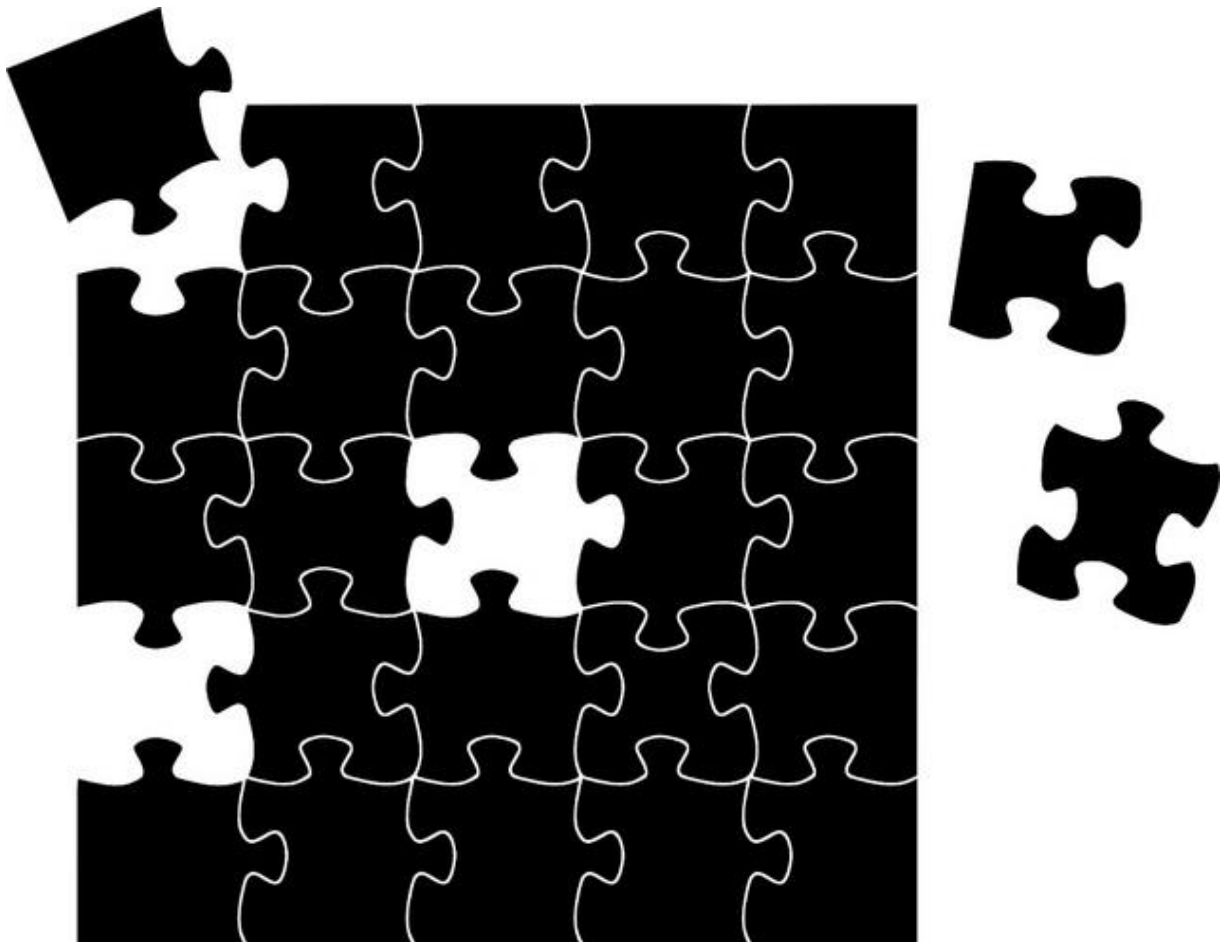


# Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry

*How can the Council, along with its partners, develop and improve regional working for the benefit of Swansea and its residents?*



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The Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel  
May 2018



## **Why This Matters**

### **Foreword by Councillor Lyndon Jones**

We chose to look at this issue because we wanted to ensure that throughout the constant changing picture that is regional working in Wales that the outcomes of the people in Swansea are our key focus.

We found regional working in Wales to be a complex and confusing picture. More clarity is needed by the Welsh Government as to whether they favour the amalgamation of Councils, more regional working or indeed a combination of both.

However regional working must show a real benefit for the people of Swansea and therefore needs to add value and not be seen as another layer of bureaucracy. We welcome the opportunity, through this inquiry, to give our views on this issue that will be reflected via the Councils response to the Green Paper consultation.

We were pleased to hear that Swansea has been consistently open to considerations on merger and other regional working options. We were also encouraged to find that some regional activities are making a real difference to local people.

We heard about the potential detrimental effect of protectionism in some of the regional partnerships and would urge all those involved in collaboration activities to ensure that they are thinking about and focussing upon what is best for the people.

We did have a particular concern about the amount of scrutiny and therefore the accountability to local councillors of some of our regional collaborations. We would particularly like to see the big three partnerships (Western Bay, Education through Regional Working and Swansea Bay City Region) activities have clear accountability and scrutiny process built into their governance arrangements. We would also like to see any future new large collaboration activity to build in scrutiny early in its development.

We hope that Cabinet will find this report useful and that our recommendations will go some way in helping Swansea map the way forward for its regional working activities.

