

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

JOINT COMMITTEE REPORT

25TH SEPTEMBER 2019

MANAGING DIRECTOR APPOINTMENT

JOINT REPORT OF THE LEAD CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Author: Richard Evans, Director of Human Resources

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To seek the Joint Committee's approval to advertise the post of Managing Director.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To agree that the post of Managing Director be advertised;

2.2 To agree the advert, job description and recruitment pack for the role.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Members will be aware that a formal review of the Consortiums operational model has taken place over the last few months and reports have subsequently been shared with the Joint Committee.

3.2 Members will also recall that the previous Managing Director relinquished his role in December 2018 but due to the formal review of the operational model, interim senior management arrangements have been in place since January 2019.

3.3 As part of the review of the operational model, it is clear that the role of Managing Director is still relevant and therefore the Joint Committee are being asked to consider formally recruiting to that role.

4. REVIEW OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR ROLE

- 4.1 The existing job description and person specification for the Managing Director role has been reviewed and updated with contributions from the five Education Directors.
- 4.2 Following on from that review, a draft advert has also been prepared and again shared with the Education Directors.
- 4.3 This draft advert and revised Job Description and Person Specification has now been incorporated within a draft Recruitment Pack which is attached at Appendix 1 for the Joint Committee's formal review.
- 4.4. Members will note that in terms of any appointment, then in addition to the offer of a permanent appointment to the Managing Director role, the option of a two year secondment has also been recommended. This option has been included to hopefully expand the field of potential applicants to this key role.
- 4.5 In terms of the recruitment process, it is suggested that an advert is placed during October with shortlisting and interviews to take place from the middle of November 2019.



Draft

RECRUITMENT PACK

MANAGING DIRECTOR

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM



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1.0 WELCOME LETTER TO CANDIDATES

Dear Applicant,

RE: Central South Consortium – Joint Education Service

We are pleased you have asked for more information about this key role in the Central South Consortium.

The Central South Consortium and its five partner Local Authorities together are responsible for the educational outcomes of children and young people in more than 400 schools. This makes us the largest consortium in Wales. Our communities which include the economic heartland and capital city benefit from some of the best performing schools in Wales alongside some of the most challenged. Nothing is more critical to the people who live in our area, to our businesses and local politicians than the quality of education that our young people receive.

Results continue to improve, but our children and young people will do much better when each and every school is delivering outstanding teaching and learning and securing continuous improvement and growth.

This is why Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils have put together our resources for school improvement into one organisation which will bring scale, focus and pace to our engagements with, school leaders, teachers, governors, parents and young people. We are excited about the potential for building on the achievements of our first year to develop a really innovative, developmental school and effective improvement organisation which gets behind the efforts of our schools and teachers to transform educational outcomes.

We very much hope that you will want to come and work with us to deliver the best education for the young people of the Consortium.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**COUNCILLOR CHARLES SMITH
LEAD CABINET MEMBER**

**PAUL ORDERS
LEAD CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

2.0 CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

The Consortium is commissioned by, and acts on behalf of, five local authorities to develop a school improvement service that challenges, monitors and supports schools to raise standards. The five local authorities that constitute the Central South Consortium are:

- Bridgend Council
- Cardiff Council
- Merthyr Tydfil Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf Council
- Vale of Glamorgan Council

Many of our communities face significant poverty related challenges; others are amongst the most prosperous in the country. Historically the region has underperformed against schools in Wales. However since 2012, it has seen a steep improvement in learner outcomes at every level and in every local authority. However, we acknowledge there is more to do to secure further improvement and to close the attainment gaps for more vulnerable groups of young people.

The success of schools in this region is the key to the future economic and social success of the country. We want to play a full part in realising the vision for Welsh education detailed in Education in Wales: Our National Mission, delivering an education system that is the source of national pride and public confidence.

The Consortiums 2020 aims, agreed with the five local authorities are that:

1. Children and young people achieve and sustain outcomes that are the highest performing in Wales at most levels in 2018 and sustain it to 2020
2. Schools show sustained improvement at all levels rivalling the best in the UK by 2020
3. Vulnerable children increasingly close the gap on their peers and do so faster than elsewhere in Wales
4. Teaching is excellent for most children, particularly so in schools within the most deprived communities

5. Inspection outcomes show increased levels of excellence in teaching and leadership and in judgements on schools' capacity to improve
6. The region is recognised for the quality of its school-led curriculum, professional learning and leadership and its work with the higher education sector and initial teacher training providers
7. There are wider partnerships involving business, the community and parents working with schools to reinforce aspiration
8. The region works with others to drive up standards and capacity for improving teaching and leadership as part of delivering the new [Curriculum for Wales](#)

HOW WE WORK

The consortium's role is to challenge and support schools in their work to improve educational outcomes. The local authorities (through a [Joint Committee](#) attended by the Cabinet Member for education in each authority) agree the business plan including targets and budget for the region and hold the consortium to account for the impact of its work.

The Consortium is funded by the local authorities. There are approximately 400 schools in the Central South Consortium region. These are the key to the future educational and economic success of Wales. How well children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable, achieve in this region significantly influences how the country and its education system are perceived within our borders and beyond.

THE CONSORTIUM'S BUSINESS PLAN AIMS TO:

- Develop a high-quality education profession;
- Develop inspirational leaders and to facilitate working collaboratively to raise standards;
- Develop strong and inclusive schools that are committed to wellbeing, excellence and wellbeing;
- Develop robust assessment, evaluation and accountability processes supporting self-improving systems;
- Provide professional learning opportunities to support the curriculum for Wales;
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Central South Consortium.

TO DO THIS, THE CONSORTIUM:

- Provides a challenge adviser to each school in the region (with more time allocated to the schools most in need);
- Provides timely data analyses to support schools' self evaluation and improvement planning (including school categorisation judgements);
- Supports and funds school-to-school improvement partnerships. These enable schools to share good practice and learn from each other to improve teaching and leadership practice and improve outcomes for learners;
- Works with the Welsh Government to deliver its priorities in the region;
- Allocates grant funding (e.g. the pupil development grant - PDG) to schools in the region along with guidance and advice on how grant funding can be used to drive improvement.

Further information on the Consortium can be found at
<https://www.cscjes.org.uk/about-us>

3.0 THE ROLE OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

3.1 ADVERT

CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM JOINT EDUCATION SERVICE

MANAGING DIRECTOR POST

Salary £110,000

We are seeking to appoint a highly motivated individual with the knowledge, skills and experience to lead and manage a well-established regional school improvement service on behalf of five local authorities. Whilst this is a permanent role we would also consider the option of a secondment for up to two years. Please note that any secondment arrangement would be at the candidate's current salary if higher than the salary stated above.

We are looking for an outstanding candidate who has the determination and ambition to further develop the vision of a school led system; who understands the drive to build the capacity of the school system to lead the drive for further improvement themselves.

We want to appoint a highly skilled and competent leader who:

- Communicates confidently on behalf of the region with schools, local authorities, national and local politicians, other regions and a range of other partners and can manage the relationship with Welsh Government especially in times of major systemic changes when there are competing demands on the organisation
- Creates within the organisation a team ethos and culture which promotes and implements the region's vision and mission to maximise the life chances of every learner in the region through the delivery of a top-class education.
- Understands and supports others to embrace the changing landscape of the education system in Wales.
- Recognises that school improvement is far wider than the activities of the organisation and facilitates and encourages strong collaboration with local authorities and other partners.
- Can lead and manage the development of the region's short and long-term strategy through robust business planning, sound financial acumen and clear lines of accountability.

What is the Central South Consortium?

The Consortium delivers a school improvement model under the governance of a Joint Committee of cabinet members for education from five local authorities (LA). Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan councils have consolidated resources for school improvement into one organisation.

An independent review has recently been undertaken and as a result all LAs have committed to restating their long term commitment to regional working and are developing new governance arrangements to include a greater engagement of school leaders and to make the process more efficient.

It was acknowledged in the report that the consortium brings economy of scale and encourages the use of common approaches and strategies across a wider group of schools. The consortium provides challenge and support to all schools, distributes grants on an equitable basis and works with school leaders on the development of evidence-based school to school strategies that impact on standards. At the same time, the consortium works with other consortia across Wales, research institutions and the Welsh government to lead policy development and delivery in the region.

It is an innovative model, focused on improvement, efficiency and delivery at all levels of the system. The scope for further development is huge and exciting.

Who are we?

The Central South Consortium works on behalf of five LAs in the South Wales region to deliver school improvement services with 387 schools across all sectors. The organisation is funded through a combination of core local authority contributions and Welsh Government grants. The region is the fastest growing region in Wales covering the capital city and economic heartland of Wales. Schools in the region serve a third of school aged children in Wales as well as both the most diverse and deprived communities of Wales. The region includes many outstanding schools as well as small numbers who still require intensive support and intervention. Nothing is more critical to the people who live in this region than the quality of education that young people receive.

The performance of schools in the region is on the up. From the lowest performing, Central South is now one of the highest achieving regions in Wales for most of the performance measures and has seen the fastest improvement in results, particularly for the most vulnerable learners.

We can however go further, and we want to work with the highest performing schools across Wales and further afield. We want to be a region known for the quality of professional learning for teachers and leaders. Above all, we want to be a region where every school delivers great teaching and learning in every classroom, especially benefitting the most vulnerable learners.

Evidence from the recent review shows that schools are very positive about opportunities to work together across the region and beyond. Our mission is to

enable schools to lead improvement, through the 'Central South Wales Challenge' (CSWC), an approach based on the premise that great practice exists in schools and our job is to develop effective structures and systems for sharing and growing exemplary practice within and across schools. The refreshed CSWC model has been constructed in partnership with headteachers and will build on the previous model but will develop further so that schools in the region are well placed to meet the challenges of WG's major reform programme including a new curriculum and evaluation and improvement arrangements.

Who do we want?

We are looking for a creative and committed Managing Director to lead our regional school improvement service to its next stage of delivery. We are looking for someone who:

- has experience and a strong track record of making an impact in leading a school improvement organisation or group of schools to significantly improve educational outcomes;
- is innovative about strategic sustained school improvement and committed to a school led model of improvement;
- demands high standards, recognises the importance of accountability to local democracy and is unequivocal about the fight against complacency;
- understands that schools serve diverse communities and working in partnership with other services is essential;
- has the skills to manage a range of stakeholders with different views but ensures that the Consortium stays focused on delivering the agreed priorities to benefit schools and all learners in the region:
- can galvanise an effective team working with local authorities and politicians; and
- is committed to leading an organisation to work in partnership with local, regional and national partners to get behind the efforts of schools and leaders to improve learning in Central South Wales.

For an informal conversation contact Paul Order, CSC Lead Chief Executive on 02920 872401

Applications and further details are available at

3.2 JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB DESCRIPTION

Unit:	Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
Post Title:	Managing Director
Salary:	£110,000
Responsible to:	Central South Consortium Joint Committee
Date of Description:	September 2019
Last Updated	September 2019

FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Leadership and management of an ambitious organisation

Providing visible and inspiring strategic leadership and management of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service. This will require recognising the history and achievements of the organisation to date whilst continuing to manage the delivery model to ensure it is as efficient and effective as possible and compliant with local authority, Welsh Government and Estyn expectations. Critical to this is the ability to manage expectations and competing demands of stakeholders. Promoting the role of the consortium through effective brand management via a well-structured communications strategy is also key.

Collaborative leadership

The consortium works on behalf of the five authorities who are committed to the success and accountable for the outcomes of the organisation. This role will need to marry increased autonomy for schools with the accountabilities of LAs in delivering their own statutory responsibilities. There will, subject to local government changes, be opportunities to consider wider functions within the consortium to be delivered in partnership/s across the region. Success means keeping sight of clear outcome measures, political imperatives, good communication and analysis of evidence based on smart data collection. Maintaining an excellent relationship with schools, local authorities and Welsh Government is vital.

Leadership and management of school improvement services

The strategic leadership and delivery of a school led model of challenge and support for schools to include leading an experienced team to work alongside school leaders and teachers providing robust challenge and support for activities based on strong analysis of data and evidence. Managing the delivery of WG's reform programme with the agility to adapt to the requirements of the rapidly changing education landscape in Wales will demand effective people management skills to include identifying and providing high quality professional development for staff.

Growth of system wide school-to-school capacity building measures

We believe that capacity for system wide improvement rests within and across schools. The postholder will take our journey of a school led system to the next level, to work with leading schools and galvanise all governors, headteachers, middle leaders, teachers and support staff to engage with and benefit from a system of school led capacity building and improvement. The scope for this is wide, learning from our success so far and further developing the model with creative and innovative headteachers building on the evidence base to improve teaching and learning for all children especially the most vulnerable. The model will need to have the flexibility to embrace the challenges presented by the WG reform programme especially in preparing schools to meet the demands of the new curriculum.

