



**To/  
Councillor Rob Stewart  
Leader of the Council / Cabinet  
Member for Economy & Strategy**

**BY EMAIL**

cc Cabinet Members

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Leader / Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 14 January 2019. It is about the Swansea Bay City Deal, Brexit Preparedness, and the Public Services Board.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

### **Cabinet Member Question Session – 14 January**

Thank you for attending the Scrutiny Programme Committee on 14 January 2019 and answering questions on your work as Leader / Cabinet Member for Economy & Strategy.

We appreciate you providing a written paper in support of your appearance. The Q & A session gave us an opportunity to explore priorities and achievement in relation to your wide-ranging areas of responsibility.

We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion, share the views of the Committee, and, where necessary, raise any outstanding issues / actions for your response. The main issues discussed are summarised below:

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## **Swansea Bay City Deal**

The Committee asked you about developments with the Swansea Bay City Deal Programme. In particular we questioned you about the various reviews that have been announced and their impact on projects.

You informed us that there were three separate reviews being carried out but these were all being dovetailed:

- an internal review being conducted by Pembrokeshire Council concerning the issues around the Llanelli Wellness Village / Delta Lakes project led by Carmarthenshire Council;
- an internal governance review of the Programme commissioned by you as Chair of the Joint Committee; and
- an independent review by UK and Welsh Governments, which you stated was the last stage of assurance prior to approval of City Deal business cases and release of funding.

The Committee noted your confidence that these reviews would not give rise to any concerns or impact negatively on the timetable for project delivery. You told us that reviews should be concluded around mid-February and were positive about the release of initial government funding before the end of this financial year, for the first set of projects, and further instalments within 3-6 months of the new financial year for the second phase of projects.

### Swansea City and Waterfront Digital District Project

You reported that the project plans include a 3,500-seat digital indoor arena at the current LC car park site in the city centre that will accommodate music concerts, touring shows, exhibitions, conferences, gaming tournaments and other events. We asked you about the awareness of the arenas planned for Cardiff and Newport and their effect / impact on our plans. You stated that the development of an arena was part of a strategy to re-purpose the city centre for leisure not just retail and that the need for an arena was identified by development partners as a market gap which would improve Swansea as a visitor destination. We heard that market experts had advised this would be the right size arena for the area and you felt it would not be in direct competition with larger arenas in other cities.

We talked in general about the future of the City Centre and various regeneration and development plans to attract businesses and people, including Swansea Central, Castle Square and Wind Street. With increasing on-line retail we understood the need to adapt and focus on a mixed approach with more accommodation and attractions, as well as improved shopping experience, to draw people in. You highlighted in particular the need for offerings that will appeal to families, developing the café culture and creating performance spaces that will add to reasons for visiting the City Centre.

You responded to concern about the increasing development of student accommodation in the city centre and possible impact on the night time economy – fears that it would make it less attractive to other visitors. You were clear that an increase in people (be it students, professionals or families) living in the city centre would drive demand, improve the economy and lead to a more vibrant and revitalised centre. You added that more purpose built student accommodation should also reduce the demand for HMOs.

The Committee also discussed job and skills opportunities resulting from development in the city centre. You stated that the Council would continue to source labour and materials locally as much as possible and also link with education and industry to develop the skills needed in the future. You referred to the Skills and Talent Initiative Project as a key element of the City Deal - part of Phase 2 of the Programme. Working alongside partners from the private sector, higher and further education, schools and the third sector, the Project will map out gaps in current provision and establish the skills and training needed for students, teachers and lecturers both now and in future, and aim to develop bespoke education and training solutions. We asked for some detail around the engagement with schools, and you stated that this had not been developed yet, however added that the Regional Learning & Skills Partnership would be a good vehicle to deliver this.

With regard to Swansea Central – Phase 2 you reported that work is underway in relation to the scope of this phase, and a new retail and leisure offering in the city centre that would be driven by the delivery of the Digital Area and surrounding development. We noted that discussions are ongoing with Department of International Trade about promoting the opportunity globally.

### **Brexit Preparedness**

We asked you about the possible impact of, and Council preparedness for Brexit. We recognised there is still much uncertainty about what will happen but understood that you were working on this issue nationally with the Welsh Local Government Association as well locally as Council Leader. When we met you the prospect of a ‘no-deal’ Brexit loomed large and is still a possibility. We wanted to know whether work has been carried out to understand the implications for Swansea and the region, and to ensure that we are as well prepared as possible for what may lie ahead.

You reported that preparations for Brexit were underway at WLGA and local level. We noted that Brexit has already been identified as a key corporate risk and a Steering Group has been established in order to discuss the impacts and mitigate the risk. We noted that the Brexit Steering Group has completed a self-assessment for the Wales Audit Office which was designed to assess the arrangements that Local Authorities and other Public Sector bodies are putting in place to prepare for Brexit. However, you stressed that with so much uncertainty and decisions yet to made, the effects, and how far reaching

the effects would be, were difficult to predict, many of which would be outside of the Council's control. You told us that any form of Brexit would make the UK and Wales economy poorer and highlighted that Swansea has had significant benefit from EU funding.

We discussed some of the issues around Brexit that may affect us locally, for example on the local workforce and employment, business, supply chains (including food and medical supplies), and possible impact on legislation (e.g. around environmental protection). You mentioned in particular that such issues would put pressure on an already fragile social care market. You stated that the Council was doing all it could in terms of preparedness, to a point - without a clear decision on Brexit you stressed that it is difficult to plan.

We asked about Council spending on preparedness and we noted that to date it has been about officer time (including collaborative working / alliances with other Councils, including Cardiff and Newport, to discuss common problems / interests the region) however you anticipated there would be money available from Welsh Government in due course specifically for Brexit.

Your overall message was loud and clear. You told the Committee to be under no illusions about potentially huge impacts from Brexit and shared some concern about the possible damage from mis-information being spread across social media. You felt this would be a big challenge for government at all levels to keep people well informed with the facts and counter any misleading information. We were pleased to hear about a meeting that had been organised by the Council for EU Citizens on 23 January giving advice about the EU Settlement Scheme.

### **Public Service Board (PSB)**

The Committee is responsible for scrutiny of the PSB. As you know we have established a Performance Panel to help discharge our responsibility and ensure effective scrutiny. However, we took the opportunity to ask your view about the added value of the PSB, over and above collaborative working that would perhaps have taken place anyway.

Having chaired the PSB (and predecessor Local Service Board) since its establishment we noted that since October you have been acting as Vice-Chair, supported by the Deputy Leader - the Chair of the PSB now being Andrew Davies, Chair of ABMU Health Board. You explained that this change supports collaborative working as in the past the Council was perceived to be the lead. You felt that the current chairing shifts that perception and will ensure it is driven by partners who have the platform to play a more active role.

You reflected on your experience as chair of the PSB and credited the PSB for progress in tackling issues such as NEETS, Domestic Abuse, Early Years, and environmental priorities. You referred to the Well-being Plan agreed by

the PSB and well-being objectives, which actively engaged citizens, the public, private and third sectors throughout the process. You told us that this Plan was a demonstration of the PSBs commitment to shared objectives and understanding that more can be delivered together through the PSB. You stated that the PSB and the relationship between partners has developed and close engagement on issues has improved, though of course wanted to see that improve further.

We referred to a recent scrutiny meeting with Sophie Howe, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, who gave us a mixed review of the way PSBs were working across Wales. You acknowledged that there is more to do in terms of targeting resources and actions to deliver on the objectives and goals, to ensure that the PSB is not viewed as simply a talking shop. You told us that it was incumbent on all partners to ensure that the PSB is effective. You referred to the driver diagrams that have been developed which showed each partners' contribution to the objectives.

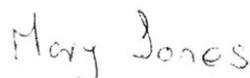
You recognised some difficulties faced by partners who, because of regional footprints, were involved in multiple PSBs. You welcomed any changes that would relieve the pressure and enable a greater focus on delivery, e.g. one PSB for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, though not at the cost of the work already done on the Well-being Plan and Objectives. You concluded by saying that collaboration, in whatever form, must be for the right reasons, and with the right partners – not something that can be forced upon partners – with a footprint that makes sense. You told us that the PSB have clear Well-being objectives and outcome goals, which should drive it to deliver. The PSB Scrutiny Performance Panel will of course continue its close monitoring of the PSB to see the difference that it is making. We are aware that a governance review of the PSB is in progress and look forward to learning more about that.

## **Your Response**

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome any further comments however we do not expect you to provide a formal response.

We will arrange to follow up on portfolio developments and invite you to a future Committee meeting in due course.

Yours sincerely,



## **COUNCILLOR MARY JONES**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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