



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**Cllr Rob Stewart**  
**Chair of Swansea Public Services**  
**Board**

*Please ask for:*  
*Gofynnwch am:*

Overview & Scrutiny

*Direct Line:*  
*Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 637257

*e-Mail*  
*e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

**BY EMAIL**

*Our Ref*  
*Ein Cyf:*

*Your Ref*  
*Eich Cyf:*

*Date*  
*Dyddiad:*

9 June 2017

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Public Services Board Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Chair of the Public Services Board following the meeting of the Panel on 12 April. It reflects on the Panel's Q & A sessions over the last few months with members of the Public Services Board Core Group.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

### **Q & A sessions with the PSB Core Group Members**

This letter provides you and the Public Services Board (PSB) with feedback following meetings of the Public Services Board Scrutiny Performance Panel with members of the PSB Core Group, during the last municipal year. The letter was held back due to the council elections in May and awaited confirmation of your re-election as council leader.

We understand that the Core Group is responsible for: planning the work of the PSB; setting the agenda for meetings; leading and managing the work streams; and reviewing and developing the PSB.

The Panel had already written to you following our meeting with Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS), one of the PSB's invited participants. We made you aware of concerns around their ability to contribute effectively to the PSB given financial pressures on the organisation, and asked how the PSB can develop a budget to facilitate the involvement of smaller organisations in supporting the work of the PSB who otherwise may struggle to contribute. We also asked for the PSB, as it develops a communications

strategy, to focus on community engagement and ways of taking forward co-production, and not just on promoting key messages.

We since met with Andrew Davies, chair of ABMU Health Board (and vice-chair of the PSB), Martin Jones, Chief Superintendent South Wales Police, Martyn Evans, Head of Operations South West Wales, Natural Resources Wales, and Mick Crennell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and Cllr Janice Dudley, Chair of the Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service. Our sessions helped the Panel to understand the contribution Core Group Members and their organisations are making to the work of the PSB. A session with the Welsh Government representative, that will complete the series of Q & A sessions, will need to take place early in this municipal year.

This letter reflects on our Q & A sessions, issues raised, and the views and recommendations of the Panel, including any matters we would like the PSB to consider.

### **Commitment to partnership working**

The Panel heard a clear commitment to the PSB from Core Group members, attributed in part to its statutory footing. There was a view that the change from Local Service Boards to Public Services Boards has provided a far better opportunity for engagement at the highest levels of each organisation.

We had the impression that all welcomed the opportunity to work together and saw how their organisation was connected to the improvement of health and wellbeing, and mutual dependencies in tackling the big issues facing Swansea. There was also recognition of the mutual benefits in delivering agreed objectives. Core Group Members demonstrated to the Panel how they are contributing to PSB priorities. We heard examples of work that is supporting the independence of older people (dealing with the challenges of an ageing population) and work focussed on providing a good start in life (investment in early years).

However, you should note that the Panel heard some concerns about the extent to which the PSB was operating as a team. All recognised that the PSB was still at the early stages of development and a challenge for all. It was clear to the Panel that there was much relationship building to do, changing of cultures, and 'thinking time' needed for effective collaboration to be achieved.

We acknowledged that Natural Resources Wales (NRW) was new to the Public Services Board, and the organisation saw this as an opportunity for strong connections to be made between the work of NRW and other partners. We saw evidence of their commitment to PSBs across Wales, and heard a strong view about the contribution NRW can make and its relevance to improving the quality of life. An argument was made for the PSB to raise the

importance of tackling the environmental issues that have a wider effect on the City and County of Swansea. This includes issues such as air quality, water quality, waste, climate change and renewable energy. This is something the PSB will need to think about as it develops its Wellbeing Plan and considers new objectives.

However, the Panel also realised that the extent to which the commitment to working together would be supported by financial contributions was an altogether more complex matter.

### **Pooled funding to tackle PSB priorities**

The Panel asked about their position on pooled funding to support specific PSB projects, which we know is something you are trying to progress. We sensed that this was not straightforward. Whilst there was not an aversion, it was apparent that not all are convinced about the necessity or benefits of this approach. Given current austerity, there is more emphasis on the commitment of staff resources and its value, rather than financial contributions.