I would like to thank the members of the Inquiry Panel who gave their time and commitment and all of those people who gave evidence and information to the Panel.

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# 1 WHY WE PRODUCED THIS REPORT

## Overview

1.1 This report focusses on the following question:

**How can the Council, with its partners, develop and improve regional working for the benefit of Swansea and its residents?**

## Selecting a topic

1.2 Councillors chose to look at this subject because:

- The Welsh Government has long seen collaboration between public services – and particularly within local government – as a means of providing more efficient and effective services.
- Collaboration has a higher profile than ever before. *'It is a central plank of the Wales' public service reform agenda in order to respond to the challenges presented by the tightening public services finances.'* **WLGA**
- Councillors carried out this work in order to build a picture and gain better understanding of progresses being made in this area.
- Councillors wanted to look at the scrutiny processes that are being developed within regional partnerships.

The Panel agreed to investigate the following aspects and these formed the basis of this questioning strategy:

1. **The Swansea Picture:** What is the regional picture as it affects Swansea currently? What are the proposals for the future? Where do we want to be?
2. **Financial Picture:** What are we financially contributing too currently? How is this envisaged to change in the future?
3. **Regional Partners:** The current relationship between Swansea and its regional partners? The barriers to improving this.
4. **Impact:** What has been the impact for Swansea and its residents of regional working so far?
5. **Scrutiny:** What are the scrutiny mechanisms on regional partnership governance arrangements?
6. **Legislation and Directives:** What are the influences on regional working by national and local directives/policy/legislation?
7. **Good Practice:** Are there good examples of effective practice in regional working and how are we/partners using this to improve?

## Intended Contribution of Inquiry

- 1.3 As a Panel we believe that we can make a valuable contribution to this topic. We recognise that, while there are no easy answers, success will only come from a conversation that everyone is able to contribute to. It is in this spirit that our conclusions and recommendations are offered.
- 1.4 Specifically this report aims to contribute to this vital debate by:
- Offering proposals for improvement
  - Providing a Councillor perspective
  - Drawing together some general principles
  - Pointing to good practice examples
  - Sharing the views of different people involved
- 1.5 We recognise the limitations of the inquiry. Given the complexity of the topic and the time that we had this report necessarily provides a broad view.
- 1.6 Finally, many of our conclusions are in line with the Council's current direction of travel and these are offered in order to provide reassurance. Others may be either additional or contrary to what has already been agreed. These are intended to offer challenge and to stimulate debate. Where we have made recommendations these are intended to help improve the service.

## Evidence Collected

- 1.7 Evidence was collected between October 2017 and March 2018. The evidence gathering activities undertaken included:
- a. National and Local Strategic picture – a meeting with the Council Leader and Chief Executive
  - b. Financial Picture – meeting with the Chief Finance Officer
  - c. Place Directorate – meeting with Director of Place
  - d. Education Directorate – meeting with Chief Education Officer
  - e. Social Services and the Public Services Board – meeting with the Chief Social Services Officer and the Director of People
  - f. Partners' perspective – roundtable meeting with Place Directorate partners from South West Wales Transport Partnership, Swansea Bay City Region and Food Waste Partnership
  - g. Partners' perspective – roundtable meeting with People Directorate partners Western Bay and Education through Regional Working (ERW)
- 1.8 For full details of the evidence gathered including details of all the findings from each session use the following link to the Councils website  
<https://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/documents/s42378/00%20-%20FINDINGS%20REPORT.pdf?LLL=0>

## The Context of the inquiry

- 1.9 ***The Swansea Picture***  
Swansea is committed to regional working and collaboration through the Councils Corporate Priorities/Plan and has committed to the Council having a

clear understanding of the extent of its collaborative work by

- A mapping exercise undertaken by the Corporate Management Team identified the key local, regional and national partnerships.
- The Council meets up regionally with 5 other local authorities to discuss collaboration projects.
- The Council has a clear rationale in place when collaborating and it is clear on the anticipated benefits and costs. The Council has developed, through the Public Services Board (PSB), a set of principles for partnership working. Benefits and costs are assessed on a case by case basis.
- The PSB has identified clear priorities, which are set out within the Swansea Wellbeing Plan. These are based upon an evidenced assessment of need, which is regularly updated.
- A partnership agreement sets out the responsibilities and accountabilities of each PSB member.
- A multi-agency Scrutiny Performance Panel for the PSB, including its partnership role and the delivery of the Service Improvement Plan, has been established and is currently developing its work plan.

## **2 CONCLUSIONS**

The conclusions below answer the following inquiry key question: *How can the Welsh Government, the Council and its partners, develop and improve regional working for the benefit of Swansea and its residents?*

### **2.1 By Welsh Government providing clarity and simplifying the regional picture across Wales**

- 2.1.1 We recognise the reasoning behind the Welsh Government reform agenda, especially after looking at the issues faced by local authorities across Wales in relation to getting better value for money from limited resources and the resulting affordability of services. The challenges that are being faced by the public sector in Wales are enormous and therefore require a radical but realistic rethink of how services can be provided. We agreed with the caveat that this must always be in the context of ensuring the central focus is ultimately on citizen's outcomes.
- 2.1.2 We found there to be a confusing picture of regional partnerships with differing working footprints across Wales. Part of the confusion exists where agencies are working across different footprints but also where different partnerships cover different areas. We recognise that this pattern has evolved over time but more clarity around this is needed.
- 2.1.3 Through all this confusion we must ensure that we focus on the outcomes of our citizens. It is important to understand the implications of the decisions that are likely to be made and be prepared for how this will affect the services to our local community here in Swansea. We believe eventual mergers must be about what is best for our communities and not just geography.
- 2.1.4 We were of the view the public sector is constantly looking for clarity in a constantly changing picture, this in itself is both challenging and confusing.

2.1.5 Towards the end of the inquiry the Panel were alerted to a recent announcement that was made by the Welsh Government (20 March 2018). This puts forward plans for potential options for improving joint and partnership working in the form of a Green Paper. We were of the view that this will potentially change the way forward from what had previously been talked about. This will have different implications on how the local authorities will move forward in both their collaborative partnerships with other organisations and in their joint working with other local authorities.

Welsh Government announcement on local government reform was received in a Green Paper, “*Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People*” on 20 March. The main proposal within the green paper is that the 22 councils in Wales are reduced to ten on the following footprint.

- Ynys Mon (Anglesey) and Gwynedd
- Conwy and Denbighshire
- Flintshire and Wrexham
- Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire
- Swansea and Neath Port Talbot
- Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil
- Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff
- Newport and Caerphilly
- Powys
- Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire

The new map would look like this:



The consultation suggests three alternative approaches to the transition from 22 to 10 authorities, namely: voluntary mergers; a phased approach with early adopters merging first by 2022 with all other authorities merging by 2026; a single comprehensive merger programme to be completed by 2022.

The expectation is that existing regional arrangements will continue around the education consortia, and the City and Growth Deals. Consultation on the proposals is now open and ends on 12 June 2018.

- 2.1.6 We agreed with Swansea Council Chief Executive when he said that it is helpful that Welsh Government has set out the proposal clearly but we did also share his concern about the confusion caused after the previous assurance that no reorganisation would occur for ten years. We understand that a number of Councils are likely to react negatively to the proposed return to some of the former county council footprints. We were of the same opinion that it is vital that we keep the main focus on services to the public during this process and that it must be about what the best model is for delivering sustainable and efficient local government services. We recognise that the Green Paper is currently out for consultation and we will need to wait and see if these proposals survive intact following the consultation process.
- 2.1.7 We heard from the Chief Executive that Swansea has consistently been open to considerations on merger but it is unclear what the views of our neighbours are. Meetings are being held over coming weeks to respond to the consultation.
- 2.1.8 We also heard that the six councils in Mid and South West Wales have all expressed the preference to collaborate on the economic development footprint and extend that to go beyond economic development to school improvement and health and social care.
- 2.1.9 We did have concerns about the confusion that will potentially be caused to existing collaborations by any mergers. For example the Welsh Government may see them as being in sync but if Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils were to agree to merge they may have a very different view on, say, the revised national model for education that will shortly be published. We were concerned that this could potentially freeze/delay decision making on some collaborations until there is clarity.
- 2.1.10 We had heard, previous to the Welsh Government announcement in March, that there is significant change underway at a regional level, following previous announcements and meetings around Local Government Reform (LGR) in Wales. The Welsh Government had set out its proposal for mandatory regional working and Joint Governance Committees (JGC) emerging from a recent White Paper Consultation process. The mandated services would include: economic development, Transport, Strategic land use, planning and building control, Social Services, Education improvements and additional learning needs and Public protection.

It was also suggested in the previous paper that the Joint Governance Committees (JGCs) will be responsible for effective planning and delivery of these mandated areas. We heard that there would be two types of JGCs Governance and Service. Governance JGC for each region will be made up of elected members. They would be decision making bodies with consistent levels of delegation from each Local Authority. New legislation will set out their duties and powers.

How this will change or work in conjunction with the any of the changes proposed in the green paper announced by the Welsh Government in March is yet to be clarified. Presumably any new mergers will still be required to



work across wider regions on many services like for example Education.

- 2.1.11 Councillors heard that existing partnership structures will be maintained within the new framework and will co-exist. It was proposed that there will be three large partnership regions: North Wales, Mid and West Wales and South East Wales. Swansea will be part of Mid and West Wales and will include: Ceredigion, Powys, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot. Again it is yet to be clarified how these will co-exist in any new arrangement.
- 2.1.12 The Panel did have concerns about these mandated models. Particularly their potential for creating another layer of bureaucracy that will require officer time and resources and potentially make decision making more difficult and bureaucratic with each decision needing to be considered by each individual local authorities Cabinet before JGC.
- 2.1.13 We felt the Welsh Government should determine once and for all their approach to local government reform and particularly the strategy for mergers. The constant sidestepping of the issue is unhelpful and confusing for all. It is hoped that more clarity will arise following the Green Paper consultation.
- 2.1.14 Firm arrangements for scrutiny have not been considered yet across any of these models. However the original White Paper summary highlighted that the JGC approach should be coupled with a joint regional scrutiny arrangement. That work should not be duplicated between regional and local authority scrutiny and the one local authority should be the lead for an individual joint scrutiny committee. It was felt that this work should be taken seriously.

