can truly be met.

The Panel were pleased to hear that the inquiry had helped to raise the profile of regional working and that it has informed and began to provide clarity on the Council's approach to regional collaboration. The Panel agreed to sign off this Inquiry as complete.

The Panel agreed:

- To sign off the recommendations and complete this Inquiry.
- The Panel Convener will write to the Cabinet Member outlining the Panels thoughts arising from this meeting.
- That a letter will be written to the Welsh Government Minister covering technology matters supporting the need for standardisation and investment in the infrastructure for local authorities Councillors and Officers to meet remotely.

Minutes of the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel – Regional Working (15.10.2019)
Cont'd

- That the Regional Working Annual Report go to the Scrutiny Programme Committee on an annual basis.

The meeting ended at 11.10 am

Chair



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart
Cabinet Member for Economy and
Strategy**

*Please ask for:
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Scrutiny

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*Date
Dyddiad:*

4 November 2019

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy following the meeting of the Panel on 15 October 2019. It is about progress with recommendations resulting from a scrutiny inquiry into regional working.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel – 15 October 2019

We would like to thank you and Phil Roberts for providing an impact report and attending our Panel meeting to discuss progress with the recommendations agreed by Cabinet on 18 August 2018 that had resulted from the Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry.

You told us that since the inquiry concluded in 2018, there has been some movement in relation to regional working in Wales. This includes clearer details from Welsh Government on the proposals for improved collaboration and the operation of Joint Committees. In addition, the WLGA have been involved in detailed discussions with Welsh Government and a Wales Bill detailing these and other changes is now imminent.

We were pleased to hear that the Chief Executive has been holding informal discussions with the Minister and with senior civil servants with a view to preparing a regional proposition following discussions with neighbouring councils.

We heard that reviews of the existing arrangements have informed the developing strategy for collaboration and the preference for a four council footprint in South West Wales as a basis for future partnership arrangements. You explained that the most logical footprint for Swansea is that of the City Region area, which includes the four Local Authorities of Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire,

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Carmarthenshire and Swansea. Although, you did say that this would not include Health for the moment because considerations around this are rather more complex. We felt that it is very positive that we have clarity amongst the four local authorities about the way to move forward. We recognise that these four authorities have experience of delivering projects together and have many common strategies, especially around economic development and education improvement.

We were pleased to hear that separate reviews have been undertaken on all three regional partnerships and to hear that the common themes of governance, management and value for money are being looked at.

You explained that little progress had been made in relation to our recommendation about *improving modern technology in order to reduce travel to meetings*. You said that whilst the use of Skype is increasing the level of technological capability and capacity varies between councils. A regional collaboration proposition will aim to address this and seek funding from Welsh Government to do so. We agree that standardisation and investment in the infrastructure across Councils in Wales is needed to move this forward and we agreed to write to the Minister in support of this proposition.

We were interested to hear about the lessons that have been learnt from our current collaborative activities and how this will be of benefit to us in future especially in relation to the need for good programme management, clear and strong governance and sharing of responsibility.

You told us that in November 2019 a legislative Bill is likely to be published that will outline new powers and responsibilities for local councils. It will create challenges and benefits. It will include the general power of competence, which will be hugely important and will sweep away unnecessary bureaucracy around continuous audit introducing peer review. We agreed financial resources must follow any new powers and responsibilities to ensure they can truly be met.

We were pleased to hear that the inquiry had helped to raise the profile of regional working and that it has informed and began to provide clarity on the Council's approach to regional collaboration. We have agreed to sign off this Inquiry as complete and we would like to thank you for your engagement in this piece of work.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

✉ Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk