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**Professor Andrew Davies
Chair of Swansea Public Services
Board**

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BY EMAIL

Summary: This letter is from the Public Services Board Performance Panel. It follows on from the meeting on 5th December 2018 looking at the Working with Nature objective and Public Services Board Governance.

Dear Professor Davies,

On 5th December 2018 the Panel met with Martyn Evans (Head of Operations South West Wales), Max Stokes (Senior Natural Resources Planning Officer) and Suzy Richards (Sustainable Policy Officer) to discuss their thoughts on Public Services Boards and the progress under the Working with Nature objective.

We are grateful to all officers for taking time to attend this meeting considering their busy schedule and for giving us the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on the Panels thoughts.

Statutory Member Question and Answer Session

We heard that the Public Services Board (PSB) work aligns the work of all public bodies and that the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) strategy regarding resilience beckons other public bodies to work together to produce added value. We also heard that social and economic outcomes can only be achieved if ecosystems are resilient as they underpin everything. We agree with this and are encouraged to see that it is a top priority.

We heard that there is currently a focus on gaining momentum around the Working with Nature objective and an intention to listen to what other public bodies are doing to maximise achievements.

We heard that public bodies are contributing to all objectives, with NRW feeding into Early Years work with education aimed at prevention and whilst immediate outcomes

are not necessarily achievable, the long term outcomes will be enormous, recognising sustainability needs continuity.

We were concerned about some recent environmental infringements, it was discussed that the sanctions for these need to be severe and that the legislation is strong in this area with people needing to be held to account. The Panel agree with this and feel that the enforcement powers of the Council and NRW need to be combined.

It was suggested that the PSB should be looking at circular economies where waste does not produce an end product, an example of good practice given was the sustainable development of Scandinavian countries. Wales is a waste crime hotspot despite having a strong waste team.

We heard that there are no areas where collective action is not beneficial and objectives can only be achieved in partnership, however there can be a risk of lack of accountability which the Panel have raised as an issue on previous occasions. We also heard that the profile of PSB is not high enough and as a result does not create meaningful involvement from the public and is not as inclusive as it should be. We would like to see this tackled as projects develop.

Working with Nature - Objective Lead Update on Action Plan

During a presentation about progress, we heard how NRW and the Swansea Environmental Forum (SEF) have been consulting and holding workshops to gather data to feed into the action plan. We heard how they want to get the profile of the environment high on everyone's agenda and that green infrastructure is crucial in Swansea in both rural and urban areas. The Panel agree with this and are glad to see green infrastructure as a key part in development and regeneration plans with NRW having major input. The benefits to physical and mental health as a result of green spaces was highlighted and has long been something the Panel has supported.

We were told that if a person does not live within 5 minutes of a green space, the chances of them accessing one dramatically drops. This is just one of the reasons why we believe quality green space is essential.

We heard that the current PSB green infrastructure projects want to improve knowledge and understanding around the benefits of working with nature but this will require a real collaborative effort. We were told there is currently a tool being developed to help people understand what a 'good' green space is this comes along with climate change awareness resources.

We were told that 6 area statements including a marine area statements would be published between December 2019 and April 2020 and these will improve opportunities and actions for people in those areas linking to ecosystem services. NRW and SEF are currently trying to engage people to get these area statements correct with meaningful input.

It was encouraging to hear that trees are being planted as a result of PSB work and that grants have been approved as a result of the collaborative work under PSB.

It was highlighted that in order to succeed in these projects it is important to achieve a streamline approach and synergy. We heard that success needs good relationships and scrutiny will continue to monitor progress and collaboration.

Governance Update

As part of an ongoing monitoring item, the Panel have a Governance update at each meeting.

We heard that the role of the PSB is about ways of working and prioritising work with the purpose to improve well-being in Swansea and doing this by contributing to the national goals. That it is important to pay attention to the steps under each objective which we are legally bound to deliver.

We heard how some restrictive ways of working such as agenda formats can restrain the meeting format but the relationships between organisations have improved. It was encouraging that the Working with Nature objective and the Human Rights Cities came directly from consultation.

We also heard public relations needs to be addressed via the governance review as it was assessed as 'poor' but there is no budget for communications which will make it a challenge.

Finally, we heard how there needs to be mechanisms in place to capture the added value which is assessed under collaboration activity rather than outcome. The Panel will continue to monitor the progress and development of the governance of the PSB.

There is no requirement for you to respond to this letter but your thoughts and comments are welcome.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Mary Jones

Convener, Public Services Board Scrutiny Performance Panel

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