### **Swansea's Current Regional Working Partnerships**

A review of Swansea's current regional partnerships shows:

- The Council is currently involved in around one hundred partnership/collaboration areas. The 'big three' being City Region, ERW and Western Bay.
- Excluding the major contributions to ERW, the City Region, and Western Bay, the Council also makes an annual cash contribution to the administration of these projects and partnerships.
- Swansea Council officer time on partnership equates to around 600 days per year. This excludes those posts which are specifically funded for regional work in order to understand Swansea Council's commitment.

- 2.1.15 We were informed that Swansea currently is part of at least 100 regional partnerships of different sizes and complexities, requiring different levels of officer support and financial contribution. Some of these are national or regional networks while others manage services and budget allocations and/or grant monies.

## **2.2 By addressing the challenges to harmonisation that regional working requires**

2.2.1 We recognise that work has begun and will need to continue across the original and within any new partnerships that will harmonise aspects of the collaboration arrangements for all those involved. Currently there are many cross overs in responsibility and remit including, for example, the co-existence of Joint Governance Committees and the Public Services Board. The harmonisation across different regional clusters that are currently in existence and changes that have or may be planned will need to be addressed. For example: the increase in size of the footprint of City Region and the changing coverage of Western Bay from 4 to 3 partners. These types of large changes have consequences for the existing or original local authorities in those partnerships. The Panel felt it important to ensure that partnerships have the resilience built in to be able to work through such big change.

2.2.2 We found there to be a number of key challenges to local government reorganisation relating to harmonisation that need to be considered. We emphasise the importance of finding ways to address and/or mitigate the effects of these in our current and future partnerships and in whatever model is agreed by Welsh Government moving forward. These are not insurmountable but need to be recognised and dealt with. Some of the challenges and potential barriers are around policy, systems particularly ICT, terms and conditions of staff and council tax charges.

We found these challenges to include for example:

- Co-existence and harmonisation of Joint Governance Committees, potential mergers and the different regional clusters that are already in place, like for example, for ERW and the City Region.
- The risk that Welsh Government may introduce a new framework which is either not aligned to, or has detrimental effect on those current partnerships which are proving to be beneficial. The Panel heard that the Welsh Local Government Association is urging Welsh Government to:
  - Work with Local Authorities to review current arrangements, making improvements where needed
  - Review the current binding agreements between councils, as additional legislation may be unnecessary
  - Consider regional variations, not take a 'one size fits all' approach
  - Consider the regional framework agreements early in the process before everything is formalised.
- There is also a risk that regional decisions will need to be taken through each Local Authorities' decision-making process which could take time and make change slow to implement. .

#### **Swansea's 'Big Three' Partnerships include:**

##### ***Western Bay Health and Social Care***

Western Bay consists of Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot Councils and the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU). The Western Bay Programme delivers integrated health and social care models for older people, children with complex needs, mental health, learning disability and support for carers. The Western Bay programme supports collaborative working between the above statutory partners together with the third and independent sectors.

### ***Education through Regional Working (ERW)***

ERW is partnership of 6 local authorities including Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Councils. The main purpose of this consortium is to deliver a single school improvement service and this includes for example: school improvement, data collation and analysis, delivering national system for categorising schools, providing challenge to schools performance and delivery.

### ***Swansea Bay Region City Deal***

The Swansea Bay City Region is comprised of four local authorities: Pembrokeshire County Council, the City and County of Swansea, Neath Port Talbot Council and Carmarthenshire County Council. These are underpinned by a supportive network, including the region's further education establishments: Coleg Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire College, Coleg Sir Gar, Gower College Swansea and Grwp NPTC, Swansea University and University of Wales Trinity St David's. The City Deal programme encompasses 11 projects across 4 key themes of Economic Acceleration, Life Science and Well-being, Energy, and Smart Manufacturing.

### ***Swansea's has a wide variety of partnerships, other than the big three, just a few of these include:***

The Western Bay Contest Board, Regional Transport Forum, South West Wales Food Waste Hub, Wales Biodiversity Partnership, Institute of Licensing (Wales), Cross Borders Project (Housing). All Wales Rough Sleeping Partnership, South Wales Resilience Forum.

- 2.2.3 We also feel it important to stress the importance of taking the local context and needs of an area into consideration and ensuring that regional Business Plans are reflect this.

## **2.3 By recognising positives, identifying and addressing the barriers to regional working for Swansea and its partnerships**

- 2.3.1 Evidence suggests that there are a number of strengths and positives resulting from regional working which are proving to be of benefit. We recognise these positives will help in developing and moving towards regional working in whatever form it takes. From the evidence we gathered we found that some of the strengths of regional working include:

- The sharing of good practice, innovation and ideas. ERW has found this to be a real positive with authorities helping each other to improve.
- Pooling of resources can enable greater capacity and consistency. Western Bay describe some the benefits to this approach in a variety of ways from economies of scale through shared learning, to the advantages of integrated services at the front end of service delivery, from joint commissioning arrangements to sharing good practice. The real positive improvement above all this has been in quality with the use of a regional framework which includes a set of quality standards used by care providers.
- The sharing of information and business intelligence.
- Joint planning and performance management. Western Bay felt that the funding environment at the moment can make for people to be far more introspective than outward looking but this can be positive in that people need to take a fresh look and change services and this can result in new and innovative ways forward.
- Joint management of major/high risk projects and shared responsibility but

identifying these common risks can be a challenge.