What appeared more important than any discussion about pooled budgets was the agreement of, and commitment to, shared objectives, i.e. seeing pooled budgets as a means to an end and not an end in itself. We were told that an alignment of budgets would then be more feasible or other ways to marshal resources for PSB projects would follow.

Partners, such as the Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Service, were keen to explore opportunities for co-production, co-location and collaboration that need not involve financial resources, but more effective use of staff resources.

In the case of the Police, we heard that they were unlikely to be in a position to contribute financially directly to the PSB but would instead focus on aligning their resources to support PSB objectives. We acknowledged that the police budget and service was not devolved to the Welsh Government. However, we heard about the other ways in which South Wales Police were funding projects benefitting Swansea, subject to a clear evidence base.

We did note that the Health Board has committed £10k to the PSB however the Panel is unclear about the purpose of this funding, and asks for your clarification. There was some confusion within the Panel about whether this was to support the running of the PSB or whether it is to support specific priorities.

We look forward to hearing more about developments on the issue of pooled funding, and in particular whether the commitment from partners to fund additional Local Area Coordinators has been achieved. The Panel feels that this will be a mark of the effectiveness of the PSB. Continued difficulty to

secure funding to support PSB priorities and objectives may suggest they are not high enough priority amongst partners and therefore not shared or that proposals lack a strong business case or confidence about impact.

### **Making a difference**

We have already highlighted the need for the PSB to develop a performance management framework in order to be clear about actions, monitor progress against targets, and evaluate achievements and the effectiveness of the PSB.

One way in which the PSB can help to demonstrate its effectiveness is by communicating its work and achievements. The view from Core Group Members was that a greater promotion and publicity of successful collaborative working, showing what has changed 'on the ground', would increase awareness of good work that is going on and public confidence. Core Group members agreed that outcomes for citizens were paramount.

### **PSB arrangements across Wales**

The Panel is aware of conflicting opinion about current arrangements for PSBs across Wales. We acknowledged the difficulty caused to some partners regarding the incompatibility of authority and regional boundaries. It was clear from our discussions that this posed a particular challenge for some of our partners, who, like the ABMU Health Board, would prefer a reduction in the number of PSBs and alignment with regional boundaries which they already operate under. Whilst not everyone may be happy with whatever arrangements are in place, we can see how this issue would affect the capacity for organisations to engage effectively in local priorities, which may differ across PSBs. The streamlining of the work and objectives of PSBs, within their regional footprint, appeared to be key to them, and the collaborative working between Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff authorities and partnership working in that area was cited as a positive example for others.

Although you have told us that it was difficult to identify good practice with the experience to date, partners shared their experience of working with other PSBs, and approaches elsewhere. We noted that there are variations in approach, for example in the preparation of Wellbeing Assessments, which have presented another challenge for those partners involved in more than one PSB. However the feeling was that there was an opportunity for learning from others, and there was a suggestion that examples elsewhere could help the Swansea PSB. A specific example of the experience in Bridgend PSB was mentioned where priority was given initially to developing partner relations and understanding about each other's roles, leadership, and priorities, through workshops, resulting in a more cohesive PSB. We noted

that this type of approach is now being adopted in Swansea following discussion and agreement by the Core Group.

### **Communities First Programme**

Further to our discussion with you in February, there was agreement amongst Core Group Members that the PSB should discuss the impact of the ending of the Communities First Programme, to understand and consider how it can mitigate issues that may arise. The Panel would expect to see this as an agenda item at a forthcoming PSB meeting. There should be concern about the possible effects, which may cut across organisations, projects, initiatives and services within the partnership, and discussion about managing the transition.

### **Your Response**

In your response we would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically refer to our request for you to:

- consider how the PSB can raise the importance of tackling the environmental issues that affect Swansea, and identify issues such as air quality, water quality, waste, climate change and renewable energy within PSB priorities;
- clarify the financial commitment from the ABMU Health Board to the PSB
- tell us about developments on the issue of pooled funding, and whether the commitment from partners to fund additional Local Area Coordinators has been achieved; and
- schedule a PSB discussion on the impact of the ending of the Communities First Programme.

I would be grateful if you could reply to this letter by 30 June 2017.

We will then include both letters in the agenda of the next available scrutiny meeting.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Mary Jones**

Convener, Public Services Board Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ [cllr.mary.jones@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.mary.jones@swansea.gov.uk)