

- The now known scale of funding increase for local government for 2020-21 is the best in over a decade and extremely helpful because it is of a different magnitude to recent settlements it enables much greater choice to be exercised over relative priorities, funding commitments and local taxation levels for 2020-21. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy said it is hoped that this change of emphasis and funding can now be sustained over the medium to longer term to allow the Council to not only maintain, but also develop, and extend vital services to the public.
- The final figures for 2020/21 and any potential announcements on future year implications are expected from Welsh Government on 25 February.
- Education continues to be biggest area of funding within the council's revenue budget and will continue to be a key priority for the council. It is intended that there will be a proposed 6.5% (9.7 million pounds) cash increase in schools core funding. This is predominantly to fund teachers' pay and pension costs.
- The Panel heard that the decision about this year Council Tax increase has not yet been made. The Panel heard that the Council Tax planning assumption was up to 5% but the overall yield was higher still, which was due to no longer having discount on empty homes, the 100% premia on long term empty homes and growth in the tax base. In addition, that Council Tax forms just over 25% of income the council received which equated last year to 122 million pounds, with the Revenue Support Grant from Welsh Government being 242 million and Business Rates raising 80m. It was also highlighted that we have to fund the council tax reduction scheme of 22 million pounds that is targeted at lower income groups and which is not fully funded by Welsh Government.
- The Cabinet Member was asked whether Environmental Groups had been contacted with regard to the budget consultation exercise and he replied saying he would follow up on this to ensure it is the case.
- Increase in fees and charges relating to Bereavement services was raised, they heard that the council charges in this area are small compared to the overall costs of a funeral. Swansea is mindful of its position in relation to other councils.
- The Panel heard about the impact of the savings proposals on jobs in 20/21. Hearing that the reduction in numbers is a fraction of what it has been in past years and every effort is being made to minimise this figure given in the report.
- The Panel asked about the ¼ million saving proposed for Home to School Transport. They heard that the council is continuing to look to get the best value we can for our transport services, that HTS transport cost is significant, Council has and is continuing to renegotiate contracts and ensuring a more joined up approach to transport across the council.
- The Panel heard that Swansea would ensure that any grants opportunities that come via regional working would cover our costs and provide the maximum benefit to Swansea.
- The Panel wanted to find out more about the savings proposals line under Social Service Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families first.
- Continuing to take monies out of insurance reserves was raised. The Panel heard that the Section 151 Officer has allowed monies to be taken out of the insurance reserves where appropriate, that he does take professional advice about our insurance reserves. That we effectively cover the council currently for

9 out of every 10 years of possible claims and this was considered to still be very prudent.

- Around (20%) of this year's original savings have not been achieved as originally expected but most directorates have made significant savings in other ways. The Director of Education was still working on further savings proposals to help reduce forecast over spending in that Directorate. The Panel heard that the 3rd Quarter budget monitoring report was expected to show big inroads into reducing the overall service in year overspending figure.

5 Q2 2018/19 Performance Monitoring Report

The Corporate Performance Manager attending the Panel to present the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report and answer questions.

The following indicators and issues were highlighted for discussion:

- 49% of indicators have meet their targets and 39% are showing improvements, this is showing a decline in performance from the corresponding quarter last year. Fewer indicators showing improvement overall compared with this time last year.
- AS13a *Number of carers (18+) who received a carer's assessment in their own right during the financial year.* 52 few carer's assessment completed compared to 2018/18. This was attributed directly to the sickness levels within the integrated hubs, these are being managed and it is hoped the next quarter will see an improvement.
- AS9 - *The percentage of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) assessments completed in 21 days or less.* Performance has dipped compared to previous quarters but this will improve with permanent staff rather than staff rotating. The panel wanted to find out more about when this will happen.
- CFS18 - *The rate of looked after children (LAC) per 10,000 of the 0-17 Swansea population at the end of the period* and CFS2 – *The number of Looked After Children (LAC) at end of period.* There has been a recent reduction in the LAC population and it is stabilising. There is a safe LAC reduction strategy in place which is monitored monthly through the strategic LAC meeting. The current pressures relate to children under 2 years of age.
- Measure 19 – *The rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over.* Staff shortages within the domiciliary care sector continues to impact on this service. However, they have recently re-rendered the service splitting the providers into geographical zones which is expected to have a positive impact on delays.
- BBMA4 – *The number of apprenticeships or trainee starts in the Council.* This indicator records new starts and is currently under review to include a wider apprentice and trainee strategy. This will include the recruitment of trainees and in work apprentices which are currently not recorded.
- EDU015b – *The percentage of final statements of Special Education Needs (SEN) issued within 26 weeks excluding exceptions.* This quarter covers school holidays when there are less staff, however, there are capacity issues within the team due to the volume of operational day to day work as well as a backlog of statements which are affecting the ability of the team to reduce the backlog and

improve the PI. Secondly, the system is largely paper drive and there is not capacity to review systems to improve efficiency without compromising the LA statutory duties further.

- **POV07** – *The number of training and employment person weeks created by BBM for unemployed and economically inactive.* This is 27% lower than last year. There has been a delay in the start of a number of projects, which has reduced the number of opportunities for training work. It is envisaged they will catch up on this delay in the weeks and months ahead.
- **HBCT01a** – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* Drop in performance, as expected, due to reduced resources and because the more complex cases remain in housing benefit and easier cases transfer to Universal Credit.
- **HBCT01b** – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
- **HBCT02a** – *Council Tax reduction speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* As expected, performance has dipped due to a process change, which increased Council Tax Reductions granted to individuals at the cost of an apparent decrease in performance stats. In reality, no worsening of the service to applicants.
- **HBCT02b** – *Council Tax speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
The panel wished to find out more about these for HBCT indicators asking department for component parts to this decline.
- **CHR002** – *The number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence.* Data is currently under review and in a new Management of Absence Policy is under review. Proposals have also been sent to CMT for targeted objectives to reduce sickness in the longer term. The Panel would like to see at breakdown of the indicator by department and by issue.
- **FINA6** – *Percentage of identified forecast General Fund Revenue savings and income for the year compared to originally approved budget.* CMT continues with the expectation that both service and overall net expenditure must be held within the relevant limits for the current year's budget as set by Council.
- The Panel also heard about the four indicators relating to the environment and biodiversity that will be reported annually. They will include: Carbon Reduction, numbers of trees planted, areas of wildflower sown and water quality. The panel would like the see the descriptors for these including how they were chosen and put together.
- The Corporate Biodiversity Working Group was raised and concerns were raised that there is currently no direct reporting mechanism for this into any Councillor meetings. The Convener of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Panel will follow up upon this in this panel.
- Scrutinising delegated decisions and the visibility of the decision-making process as a council was also raised by a panel member who also said that they believe legal are looking into how this can be seen by scrutiny.

Minutes of the Scrutiny Performance Panel – Service Improvement & Finance (20.01.2020)
Cont'd

The Panel received the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chair



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

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 636292

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

29 January 2020

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy. The Panel met on 20 January 2020. This letter relates to the Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future Budget proposals.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 20 January 2020, the Panel met to discuss the Annual Budget proposals for 2020/2021. The Panel are grateful to you and the Chief Finance Officer for attending the Panel to provide information and answer questions.

We heard that due to the General Election held on 12 December, the Welsh Government delayed its announcements on the budget and provisional settlement until 16 December 2019. This made the budget process extremely challenging and uncertain. The funding increase for local government for 2020-21 is the best in over a decade and extremely helpful because it is of a different magnitude to recent settlements enabling much greater choice to be exercised over relative priorities, funding commitments and local taxation levels for 2020-21. You said it is hoped that this change of emphasis and funding can now be sustained over the medium to longer term to allow the council to not only maintain, but also develop, and extend vital services to the public.

You told us Education continues to be the biggest area of funding within the council's revenue budget and will continue to be a key priority for the council. Also it is intended that there will be a 6.5% (9.7 million pounds) cash increase in schools core funding. This is predominantly to fund teachers' pay and pension costs.

We heard that the decision about this year's council Tax increase had not yet been made. We understand that the Council Tax planning assumption was up to 5% but the overall yield last year was higher still, which was due to no longer having discount on empty homes, the 100% premia on long term empty homes and growth in the tax

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base. You explained that council Tax forms just over 25% of the income the council received which equated last year to 122 million pounds, with the Revenue Support Grant from Welsh Government being 242 million and Business Rates raising 80 million. I raised that a number of residents had relayed concerns to me about the present affordability of council Tax and the impact another rise would have on them. I asked whether the Local Authority carries out an appraisal of affordability, you said that an equality impact assessment is completed and consultation is carried out before a decision is made on any increase. We do also understand that we fund the council Tax Reduction Scheme that is targeted at lower income groups and costs 22 million pounds, which is not fully funded by Welsh Government.