- The shared training, development and networking opportunities.

2.3.2 We heard from Zac Shell, a representative on the South West Wales Waste Partnership from Bridgend Council, who talked about his and Bridgend Councils experience of regional working partnerships relating to waste matters. He said that working across the region particularly on procurement matters was good for economies of scale.

He highlighted a particularly tangible benefit to collaborative working last year with the development of a new food waste procurement that included Bridgend and Swansea Councils. Welsh Government supported it with 25% funding and it is now proving financially beneficial to both Councils. The facility was built in Bridgend and has resulted in economic benefits through local employment opportunities.

He said that it had been a very positive outcome but it did take a substantial time to deliver. It has been a learning curve. He explained the initial bid process started in 2008 when a number of other Local Authorities were involved but the preferred bidder pulled out. After this failed procurement situation some of the Local Authorities lost appetite for it or found other solutions. In the end, only Bridgend and Swansea took up this opportunity, which despite being a long winded process, was successful in the end.

2.3.3 Whilst we recognise there are many benefits to regional working we also found some potential weaknesses that will be challenging. We found these to include:

- Local authority areas with diverse and different needs requiring different local priorities, for example urban deprivation vs rural sparsity
- Formal regional partnership decision making arrangements can be slow
- When there is little formal financial contribution, new processes and partnerships operating on existing stretched resources
- Potential loss of locality focus and/or duplication, there is a risk that local voice and local difference is masked or lost especially in partnerships with a wide population
- Different terms and conditions of employment across organisations if sharing services.
- Different perception/understanding of language across different parts of the partnership. It is Important to agree a common language.
- Use of different ICT programmes where it is difficult, if not impossible, to share data. Western Bay have experienced this and are currently putting in place a new system that will improve and give capacity to look at data together. Health are arranging there timetable to come on board in consideration of potential risks. The Panel agreed that this will make a real difference in the ease and timeliness of sharing information.
- Ability of Councils to commit Councillors and Officers to these collaborative activities.

- In relation to the Bridgend/Swansea food waste procurement exercise a number of challenges were experienced including the effort and time it took to go through the procurement process. In addition the challenge of getting Welsh Government funding was positive for the exercise but the procedure is onerous and very time consuming. The business case exercise is very challenging. They found that it is very important that you get all the necessary departments within your own council working together and on the same page when you are involved in any regional process.
- One of the barriers that can be found when working across a number of Local Authorities or organisations that must be addressed is protectionism. The Panel found that this does still exist in many partnerships but in some it has reduced as the collaboration has matured and trust has been developed. For example one person felt that it has improved as all partners see the overall benefits of working across the region. But there is the threat that some partners feel that the system is not serving them as well as it is others; each local authority serves and answers to its own citizens. The Panel felt that this is why it is important that each partner signs up to a joint plan identifying the regions priorities and commits to it.
- The Panel did feel that protectionism can seriously frustrate regional collaboration, and can have quite significant effects at some levels in partnerships. The Panel considered how we could improve this situation, hearing that some solutions could be to:
  - Ensure the collaboration has strong political and senior management leadership and director (senior leadership play a pivotal role in shaping the ethos of the partnership)
  - Celebrate people on the ground and the work they are doing, improving bottom up.
  - Good communication right through the partnership and especially in those areas of potential blockage like middle management.
  - Having a common and shared vision.

2.3.4 We recognise that change is not easy and needs careful management and clear communication. Transforming processes and asking people to do things differently can be hard.

2.3.5 Welsh Government reform agenda presents a number of opportunities but some areas the Panel saw as potential for threat/risk. Some of those identified include:

- Some activities will give rise to greater efficiency by delivering on a regional footprint. Although the Panel agreed that these have to be clearly scoped with clear opportunities for rationalisation identified, ensuring that current or improved levels of service are assured.
- Welsh Government is increasingly directing funds via regional partnerships and are encouraging collaboration through this avenue. The allocation of resources through for example ERW and Western Bay have increased hugely, the caveat is the need to continue to prove that this is being done collaboratively.

- The prevention agenda and in adhering to the Future Generations Act legislation councils may not be able to solve issues or future challenges individually without wider collaboration with other Local Authorities and other partners including the third and private sectors.
- The Panel spoke to the Director of People about the Public Services Board (PSB), which is currently contained within the Swansea Council boundaries. They heard that some members of the partnership are keen for the PSB to move to a regional model around a larger footprint like that of Western Bay. The benefit of this to some partners is clear, for example, reducing multiple attendances by them to different individual Local Authorities meetings. Welsh and Wales Government is encouraging working on a regional basis.
- Resilience was raised, members recognised that as budgets shrink, there are increasing concerns that some services particularly in smaller councils are unsustainable by an individual authority in isolation and greater collaboration will be a way to address this.
- Changes to the established footprints for regional collaboration have been identified and are seen as a risk, especially the impact that this may have on existing projects, respective financial contributions and ability to provide a stipulated level of service. The example of changes to the Western Bay footprint was cited as an example. The Panel heard that the Welsh Government consulted on changes to the ABMU Health Board footprint, to cover only Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, with Bridgend being served by Cwm Taf in future. This will impact primarily on the Western Bay arrangements and plans to manage this transition are underway.
- Differing priorities can be a risk for a region for example the ERW footprint. Where the majority of the region is rural those issues can potentially predominate and this can then be reflected in the allocation of funding within that region. The Panel heard that some areas are better delivered regionally such as strategic transport planning and economic development strategies and the Panel felt that formalising these aspects would be beneficial. We heard particularly about the regional transport planning aspect and the need for more mandation to secure partnership arrangements.
- The Transport Strategy Officer for the South West Wales Regional Transport Partnership, Ben George, attended the Panel to discuss their experience of working regionally. We heard that he believes governance of a partnership is very important. He explained that the South West Wales Regional Transport Partnership does not currently have a formal governance structure as the Consortium was dissolved in 2014. Partners from across that region have agreed it important to keep the collaboration going as they do not want to lose the good partnership working, the skills and knowledge of its members. They do not want to have to start from the beginning if they need to work together formally again, so they currently work together informally in the meantime. All the Local Authorities in this partnership recognise and value it. It was thought that a legally mandated structure for transport would be part of the new City Deal developments