KEY OBJECTIVES

1. To improve outcomes in education in the schools across the Central South region.
2. To maintain a strategic overview of the school improvement priorities for the region, using robust intelligence, and to configure the appropriate combination of school improvement services to meet the identified needs.
3. To motivate and manage the regional workforce in a way that meets the needs of LAs and the demands of Welsh Government
4. To ensure effective challenge and support to improve self-evaluation and improvement planning processes in all schools, providing support in inverse proportion to need.
5. To ensure effective leadership and structural models delivering interventions where standards are inadequate which have rapid and robust impact on outcomes and sustained capacity to improve.
6. To lead and further develop the 'Central South Wales Challenge' – the school led system for improvement in the region, moving it towards an independent school led model at the right pace and quality. This will include effective governance arrangements, sound financial management and an outcome-based accountability framework, which meet the expectations of all parties.
7. To attract, empower and engage the best leaders of education from within the region and beyond. To seek outstanding practice, grow and share it, to be

relentlessly focused upon building the capacity of the school led system within and across schools, train and develop a high-quality teaching workforce, develop excellent future leaders and above all reflective practitioners who seek to constantly improve for the benefit of all children and young people.

8. To be accountable and have oversight for grant and core budget across the region, distributing grants in line with WG conditions and secure value for money through economies of scale and efficiencies enabling greater delegation of funding to schools.
9. To lead and promote greater collaboration between the five local authorities, and actively pursue opportunities to share good practice.
10. To build and sustain relationships with partners in particular with the constituent councils, other stakeholders including local and national politicians, governors and head teachers.
11. To understand the importance of communication and stakeholder engagement at all levels, and to manage relationships with the Welsh Government in all matters relating to the consortium's role.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

1. To deliver the strategic plan and policies, as well as implementing cultural change, organisational development and facilitate the creation of a common purpose across the service.
2. To seek innovative and creative solutions to meeting the service's need to bring about change and improvement within limited resources.
3. To promote equality of opportunity and access in service delivery and in the employment of staff.

SERVICE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

1. To ensure that services are planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way and in compliance with the Joint Education Service Committee requirements for continuous improvement processes and effective scrutiny.
2. To ensure the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Statutory Service Plans and Business Plans identifying, analysing and responding to changing trends, patterns of demand and performance issues, as necessary.

3. To ensure that service delivery and planning takes account of and is benchmarked against local, regional, national and international performance indicators.
4. To put in place effective arrangements for performance management within the organisation with regular appraisal and reporting processes to evidence impact.
5. To be accountable for personal performance, through meeting agreed personal targets and through undertaking planned programmes of professional development.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

1. To ensure the efficient and, imaginative management of all the services resources, (people, finance, property and information), in support of the agreed targets for service delivery and improvement.
2. To demonstrate an entrepreneurial approach to identifying and pursuing as appropriate, all additional sources of funding or other resources, which could be used to augment those provided by WG and LAs, ensuring that any special accounting or evaluation requirements involved are complied with and that such resources are integrated fully into the financial processes.
3. To work closely with councils, schools, agencies and partners to improve the impact of the way in which budgets are spent and resources are allocated.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND COMMUNICATION

1. To develop and maintain the wider networks and partnerships the consortium needs to deliver its leadership role and to enhance services to its service users.
2. To actively foster and develop positive relationships with all schools, local authorities and other partners, including the voluntary sector and local businesses, as well as with other statutory bodies at regional and national levels, including the Welsh Government.
3. To communicate the consortium's vision, strategy and processes effectively, both internally to staff and externally to partners and the public.
4. To develop and implement effective arrangements for formal consultation with local authorities and partners and with the public, on service planning and delivery issues and for ensuring that comments received feed into policy and decision making, as appropriate.

5. To maintain positive relationships with the media, dealing with and responding to enquiries and taking advantage of public relations and media opportunities as appropriate.

To undertake such other duties and responsibilities commensurate with the grade, as may be reasonably required.

The contents of the document will be subject to review from time to time in consultation with the post holder.

PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS IS A CORE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STAFF. STAFF ARE EXPECTED TO ALERT THEIR LINE MANAGER TO ANY CONCERNS THEY MAY HAVE REGARDING THE ABUSE OR INAPPROPRIATE TREATMENT OF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON, OR VULNERABLE ADULTS.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Post Title:	Managing Director
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This Person Specification sets out the knowledge and/ or qualifications, past experience and personal competencies that would be ideal for this particular post.

The **Knowledge/Qualifications and Experience** sections describe what is required in terms of the technical ability that is needed to do this job successfully.

The **Competencies** section describes the kinds of non-technical skills, abilities and personal characteristics that the ideal person for this particular role would have. The competencies describe how that person would ideally work with other people and how they would approach their responsibilities.

The **Special Conditions and Professional Requirements** section describes any other qualities appropriate to the particular circumstances associated with this role.