We discussed using the MRP and Capital Equalisation Reserves savings to ease the interest charges on the City Deal loan. The Chief Finance Officer said that this has been agreed by council.

We heard that the budget proposals are currently out for wide consultation, we asked whether Environmental Groups had been contacted with regard to the budget consultation exercise and you said you would find out more and feedback on this.

We also raised the following issues with you relating specifically to savings proposals:

- The Increase in fees and charges relating to Bereavement services. We heard that the council charges are small compared to the overall costs of a funeral. Swansea is mindful of its position in relation to other councils.
- The impact of the savings proposals on jobs in 20/21. Hearing that this reduction in staff numbers is a fraction of what it has been in past years and every effort is being made to minimise this figure even further.
- The quarter of a million pound saving proposal for Home to School Transport. We heard that the council is continuing to look to get the best value we can for our transport services, that HTS transport costs are significant, that the council has and is continuing to renegotiate contracts and working to ensure a more joined up approach to transport across the council.
- We raised and wanted to find out more about the savings proposals line under Social Services Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families first.

We asked the question whether it was prudent to continue to take monies out of insurance reserves. The Chief Finance Officer has allowed monies to be taken out of the insurance reserves where appropriate, that he does take professional advice about the councils insurance reserves and that we are effectively covered currently for 9 out of every 10 years of possible claims and this was considered to be very prudent.

We understand around 20% of this year's original savings targets had not been achieved. We heard most directorates have made significant savings in other ways, with the Director of Education who is still working on further savings proposals to help reduce forecast over spending in that Directorate. We were pleased to hear that the 3rd Quarter budget monitoring report is expected to show big inroads into reducing the overall service in year overspending figure.

We welcome your views on the issues raised in our letter but would be grateful if you could respond in writing to the following points by 19 February 2020.

1. Can you tell us whether environmental groups have been included in the budget proposals consultation exercise this year?
2. Can you tell us more about the savings proposals line under Social Services Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families First?

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Jeff Jones

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.jeff.jones@swansea.gov.uk



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

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 636292

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

29 January 2020

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy. The Panel met on 20 January 2020. This letter relates to the Sustainable Swansea – Fit for the Future Budget proposals.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

On the 20 January 2020, the Panel met to discuss the Annual Budget proposals for 2020/2021. The Panel are grateful to you and the Chief Finance Officer for attending the Panel to provide information and answer questions.

We heard that due to the General Election held on 12 December, the Welsh Government delayed its announcements on the budget and provisional settlement until 16 December 2019. This made the budget process extremely challenging and uncertain. The funding increase for local government for 2020-21 is the best in over a decade and extremely helpful because it is of a different magnitude to recent settlements enabling much greater choice to be exercised over relative priorities, funding commitments and local taxation levels for 2020-21. You said it is hoped that this change of emphasis and funding can now be sustained over the medium to longer term to allow the council to not only maintain, but also develop, and extend vital services to the public.

You told us Education continues to be the biggest area of funding within the council's revenue budget and will continue to be a key priority for the council. Also it is intended that there will be a 6.5% (9.7 million pounds) cash increase in schools core funding. This is predominantly to fund teachers' pay and pension costs.

We heard that the decision about this year's council Tax increase had not yet been made. We understand that the Council Tax planning assumption was up to 5% but the overall yield last year was higher still, which was due to no longer having discount on empty homes, the 100% premia on long term empty homes and growth in the tax

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base. You explained that council Tax forms just over 25% of the income the council received which equated last year to 122 million pounds, with the Revenue Support Grant from Welsh Government being 242 million and Business Rates raising 80 million. I raised that a number of residents had relayed concerns to me about the present affordability of council Tax and the impact another rise would have on them. I asked whether the Local Authority carries out an appraisal of affordability, you said that an equality impact assessment is completed and consultation is carried out before a decision is made on any increase. We do also understand that we fund the council Tax Reduction Scheme that is targeted at lower income groups and costs 22 million pounds, which is not fully funded by Welsh Government.

We discussed using the MRP and Capital Equalisation Reserves savings to ease the interest charges on the City Deal loan. The Chief Finance Officer said that this has been agreed by council.

We heard that the budget proposals are currently out for wide consultation, we asked whether Environmental Groups had been contacted with regard to the budget consultation exercise and you said you would find out more and feedback on this.

