



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart &
Councillor Andrea Lewis,
Joint Chairs of Swansea Public
Services Board
BY EMAIL**

cc: Vice-Chair of Swansea PSB

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2021-22/1

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Joint Chairs of Swansea Public Services Board following the meeting of the Committee on 15 June 2021. It is about the performance of the Public Services Board.

Dear Councillor,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 15 June

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session on the Public Services Board (PSB) with our views.

As part of our ongoing scrutiny, the Committee heard from two of the four Statutory Members of the PSB: Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service (MAWWFRS) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) about their organisation's role and responsibilities in relation to the PSB, and on the delivery of PSB Well-being Plan objectives that they are leading on.

This was further evidence to the Committee on how the PSB is performing and making a difference for citizens, and follows on from the December 2020 PSB Scrutiny session, at which we considered the PSB Annual Report 2019/20, and got an overview of progress made by the PSB, and the current situation. We wrote to you reflecting on that meeting in January and highlighted within that letter the need for the PSB to:

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
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- a) improve the performance framework to better evidence the tangible difference the PSB is making.
- b) improve public visibility / messaging about the work of the PSB
- c) press the Welsh Government on PSB resources

At our meeting in June we heard from Roger Thomas, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, MAWWFRS (also vice-chair of the PSB Joint Committee), Steve Davies, Group Manager, MAWWFRS (operational lead on the PSB Well-being Objective 'Strong Communities'), Hamish Osbourne, Swansea Environment Team Leader, NRW, Philip McDonnell, Coordinator, Swansea Environmental Forum (operational lead on the PSB Well-being Objective 'Working with Nature'), and Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive, Swansea Council.

This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee, and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - main issues summarised below.

Making a Difference

We asked what distinguishes the PSB from the organisational activities / collaborative working that perhaps might happen anyway in the delivery of shared objectives, e.g. what difference does the PSB as a body, and PSB Joint Committee when it meets, add or make?, what is it that the Statutory Members make happen? We heard how the PSB is considered a catalyst for wider partnership working across Swansea, providing space for senior members of each organisation to come together, and acting as an enabler for collaboration on tackling the key issues, both Well-being Plan objectives and specific issues that may arise and need wider involvement, and sharing of knowledge and expertise.

It was acknowledged that, in some areas, there is already effective partnership working, not dependent on the PSB, but overall we were told that the PSB, whilst not a perfect body, has served to strengthen relationships across public service providers, and with other sectors, with the Joint Committee maintaining an overview of partnership working, and taking decisions that will improve joint working and engagement and deliver shared objectives.

The Committee remarked upon minutes of previous PSB Joint Committee meetings, which could be clearer to the observer in respect of showing the outcomes from each meeting, to evidence positive action.

Performance Framework

Further to our views on improving the performance framework to better evidence the tangible difference the PSB is making, the Committee would like to see target setting, clearer measures of performance / success and reporting of achievement attached to each of the PSB Well-being Plan objectives, ideally shown in the form of action plans, with milestones and timescales. This will facilitate our ability to assess progress, and scrutinise and challenge the performance of the PSB, to see whether you have done what you said you would and direction of travel, etc. We understand that this would mean a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, in order to provide something meaningful. The Committee noted that this is work-in-progress for the PSB and look forward to an improved performance model.

PSB Resources

There are still issues around PSB resources with a general recognition that pump-priming is necessary to accelerate collaborative working, and for the PSB to make a bigger difference and impact. Whilst the PSB may facilitate good engagement between partners, without that investment the PSB will remain challenging and, with respective organisations always under pressure to tighten their belts (not to mention financial challenges from the pandemic), this is a risk to its sustainability. A comparison was made with the relatively good level of financial support Regional Partnership Boards receive to support the delivery of health and care services. We noted that partners lobby the Welsh Government at every opportunity, and learned that some money has been forthcoming from the Welsh Government specifically for collaboration with Neath Port Talbot PSB to develop a common approach for the Assessment of Local Well-being for 2022.

Nevertheless, partners did feel that significant benefits have come out of the PSB, for example in progressing work on the shared 'Working with Nature' Well-being objective, and working together on advancing the development of Green Infrastructure in the City Centre, helped by PSB support including funding from NRW. There are benefits that can result from doing things differently; making better use of existing resources or with the additional of what might seem modest sums.

The issue of PSB mergers is still one that is live. It is possible that involvement in multiple PSBs by organisations that already work on a regional footprint impacts on their ability to engage more effectively with each local PSB, and mergers would help them.

Governance

We also asked whether the overall governance of the PSB could be improved further; though understand that the operation of the PSB, since agreeing a new streamlined governance structure in 2019, has been impacted upon by the pandemic, e.g. affecting ability to hold PSB Partnership Forum meetings. We also queried the relationship between Objective Delivery Working Groups and the PSB Joint Committee, e.g. was there a clear line of communication between strategic leads and those working 'on the ground' to deliver objectives / work streams, to ensure awareness, with clear monitoring and feedback processes. We heard that the absence of the Partnership Forum has hindered things, in terms of wider information sharing of progress and awareness; however, the Objective Delivery Groups do report to the PSB Joint Committee. With the worst of the pandemic hopefully behind us, perhaps lessons learned over the past 15 months might help re-shape and re-focus things further so that the PSB can be more agile.

There was also some discussion, both in reference to the 'Strong Communities' Well-being objective and wider PSB involvement, of the role of the Police in multi-agency working. There was some concern about front-line police resources to support local work. We were assured that the Police were an active supporter of the PSB and committed, with meetings well attended, and that they were integral to the 'Strong Communities' work.

Scrutiny Views

From our discussion, the Committee would highlight the following issues in terms of providing challenge to the PSB for improvement:

a) Improve the clarity of action and outcomes from meetings.

The Committee would suggest that minutes of PSB Joint Committee meetings could be clearer to the observer, in respect of showing the outcomes from each meeting, to evidence positive action.

b) Improve the ability to measure progress in the delivery of Well-being objectives.

The Committee would like to see target setting, clearer measures of performance / success and reporting of achievement attached to each of the PSB Well-being Plan objectives, ideally shown in the form of action plans, with milestones and timescales.

c) Reflect on PSB governance in light of lessons learned from the pandemic.

The Committee would suggest that the PSB consider how lessons learned over the past 15 months might help re-shape and re-focus things further to create a more agile PSB.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome any comments, however we do not expect you to provide a formal response. However, we do expect the PSB to consider our views and the Committee will follow up on progress in addressing these issues.

We are planning our next PSB Scrutiny session for 14 December, at which we are looking to focus on the work of the Health Board and Swansea Council as the other Statutory Members of the PSB, and progress with delivery of the Early Years and Live Well, Age Well PSB Well-being Plan objectives, hopefully with action plans to show progress. If available, the Committee will also be able to consider the PSB Annual Report for 2020/21, and follow up on any issues arising from scrutiny, and action taken.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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