<u>ATTRIBUTE</u>	<u>ESSENTIAL</u>	<u>DESIRABLE</u>
<u>KNOWLEDGE / EDUCATION</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • degree or equivalent • relevant professional qualification • thorough knowledge of legislative and regulatory framework in Wales • detailed knowledge of relevant area(s) of service delivery • Level 1 Welsh Language skills (with induction from Welsh language tutor if required) 	
EXPERIENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive experience of successfully leading a group of schools as an Executive Headteacher or Headteacher or managing a major service at Director/ Chief Officer level • experience of working with elected members or the ability to demonstrate that such political sensitivity could be acquired quickly 	

LEADING CHANGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and embraces the need for change and responds positively to a modernising agenda • Develops a creative approach to service delivery • Encourages and supports others, including staff & middle managers, to be innovative 	
DEVELOPING AND MOTIVATING PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and makes the best use of the skills, knowledge and strengths of the team • Develops people for both the immediate and the longer term, and promotes a culture of continuous learning (Workforce Planning) • Ensures that team members are made actively aware of the social and environmental impact of their role 	
COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates open, honest and regular communication with all those who might need it • Communicates clearly and concisely • Communicates early to flag up potential 'surprises' in advance 	
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS AND TEAMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds lasting, positive & constructive relationships with a wide variety of people • Constantly looks for opportunities to improve service provision through working with other services within the LAs and beyond • Promotes and demonstrates an ethos of equality and diversity • Maintains the accountability and governance requirements when making decisions with external partners 	

<p>WORKING STRATEGICALLY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drives strategic priorities based on real need, grounded on well-informed evaluation of data • Sets a strategy that combines departmental strategy, the corporate vision and wider strategic imperatives • Is aware of, and acts on, emerging issues, trends and implications for the region and councils • Has clear knowledge of the connections between the regional service and wider corporate issues • Challenges service delivery to ensure a more sustainable future to improve people's quality of life and the quality of the environment 	
<p>MANAGING RESOURCES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligns core and grant budgets to maximise efficiency within the specific requirements and conditions of both funding streams • Develops creative and radically different approaches to maintain high quality delivery with fewer resources (Workforce Planning) • Finds efficiency savings without compromising service delivery (Workforce Planning) • Anticipates future budget trends early and seeks to make necessary adjustments (Workforce Planning) • Constantly looks for ways to attract money through partnerships and joint commissioning • Successfully manages budgets, understands, uses and analyses numerically presented information 	
<p>FOCUSING ON SERVICE USERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has well developed policies and processes for engaging service users • Ensures services are accessible and are provided equitably • Raises the profile and image of the regional service by publicising successes to the wider community 	

<p>POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes clear, well - justified recommendations • Makes other people aware of political sensitivities and develops others' political understanding • Has a local and national political knowledge and awareness 	
<p>SPECIAL CONDITIONS AND PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS</p>	<p>Ability to travel throughout the Consortium boundaries and beyond to meet the requirements of the post.</p>	

3.4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Consortium recognises and values the diversity of its workforce and is committed to creating a working environment where everyone is respected and where all current and potential staff are afforded dignity and equality of opportunity.

We recognise that false assumptions, prejudice and stereotyping can lead to discrimination. That's why we're committed to actively promoting equality and combating prejudice, discrimination and harassment through the use of policies, procedures and education.

Work-Life Balance Statement

The Consortium recognises that in today's society people want a workplace that is flexible and understands individuals' outside commitments. Our approach to work-life balance is based upon this principle and we seek to provide appropriate ways of achieving this.

Personal Data Statement

This is sensitive personal data and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, in line with the requirements of the Data Protection legislation. The information will only be used for general statistical and monitoring purposes. It will be separated from the application form and will not be given to the selection panel.

The Disability Symbol Scheme

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council who provide support to the Consortium has been awarded the Disability Symbol by Job Centre Plus.

This means that all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job, as identified on the Person Specification, will be invited for interview if the disabled applicant chooses to participate in the scheme.

If you are disabled and wish to be considered under the scheme you may do this when registering on the website if you are applying online. Alternatively if you are applying by post, please complete the form with your application. The information provided will be treated confidentially.

Reasonable Adjustments / Alternative Formats

At any stage of the recruitment and selection process, should you require any information in alternative formats or reasonable adjustments to participate, please do not hesitate to contact Human Resources by e-mailing equality@rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk. Should you be successful in obtaining a post, there are a number of schemes available to assist with reasonable adjustments within the workplace.