We also raised the following issues with you relating specifically to savings proposals:

- The Increase in fees and charges relating to Bereavement services. We heard that the council charges are small compared to the overall costs of a funeral. Swansea is mindful of its position in relation to other councils.
- The impact of the savings proposals on jobs in 20/21. Hearing that this reduction in staff numbers is a fraction of what it has been in past years and every effort is being made to minimise this figure even further.
- The quarter of a million pound saving proposal for Home to School Transport. We heard that the council is continuing to look to get the best value we can for our transport services, that HTS transport costs are significant, that the council has and is continuing to renegotiate contracts and working to ensure a more joined up approach to transport across the council.
- We raised and wanted to find out more about the savings proposals line under Social Services Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families first.

We asked the question whether it was prudent to continue to take monies out of insurance reserves. The Chief Finance Officer has allowed monies to be taken out of the insurance reserves where appropriate, that he does take professional advice about the councils insurance reserves and that we are effectively covered currently for 9 out of every 10 years of possible claims and this was considered to be very prudent.

We understand around 20% of this year's original savings targets had not been achieved. We heard most directorates have made significant savings in other ways, with the Director of Education who is still working on further savings proposals to help reduce forecast over spending in that Directorate. We were pleased to hear that the 3rd Quarter budget monitoring report is expected to show big inroads into reducing the overall service in year overspending figure.

We welcome your views on the issues raised in our letter but would be grateful if you could respond in writing to the following points by 19 February 2020.

1. Can you tell us whether environmental groups have been included in the budget proposals consultation exercise this year?
2. Can you tell us more about the savings proposals line under Social Services Poverty and Prevention of £40,000, which says Relocation of staff from Alexandra House to release grant funding from Flying Start and Families First?

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Jeff Jones

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ cllr.jeff.jones@swansea.gov.uk



**To/
Councillor David Hopkins
Cabinet Member for Delivery and
Performance**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Overview & Scrutiny

01792 636292

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

29 January 2020

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Delivery and Performance. The letter concerns the meeting on 20 January 2020 and the Quarter 2 Corporate Performance Monitoring.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On the 20 January 2020, the Panel met to discuss the Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring Report 19/20. The Panel are grateful to Corporate Performance Manager for attending to discuss the report.

We heard that overall 49% of indicators have meet their targets and 39% are showing improvements. This is showing a decline in performance from the corresponding quarter last year. Fewer indicators are showing improvement overall compared with this time last year.

Some of the individual indicators we discussed include:

- *AS13a Number of carers (18+) who received a carer's assessment in their own right during the financial year.* 52 fewer carer's assessment were completed compared to 2018/19. We heard that this was attributed directly to the sickness levels within the integrated hubs, these are being managed and it is hoped the next quarter will see an improvement.
- *AS9 - The percentage of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) assessments completed in 21 days or less.* We heard that performance has dipped compared to previous quarters but this will improve with permanent staff rather than staff rotating. We want to find out more about when this will happen.
- *CFS18 - The rate of looked after children (LAC) per 10,000 of the 0-17 Swansea population at the end of the period and CFS2 – The number of Looked After Children (LAC) at end of period.* We heard there has been a recent reduction in the LAC population and it is stabilising. There is a safe LAC reduction strategy in place, which is monitored monthly through the strategic LAC meeting. The current pressures relate to children under 2 years of age.

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- Measure 19 – *The rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over.* We heard that staff shortages within the domiciliary care sector continue to impact on this service. However, they have recently re-tendered the service splitting the providers into geographical zones, which is expected to have a positive impact on delays.
- BBMA4 – *The number of apprenticeships or trainee starts in the Council.* We heard this indicator records new starts and is currently under review to include a wider apprentice and trainee strategy. This will include the recruitment of trainees and in work apprentices which are currently not recorded.
- EDU015b – *The percentage of final statements of Special Education Needs (SEN) issued within 26 weeks excluding exceptions.* We heard that this quarter covers school holidays when there are less staff, however, there are capacity issues within the team due to the volume of operational day to day work as well as a backlog of statements which are affecting the ability of the team to reduce the backlog and improve the PI. Secondly, the system is largely paper drive and there is not capacity to review systems to improve efficiency without compromising the LA statutory duties further.
- POV07 – *The number of training and employment person weeks created by Beyond Bricks and Mortar for unemployed and economically inactive.* We heard this is 27% lower than last year. There has been a delay in the start of a number of projects, which has reduced the number of opportunities for training work. It is envisaged they will catch up on this delay in the weeks and months ahead.
- HBCT01a – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* We understand there has been a drop in performance, but as expected, due to reduced resources and because the more complex cases remain in housing benefit and easier cases transfer to Universal Credit.
- HBCT01b – *Housing Benefit speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
- HBCT02a – *Council Tax reduction speed of processing, average time for processing new claims.* As expected, performance has dipped due to a process change, which increased Council Tax Reductions granted to individuals at the cost of an apparent decrease in performance stats. In reality, no worsening of the service to applicants.
- HBCT02b – *Council Tax speed of processing, average time for processing notification of change in circumstances.* A minor dip in performance as expected due to reduced resources.
The panel wished to find out more about the decline in the processing of Housing Benefits and Council Tax shown in the above four indicators and have asked for more information.
- CHR002 – *The number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence.* We heard that the data is currently under review and in a new Management of Absence Policy is underway. Proposals have also been sent to CMT for targeted objectives to reduce sickness in the longer term. The Panel would like to see at breakdown of this indicator by department and by issue.
- FINA6 – *Percentage of identified forecast General Fund Revenue savings and income for the year compared to originally approved budget.* We understand the Corporate Management Team continues to expect that both service and overall

