



Dear Leader,

Re: Welsh Government Consultation “Our Valleys: Our Future”

I am writing to you as chair of the Task and Finish Group you have established.

You asked us, as an initial task, to review the Welsh Government’s proposals set out in the document “Our Valleys: Our Future” and to offer you advice on those proposals. To formulate our advice, the Task and Finish Group has met on two occasions and attended the Welsh Government event held at Neath Civic Centre September 12th 2017. I also wrote to all Members of Council and invited them to submit written comments to me.

Our detailed comments on each of the proposals set out in the consultation paper are set out at Appendix 1 for your consideration. In addition to the detailed comments I also offer the following overall comments on behalf of the Task and Finish Group Members:

- We welcome the renewed emphasis that the Welsh Government is giving to the valley communities and especially welcome specific recognition of the Western Valleys of our county borough. We applaud the Minister’s efforts to involve the community and key stakeholders in working up proposals and this opportunity to comment upon proposals before they are finalised;
- We are concerned that there is no new investment identified to support delivery of the Plan. We will want to carefully monitor how existing programmes and funding are re-directed to deliver the commitments agreed upon;
- We understand why the Minister wishes to set out a delivery plan for the remainder of this Welsh Government’ term, however, the regeneration of valley communities will need to be a long term programme and we would therefore wish you to press the Minister for a commitment that this will be the first phase of a much longer term commitment on the part of Welsh Government to address the very real issues that people living in our valley communities face;

- It is difficult to argue with most of what is set out in the document. What we are most interested to see next is the detail of exactly how the aspirations will be met, over what timescale and how progress will be measured and reported upon. The current plan lacks important detail and to be credible the deliverables of the programme need to be more clearly spelled out. We have made some specific suggestions in our detailed response as to how and where the Welsh Government's proposals could be put into practice;
- We believe that for the proposals to have credibility with valley communities, the actions must be specific to valley communities. For this reason, we do not believe it is helpful to reference a strategic hub for Neath in this particular context;
- Critical issues that have to be sustainably addressed if the plans are to have any success include: ensuring digital connectivity is fit for purpose; transport solutions can be developed to address long standing problems which affect access to both work and important services; a stronger emphasis on job creation and entrepreneurship, supported by effective models of business support and new enterprise incubation; tailored and locally delivered training to upskill local people for jobs that are available and can be created locally; and a change in narrative about the valley areas which is particularly relevant to exploiting the potential of tourism, and our industrial and cultural heritage.

I trust you will find the advice of the Task and Finish Group helpful to you in putting together the Council's formal response to the consultation and look forward to discussing the advice with you at Cabinet.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Scott Jones

Chair of the Valleys Task and finish Group

Councillor Scott Jones

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Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymdrin â gohebiaeth Gymraeg a Saesneg i'r un safonau ac amserlenni.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and will deal with Welsh and English correspondence to the same standards and timescales.