3.5 HEALTH AND SAFETY

As an employer, we have a general duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably possible, the health, safety and welfare of our employees. (In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.)

This responsibility means we must pay particular attention to many things, including:

- Providing safe plant and equipment;
- Providing safe systems of work;
- Ensuring a safe place of work with safe access and exits that pose no risks to health;
- Providing information, training and supervision to promote safety at work;
- Providing accessible welfare facilities; and
- Providing, where necessary, personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect staff while carrying out work.

We also carry out regular risk assessments in line with the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations 1999.

4.0 RECRUITMENT TIMETABLE

Closing Date	* October 2019
Short-listing	* November 2019
Assessment Interviews	Day 1 – * November 2019 Day 2 – * November 2019

5.0 LIVING IN THE CONSORTIUM BOUNDARIES

Things to See and Do

Wherever you are in the Consortium, you are always within easy reach of Cardiff, thanks to excellent road and rail links. In Wales' capital, you can enjoy a rich and varied cultural environment including provision at centres such as the New Theatre, the St David's Centre and the Cardiff Motorpoint Arena. There is also the Principality Stadium which is widely regarded as one of the best sporting and entertainment venues in the world. Along with international rugby and football games, it is host to some of the biggest music stars. Cardiff Castle is located in the heart of the city and enjoys a history spanning nearly 2,000 years. The castle is one of Wales' leading heritage attractions and a site of international significance.

There is also Europe's Largest Waterfront Development in Cardiff Bay. Transformed by the Cardiff Barrage that impounds the Rivers Taff and the Ely a massive fresh-water lake has been created. Cardiff Bay is home to a number of attractions such as Techniquest Science Discovery Centre - ideal for all the family, Craft in the Bay, The Welsh Government Building at the Pierhead, Butetown History and Arts Centre, Goleulong 2000 Lightship, the Norwegian Church Arts Centre and the Wales Millennium Centre, a stunning international arts centre.

If you love walking you couldn't come to a better place. But it's not just walkers who will enjoy our spectacular views. If you prefer a less energetic approach to appreciating the great outdoors, you're also in luck. We have some of the highest main roads in the United Kingdom, with viewpoints at all the summits, and sweeping vistas of the picturesque Brecon Beacons and the sea. The Glamorgan Heritage Coast stretches for 14 miles from Barry to Porthcawl. With plunging cliffs, tiny secluded coves and breathtaking views make the Heritage Coast a must for walkers, cyclists or anyone with a love of the countryside. The whole coastline is fringed with delightful towns, small villages and miles of footpaths and country lanes.

You are also close to the Gower Peninsula that is both beautiful and unspoilt. There are many historic features located over an area that measures just sixteen miles by seven miles wide. Not surprisingly, such an enclosed peninsula surrounded by the Bristol Sea and Atlantic Ocean, has become a haven for some of the richest wildlife and varied habitats in the UK. Scattered the landscape in Gower are historic reminders of the past, from castles, medieval churches, iron age fortifications, and prehistoric standing stones. All this against an awe-inspiring, natural backdrop of hills, valleys, beaches, clifftops, commons, woodland, dunes, marshes and caves. With its vast populated history, stretching back as far as Lower Paleolithic times (250,000 BC), long-established stories, whether they be folklore, legend or fact, are plentiful.

Shopping and Going Out

There are a large variety of shops throughout the Consortium area, everything from craft and gift shops to town centre stores; retail parks in Cyfarthfa, Merthyr, Talbot Green, Llantrisant and McArthur Glen Designer Outlet, Bridgend; traditional markets along with the cosmopolitan shopping of Cardiff itself.

You will also find hotels, bars and restaurants to suit every taste. Fans of the performing arts are well catered for, too, with many Theatres throughout the Consortium areas.

Heritage

There are plenty of museums and heritage sites to visit in the Consortium region. At the Rhondda Heritage Park in Trehafod, experience the great days of the nineteenth century coal boom, as well as its decline. For Pontypridd's story, pay a trip to the Historical and Cultural Centre, and fact finders may also be interested to learn that the Welsh National Anthem, Hen Wlad fy Nhadau (Land of my Fathers), was composed here in 1856. It was also the birthplace of one Tom Jones!

Housing

You will find a wide range of housing solutions, from budget rental accommodation through to large detached executive homes. Although property prices have been rising in recent years, prices still remain relatively competitive in Consortium areas, compared to other areas in the United Kingdom.