



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart
Leader / Cabinet Member for
Economy, Strategy & Finance
BY EMAIL**

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2021-22/6

23 November 2021

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Leader following the meeting of the Committee on 19 October 2021. It is about the Council's Recovery & Transformation Plan – Swansea Achieving Better Together.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 19 October

We are writing to you following our scrutiny session to monitor and challenge Council action in relation to the Council's Recovery and Transformation Plan – 'Swansea Achieving Better Together'.

Thank you for attending the Committee on 19 October 2021. We are grateful to you and the Deputy Chief Executive for the report, updating the Committee on the current situation and main headlines so we could see how things have developed since our discussion in March. 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.

You highlighted that whilst the focus was on recovery, the pandemic was still very much with us with concerning levels of infection across the UK and continued pressure on services, particularly health & social care. Along with upcoming winter pressures, coupled with the impact of Brexit, this will be very challenging. As such, we acknowledged that the Phases and timelines noted within the Recovery & Transformation Plan were fluid.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE

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We asked about whether the Council's work on recovery and transformation was like other Councils, and what, if anything, this Council has learned from others, whether about process or solutions. You highlighted that Swansea Council had managed to not reduce key services, unlike other Councils. We heard that the Council has worked closely with the Welsh Local Government Association and looked at what other Councils have been doing, and Swansea's work as a transforming Council, in comparison, has been held up as good practice.

We asked about headlines and tangible achievements to date since agreement of the Plan and journey to re-mobilise and re-focus the Council. We were given numerous examples in relation to recovering, restarting & adapting Council services, and the strategic response to support the city to emerge and grow from the pandemic and deliver corporate priorities. We noted that work on the five work streams (focus on Care Services, Education & Learning, Economy & Environment, Community Support, and Future Workforce & Equalities) continues, with specific topics identified for each. It was highlighted that the Plan placed emphasis on partnership working.

There was discussion about communication with councillors regarding Economic Recovery Fund applications, including Capital Scheme Applications, Play Scheme Application and Recovery Fund applications for community priorities. The Committee asked whether there was any possibility of streamlining the process for Economic Recovery Fund applications, grants to businesses, etc. to avoid undue delay in the processing. We understood the need to comply with appropriate approval / audit processes but would suggest reviewing this to ensure that, between Directors, Cabinet Members and the Recovery, Reshaping & Budget Strategy Board, the Council is dealing with applications as swiftly as possible. We noted that programme managers were in place to deliver schemes once approved.

Looking at the governance structure for 'Swansea - Achieving Better Together' and co-ordination / overview of work streams, we sought clarity about reporting lines and mechanisms, and councillor representation and engagement in the delivery of the plan. We asked about the extent to which work streams benefitted from the input of councillors and in response noted the integration of work streams with the work Policy Development Committees and that there would be other forms of councillor engagement (e.g. consultative workshops) as necessary. We noted that, within the governance structure, the Organisational Cross Cutting & Transformation Steering Group played a key role in oversight and co-ordination of the different work streams, identifying synergies. As well as formal reporting to Scrutiny and Governance & Audit Committees, Committee members stressed the importance of good communications with all councillors on recovery and transformation work, as the whole Plan looks complex from a backbencher point of view.

We asked about the effect of the pandemic on regeneration projects. It was noted that planned developments had progressed well, despite circumstances, with only minor delays for example to the Arena Development and practical completion was expected by the end of the year. Events for 2022 were now booked for the Arena and tickets on sale. You did highlight that impacts of Brexit, as well as the pandemic, had affected the availability of labour and supplies (e.g. building materials) but stated this has been managed well to date. You also referred to progress on various projects, including: Copr Bay, Kingsway, Mariner Street, Palace Theatre, former Oceana site, Community Hub on Oxford Street, Wind Street, Castle Square, Penderyn Whisky Distillery & Visitor Centre, Skyline, Tidal Lagoon, and City Centre Phase 2 to which the regeneration company Urban Splash had recently been appointed as development partner. We talked about the importance of, and asked about your confidence in, delivering Phase 2 of City Centre development, and its impact on the overall Recovery & Transformation Plan. You felt that there was now a significant momentum of private sector interest and investment and assured the Committee that the Council will look at the best funding and investment model for delivery of Phase 2, having very much led the development of Phase 1 due to necessity.

We asked about the extent to which the Plan reflected Council priorities in relation to the natural environment, not just concerning Climate Change. We heard that biodiversity, climate change and natural environment was considered in all work undertaken as well as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 being incorporated into all strategies. We were pleased to hear that the Council's Climate Change Action Plan would shortly be revised as a Climate Change and Nature Action Plan, as they are intrinsically linked.

Looking forward, specific mention was made of the following as key targets between now and the end of this Council term in May 2022:

- Assessing the financial impact of COVID-19 and shaping the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- Review / Update of the Corporate Plan
- Workforce Strategy
- Regional Economic Delivery Plan
- Development of a Corporate Joint Committee
- Co-production Strategy
- Consultation & Engagement Strategy
- Continue and expand public communications
- Volunteering Strategy
- Capitalise on the new Arena and increase in visitors
- Continued regeneration and attracting inward investment

It was clarified that the structure of the Council's future workforce was not something that could be determined in the next few months but would be a matter to be considered by the new Council post May 2022 elections, the appointment of a new Chief Executive, and subject to a new Corporate Plan and future spending assessments.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome any comments on any of the issues raised within; however, we do not expect you to provide a formal response. However, you will note particular advice within the letter about:

- streamlining the process for Economic Recovery Fund applications, grants to businesses, etc. to avoid undue delay in the processing and ensure the Council is dealing with applications as swiftly as possible.
- good communications with all councillors on recovery and transformation work, to ensure it is well understood.

We will revisit this topic within the Committee's work plan and a further progress report will be requested in due course given its importance.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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