but this has not happened. There is currently no voice at a national level because the governance structure have been stripped away. We recognise this reasoning and stress how the close links of transport run through many aspects of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

2.3.6 We agreed that whilst there is ongoing debate about how regional working will progress, it is important for the Council to be active in whatever the emerging picture should look like and share in its future. It is hoped that in developing a way forward that Welsh Government whilst looking at the national and regional picture also understand the benefits of services being accountable locally. Councillors emphasised the importance of local knowledge and accountability in delivering the best outcomes for our local communities.

## 2.4 **By all regional partnerships having good governance, challenge and scrutiny arrangements**

2.4.1 We looked in most detail at the governance arrangements of the big three partnerships that include ERW, Western Bay and City Region, looking particularly at their governance models and scrutiny arrangements. Our findings are detailed as follows.

### 2.4.2 ***Education through Regional Working (ERW)***

ERW has fully formed Governance Arrangements, whilst there are many challenges and there is room for improvement it does include a Joint committee, an ERW Service Committee and an informal scrutiny mechanism. It has an established Regional Forward Work Programme that details regional and local priorities. They have audited and published accounts and are inspected by Estyn. The Consortium has produced a document called [Democratic Accountability and Scrutiny](#) and in it there is recognition of the role of scrutiny, particularly in:

- Holding the Joint Committee to account and reviewing its decisions
- Scrutinising the work of the ERW partnership
- Helping to develop new policies and developing existing ones; and
- Monitoring the budgets and performance

### 2.4.3 ***The City Deal***

The City Deal is in the development stages of practical formation and detailed agreement, the main heads of agreement have been signed between UK and Welsh Governments and local partners, there is not a level of detail yet that clarifies the final position for Swansea individually. There is currently a joint working agreement across the partnership in relation to Finance and Legal, and Swansea's Section 151 Officer is the financial representative. No final formal agreement has been reached yet but it is anticipated that all local partner councils will take reports to their Cabinet/Council shortly. We heard that senior officer and member time involvement has been and will remain significant. Scrutiny arrangements have not yet been agreed but will be built into the partnership both locally and at a regional level. It is envisaged that the governance structure will be similar to that of ERW.

### 2.4.4 ***Western Bay***

Western Bay is a partnership with the primary purpose of providing a strategic

mechanism for co-ordinating a programme of change across the health and social care system through number of projects that partners have identified as a common concern. Many of the services and resources managed through Western Bay are pooled.

We heard that there are many positives but also some challenges including that the decision making for Western Bay can be long and drawn out because the Joint Committee cannot make decisions alone and can only recommend through each Local Authorities individual Cabinet Committees. We thought that maybe this aspect of the Governance arrangement should be revisited to look at enabling decision making to provide more timely outcomes.

We were concerned to hear that there is no formal scrutiny arrangement for Western Bay, although there is individual accountability via local scrutiny bodies. The Panel heard that most partners involved in the partnership were keen to develop a scrutiny arrangement but one local authority does not. All members have to be in agreement for governance processes to change. Therefore no progress can be made on this.

- 2.4.5 The National Assembly for Wales Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee carried out an inquiry in 2013 into progress made with local government collaboration. We recognise that this was some time ago now but we stressed that some aspects still resonate, namely:

It is clear from the evidence they received that there are significant issues to be addressed in terms of how collaborative arrangements are scrutinised at a local level, and in terms of where accountability for collaboration work lies within local government. We heard, for example, of the difficulty faced by local authority back-benchers in scrutinising collaborative arrangements and are unsure whether provisions under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 for joint overview and scrutiny committees are sufficient to overcome the 'crisis of accountability' that witnesses referred to. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and prioritised. They put forward a recommendation to Welsh Government *'The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to enable effective scrutiny of collaborative arrangements, particularly by back-bench members'*.

- 2.4.6 We discussed and considered what we thought regional scrutiny should look like and how it should work in large collaborations. We considered formal Joint Scrutiny Committee arrangements and those more informal arrangements like that used by ERW. From our view either model is fine as long as it enables back bench members to hold to account and scrutinise the work of large regional collaborations. The advantage of informal scrutiny arrangements is that of less bureaucracy and formality. The development of scrutiny arrangements via the informal route also prepares the way with relationship and system building should there be a requirement to develop formal Joint Scrutiny Committee arrangements in the future.
- 2.4.7 We also emphasised the importance of continued scrutiny on the ground at a local level where services are delivered and outcomes seen. We heard that local scrutiny arrangements within individual authorities are in place and



accountability within Swansea Council is clear but less clear is how scrutiny and accountability of the regional bodies are carried out. We understand that ERW have an informal system in place, that the Swansea Bay City Region is considering this model. Western Bay are interested in using this model, but there are currently no plans to take that forward.

- 2.4.8 We would therefore like to see at least an informal scrutiny arrangement like the one used by ERW within all large partnerships. It was felt that in the future scrutiny should be built in to all new governance arrangements at an early stage. This should then ensure that accountability processes have been considered and built in rather than being an afterthought. It was also felt important that information on the reason for and the value of the role of scrutiny is provided when partnerships are forming.

## **2.5 By ensuring partnerships/regional collaborations are involving the right organisations including the third and private sector**

- 2.5.1 Councillors were keen to hear about the learning points taken from the experience of developing the Wellbeing Plan via the Public Service Board partnership. We felt that it was important that these were shared and used when assessing and developing partnerships moving forward. These include:

- Agreement on a vision and long term thinking is vital
- It remains a challenge to retain drive and ownership across all partners
- Trust must be developed across partnerships as so much depends on individuals and their approach
- It remains a challenge to retain focus on achieving a small number of top priorities, and not get dominated by detail
- Appropriate balance between bottom up and top down approaches need to be struck in terms of agreement on delivery
- Governance arrangements help to provide assurance but do not guarantee successful outcomes

- 2.5.2 The Panel felt it important to ensure that the right people are involved within regional collaboration activities and that this may include the third sector and/or private organisations. The delivery of for example the City Deal will not be possible without the involvement of the private sector.

- 2.5.3 We heard that the Western Bay Programme had evolved since 2012, and supports collaborative working between four statutory partner organisations, together with the third and independent sectors.

- 2.5.4 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 brought about new requirements on statutory partners in the way that services are delivered and the outcomes for citizens. It requires the Local Authority and Health Board to make arrangements to promote co-operation with their relevant partners.

- 2.5.5 ERW said that they have not fully formed their partnership working with private, third or independent sectors but that is on the radar for the future.

## 2.6 **By assessing future resource requirements, ensuring we are learning from past experience and that our future planning is joined up**

2.6.1 We agreed with evidence from the Leader and Chief Executive when they said that we must learn lessons from past experience including other local government reorganisations and attempts at shared services. This along with evidence received as part of this inquiry has helped us to develop a picture of what a good and effective partnership might look like. We believe this will include:

- Strong leadership both political and officer level
- Common systems used across the partnership
- Good communication at every level and with stakeholders
- Good, clear and visible governance and collective decision making
- Good relationship development and build trust in relationship
- Built in resilience
- Champions, sponsors and leads in each partner organisation who can see bigger picture and maintain interest in the partnership
- The need to have a guiding coalition and shared vision
- Councils and its partners committing time and resources to the progression of ideas
- Clear leadership with allocation of time, focus and priority.
- Good governance structures underpin clarity for all those involved. ERW have had some challenges around lines of accountability with staff not sure if they are working for the Local Authority, the region or both. ERW are currently reforming the way they are working to resolve some of these issues
- Harmonise training and skills of staff
- Harmonise employment terms and conditions and other workforce related policies when pooling staff
- Harmonisation of culture of the different teams working together
- A common language and understanding of key aspects.
- Ability to share information and use ICT systems across partnership where appropriate.

2.6.2 We agreed with evidence presented to us by the Director of Resources about what partnerships we participate in, including the need to look at what works well in those partnerships and what needs improvement moving forward. We supported the view that it is important to identify those collaborations that are not adding value and reconsider our participation in them.

2.6.3 We heard that Swansea currently contributes directly to regional working activities by following amounts ERW £68,750, Western Bay £223,000 and City Region £50,000. Excluding these 'big three' the Council makes an annual cash contribution of a total of around £329,010 to all other partnerships. Officer time is not included within these figures and this is estimated to be substantial, at least 600 days per annum plus in many cases the travel cost of going to meetings etc. The Panel recognise that this will only increase as the amount of regional collaboration increases. We also heard that there is currently no systematic way of recording officer time spent on regional

working activities but that an audit of this and all regional working has been carried out and was reported to the Panel. We heard that time taken on regional work is not routinely recorded because officers have to some extent accepted this as part of the 'local job'.