net expenditure be held within the relevant limits for the current year's budget as set by Council.

We heard about the four indicators that will be reported to Cabinet annually relating to the natural environment and biodiversity. We heard that these will include indicators on carbon reduction, trees planted, areas of wildflower sown and water quality. We would like to see the descriptors for these including how they were chosen and put together.

We were concerned to hear that the Corporate Biodiversity Working Group had no direct reporting mechanism into any Councillor meetings. The Convener of the Natural Environment Scrutiny Panel plan will follow up upon this in his panel.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but can we please have a written response to the following points by 19 February 2020

- 1) Indicator AS9 - *The percentage of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) assessments completed in 21 days or less.* We heard that performance has dipped compared to previous quarters but this will improve with permanent staff rather than staff rotating. Can you tell us when this will happen?
- 2) The panel wished to find out more about the decline in the processing of Housing Benefits and Council Tax shown in the four indicators HBCT01a, HBCT01b, HBCT02a, HBCT01b. Can you please provide us with more information about the reasons for this decline?
- 3) CHR002 – *The number of working days/shifts per full time equivalent lost due to sickness absence.* We heard that this data is currently under review and in a new Management of Absence Policy is underway. The Panel would like to see a breakdown of this indicator by department and by sickness reason.
- 4) We heard about the four indicators relating to the natural environment and biodiversity that will be reported to Cabinet annually, which include indicators on carbon reduction, trees planted, areas of wildflower sown and water quality. Can you provide us with the descriptors for these including how they were chosen and put together?

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Jeff Jones

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ Cllr.jeff.jones@swansea.gov.uk

Councillor Jeff Jones
Convener,
Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny
Performance Panel

SENT BY EMAIL

Please ask for: Councillor Rob Stewart
Direct Line: 01792 63 6366
E-Mail: cllr.rob.stewart@swansea.gov.uk
Our Ref: RS/JW
Your Ref:
Date: 31 January 2020

Dear Councillor Jones

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND FINANCE PERFORMANCE PANEL 20 JANUARY 2020

Thank you for the scrutiny session on 20 January regarding the initial proposals for the 20-21 budget which you chaired on behalf of Councillor Chris Holley.

I very much agree with most of your summation of the matters we discussed fully and am pleased the panel recognised the scale of funding coming in 20-21, the tight timings, and the opportunities afforded to invest more in Swansea's future and the Council's priorities. I look forward to soon concluding the consultation round and reporting back to Cabinet and Council on the final budget options in due course on 20th February and 5th March respectively.

With regard to the two follow up matters you have raised I would advise as follows.

1. Our public consultation follows our normal approach, albeit to a tighter timescale this year, following the delayed provisional settlement. This involves general opportunities for any interested individuals or groups to express views online and in writing on general matters, specific issues, or our survey and has been publicised both in the press and on social media. We will know if any environmental groups have taken part once the consultation closes and highlight accordingly.

2. The budget proposal of £40,000 relates to the Council vacating Alexandra House and ceasing lease arrangements, which will mean that staff will relocate into the Guildhall or out of 5 Community based venues, as part of the integrated family support offer and the developing early help hub model. The lease cost was met from core funding and grant and the amount released is the core element only whilst additionally freeing up grant for re-investment into front line provision, enabling more effective working through integration and puts services into the community.

Page 2

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rob Stewart', written in a cursive style.

**Y CYNGHORYDD/COUNCILLOR ROB STEWART
ARWEINYDD/LEADER**