



**To/
Councillor Rob Stewart
Cabinet Member for Economy and
Strategy**

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 637256

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

*Date
Dyddiad:*

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BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Strategy following the meeting of the Panel on 15 October 2019. It is about progress with recommendations resulting from a scrutiny inquiry into regional working.

Dear Councillor Stewart,

Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel – 15 October 2019

We would like to thank you and Phil Roberts for providing an impact report and attending our Panel meeting to discuss progress with the recommendations agreed by Cabinet on 18 August 2018 that had resulted from the Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry.

You told us that since the inquiry concluded in 2018, there has been some movement in relation to regional working in Wales. This includes clearer details from Welsh Government on the proposals for improved collaboration and the operation of Joint Committees. In addition, the WLGA have been involved in detailed discussions with Welsh Government and a Wales Bill detailing these and other changes is now imminent.

We were pleased to hear that the Chief Executive has been holding informal discussions with the Minister and with senior civil servants with a view to preparing a regional proposition following discussions with neighbouring councils.

We heard that reviews of the existing arrangements have informed the developing strategy for collaboration and the preference for a four council footprint in South West Wales as a basis for future partnership arrangements. You explained that the most logical footprint for Swansea is that of the City Region area, which includes the four Local Authorities of Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire,

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SWANSEA COUNCIL / CYNGOR ABERTAWE

GUILDHALL, SWANSEA, SA1 4PE / NEUADD Y DDINAS, ABERTAWE, SA1 4PE

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Carmarthenshire and Swansea. Although, you did say that this would not include Health for the moment because considerations around this are rather more complex. We felt that it is very positive that we have clarity amongst the four local authorities about the way to move forward. We recognise that these four authorities have experience of delivering projects together and have many common strategies, especially around economic development and education improvement.

We were pleased to hear that separate reviews have been undertaken on all three regional partnerships and to hear that the common themes of governance, management and value for money are being looked at.

You explained that little progress had been made in relation to our recommendation about *improving modern technology in order to reduce travel to meetings*. You said that whilst the use of Skype is increasing the level of technological capability and capacity varies between councils. A regional collaboration proposition will aim to address this and seek funding from Welsh Government to do so. We agree that standardisation and investment in the infrastructure across Councils in Wales is needed to move this forward and we agreed to write to the Minister in support of this proposition.

We were interested to hear about the lessons that have been learnt from our current collaborative activities and how this will be of benefit to us in future especially in relation to the need for good programme management, clear and strong governance and sharing of responsibility.

You told us that in November 2019 a legislative Bill is likely to be published that will outline new powers and responsibilities for local councils. It will create challenges and benefits. It will include the general power of competence, which will be hugely important and will sweep away unnecessary bureaucracy around continuous audit introducing peer review. We agreed financial resources must follow any new powers and responsibilities to ensure they can truly be met.

We were pleased to hear that the inquiry had helped to raise the profile of regional working and that it has informed and began to provide clarity on the Council's approach to regional collaboration. We have agreed to sign off this Inquiry as complete and we would like to thank you for your engagement in this piece of work.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES

Convener, Regional Working Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

✉ Cllr.lyndon.jones@swansea.gov.uk