- 2.6.4 With such a large amount of officer time spent in regional working activities, the Panel felt it important that our commitments to different activities should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are essential and provide value for officer time spent (recognising that some that we must be part of). They agreed with the Director of Resources when she said we need to be SMART about the activities we participate in regionally.
- 2.6.5 Councillors heard about the various Regional and All Wales Networks that exist. These cover various working groups with the opportunity to collaborate and share best practice, some of these cover for example, Waste Management, Highways and Transportation, Energy, Housing, Training and Development, homelessness and many more. Many of the groups generally have direct access to Welsh Government and in many cases UK government, which is critical when developing new or changing existing policies. The Panel recognised the importance of participating in these regional and national networks but we must ensure that they add value to the work we do. We suggest that a review takes place of these groups to see if they can be rationalised.
- 2.6.6 We must learn lessons from our experience in the past and also seek out good practice available not only locally but from across Wales and wider afield to help build strong, resilient and effective regional partnerships.
- 2.6.7 We agreed with the representative from Bridgend Zac Shell who said after going through a grant application process with the Welsh Government that he felt better guidance and a more streamlined service from Welsh Government would be highly beneficial. It is a long and drawn out process applying for Welsh Government Funding. We did understand that it is important that the public sector go the extra mile for due diligence when spending public money but would be keen to see the process simplified given that grant applications for collaboration activities are being encouraged and will increase moving forward.

## **2.7 By ultimately ensuring that regional working activities are clearly demonstrating positive impacts for the residents of Swansea**

- 2.7.1 There are some clear benefits and advantages to collaborative working and we should build on these positive experiences, particularly those that are showing direct improvement to our local community. A good example of this was cited in the Western Bay programme of integrated services delivery for service users. Having a shared and co-ordinated regional approach has helped in consistency of service levels while enabling an ease of access to those services.
- 2.7.2 It is important that in the rush to move forward we do not lose the good practice, experience learnt and relationships built.

### **Example of Potential Future Impact of regional working**

The Swansea Bay City Region is a critically important driver for the Welsh and UK economy. However the region is underperforming. The Regions GVA has fallen from 90% of the UK average to 77% over the last three decades with low productivity and high economic inactivity. The economy also has a reliance on traditional primary industries and the public sector for employment.

The Swansea Bay City Deal will generate £1.3 billion of private and public money to be spent over 15 years. The City Deal will provide the region and its partners with the new ways of working and resources to unlock significant economic growth across the Swansea Bay City Region. It provides the opportunity to continue tackling the areas to economic growth. It is estimated that an overall increase to the economy of over 9,000 gross direct jobs with a contribution to regional GVA of £1.8 billion.

- 2.7.3 We looked at the National Assembly for Wales Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry into progress made with local government collaboration (2013). Although the Panel recognise that this was some time ago they feel are many of the points made and recommendations contained are still relevant. In particular *'we firmly believe that the focus of any future local government system should be on the delivery of services and the best way to deliver specific services in specific areas. The number of organisations delivering those services should be a secondary consideration, after it has been decided how different types of services could be most effectively delivered on the ground'*. The Panel agreed with the recommendation made *'the Welsh Government should focus on the areas which collaboration will have the most beneficial outcomes, rather than pursuing a general policy of encouraging collaboration across the piece'*. The Panel were also in agreement with the statement *'adequate provision of resources at the outset can lead to long-term benefits with regard to collaboration'*.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recognise that some of the recommendations are within the Councils control and some will be for our representatives on collaborations to progress through our partnerships. We therefore recommend that:

- 3.1 We continue to be ahead of the game by looking at positive ways forward for Swansea in Regional Working collaborations by being involved, where possible, in pilots/trials that may ease and prepare the way forward for us.**
- 3.2 Address or mitigate the barriers found in existing regional partnerships and use the lessons learnt to inform our new collaboration activities.**
- 3.3 Ensure that we learn particularly from previous large collaborations both positive and negative aspects to help ease our way into new partnership arrangements.**
- 3.4 Ensure all partnerships have an effective governance structure that has**

**a suitable amount of elected member challenge built in, particularly scrutiny in those larger most impactful partnerships like Swansea Bay City Region, Western Bay and ERW.**

- 3.5 That each partnership has one clear structured lead that can facilitate communication between the partnership and scrutiny.**
- 3.6 That we ensure that the current financial and resource implications for Swansea (including quantifying officer time) are clearly and continually understood.**
- 3.8 That a review is undertaken of the regional bodies that we work with, to see if any can be rationalised or amalgamated. We must be SMART about the partnerships which we are involved in to ensure we are adding value for time spent.**
- 3.9 That modern technology is used for meetings to reduce travel time, including, for example skype, video conferencing. Ensuring the right facilities are available for Councillors and staff and that they are encouraged and trained to use them.**
- 3.10 Make more use of the third and private sector bodies in our collaboration activities.**
- 3.11 Make representations to Welsh Government through our different working partnerships about streamlining and simplifying the business case and grant application process.**
- 3.12 Partnerships regularly review their governance, membership and impact. This should include the publishing of an annual report.**

## 4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel would like to record its thanks to the following people who came and gave evidence to us:

- Helen Morgan (City Deal)
- Betsan O'Connor (ERW)
- Sara Harvey (Western Bay)
- Ben George (South West Wales Regional Transport Partnership)
- Zak Shell (Waste Partnership - Bridgend)
- Swansea Council Corporate Management Team
- Cllr Rob Stewart, Council Leader

## 5.0 ABOUT THE INQUIRY PANEL

The **Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel** is a team of Councillors who are not members of the Cabinet. Their role is to examine a strategic issue of concern and to make recommendations about how policies and services can be improved.

### Members of the Panel

#### Councillors

Lyndon Jones (Convener)

Joe Hale

Chris Holley

Mary Jones

Bridgette Rowlands

Mo Sykes

Mike White

The inquiry was supported by Michelle Roberts from the Council's Scrutiny Unit.

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