

Dear Councillor Jones

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your letter. I hope you find this response useful, and that it reassures you with regard to the concerns your letter outlines.

Your first questions regarding the impact of the financial deficit if one Council leaves ERW on the overall budget is of course pertinent when one considers that Neath Port Talbot County Council have notified the Joint Committee of their intention to withdraw from ERW by April 2020.

While this is of course a concerning development within the region, I would point out that Neath Port Talbot can reverse this decision at any point between now and their exit date next year, and that their Council Leader has been very clear in his position that the Review and Reform of ERW will play a large part in this decision moving forward. Therefore, the current Review and Reform work being undertaken is of the utmost importance, and we will all work towards improvements that should sufficiently reassure Neath Port Talbot County Council. It should also be noted that Neath Port Talbot have back-paid their contribution for 18-19 and 19-20 in order for the reform programme to continue.

The Joint Committee is fully aware of the risks associated with the withdrawal / non-contribution of a member authority, both in terms of core and grant funding, and this risk has been articulated in our Risk Register which we receive termly. In terms of impact of a financial deficit itself, there are several clauses in the ERW Legal Agreement that safeguard ERW Financially under paragraph 15 – “withdrawal and indemnity for consequences of withdrawal”. If NPT were to complete their withdrawal, the Joint Committee would then take advice from our Monitoring Officer on the best course of action.

Your second question regarding the alignment of governance arrangements with the Scrutiny Councillor Group. I am pleased to hear of your re-structure of your meeting schedules, and believe it will go a long way in streamlining our correspondence, as both groups will now be meeting termly.

In terms of the ERW’s governance arrangements, there is a mandate for a top to bottom review of how the operational work of ERW is reviewed in the Review and Reform document we signed off this year. Some points of note in that agreed document were a Peer Review system between Local Authorities, and a model of Working Groups for key areas of work that would comprise of 3 practitioners, 2 Local Authority staff, and 1 Director of Education.

It is also worth noting that our Directors of Education have jointly agreed that in future, they will receive a monthly overview of regional activities, including exception reporting. The aim of this system is to ensure that any operational shortcomings or concerns can be flagged at Director level, which will then allow the Joint Committee to take a more strategic approach to their function.



While much of this work is in its developmental stage, we would be happy to keep you informed as it develops. I anticipate that the Interim Managing Director and newly appointed Lead Director will have information for you in your June meeting that will prove helpful, particularly on the progress of recruitment and on our reform journey.

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn

