



# Chief Executive – Neath Port Talbot Council

Neath Port Talbot CBC is a 'dynamic authority that punches well above its weight', council leader Cllr Robert Jones proudly explains. And now it is looking for a new chief executive.

It is a dramatic place, a place of extremes. It has bustling urban centres and a three mile stretch of sandy beach, peaceful rural countryside and winding valleys; a playground for tourism and a home to heavy industry alike; it has a deep-rooted sense of history, with ambitious plans for a thriving future economy. There is not one thing that creates the spirit of Neath Port Talbot, it is the contrasts and contradictions that make it what it is.

It is also a place that excites the passion of the people who live there. There is a strong sense of community – born out of the steel and mining traditions that continues today – that runs through the place and through the council, in staff and members alike. Throughout the coronavirus crisis, that community spirit has seen them through – and will continue to do so as the council faces the

economic and social challenges ahead.

Cllr Jones explains that many of the officers who work at Neath Port Talbot live locally. They live and breathe the place, they understand it and know what needs to be done to take the council forward.

The leader is no exception – he can see where he was born from his office window and has a deep connection to the local community. Even his first job at the age of 16 was working for the deckchairs on the sea front. He was elected as leader in 2017.



Cllr Robert Jones – Leader, Neath Port Talbot Council

'People are passionate about Neath Port Talbot,' Cllr Jones says.

And it is not just the community that love the area. It has a strong tourism economy. From mountain biking to motorsports, walking, swimming and surfing, there is plenty of natural beauty in the dramatic landscape of Neath Port Talbot.

It is a place which inspires creativity, with a host of talent springing out of the local area. It is home to a raft of drama, music and dance groups, as well as a host of worldwide stars; actors Richard Burton, Anthony Hopkins, Michael Sheen and Ray Milland, singer Katherine Jenkins – the list goes on.

And Neath Port Talbot's industrial heritage is more than a historical reference, it is still home to the Tata steelworks.

'If you have a Land Rover or a Jaguar, it will have parts that were made from steel made here. If you have a Hoover washing machine, it will be made from our steel,' Cllr Jones says. 'Now we want to look to expand our industries and move towards cleaner, greener and more

sustainable growth going forward.'

Neath Port Talbot's ambitious plans look beyond the steelworks on the skyline and see a new vision for the local economy, harnessing modern technology and protecting the environment.

**'We need someone who will be clear in their decision making, and who can communicate well with members and officers'**

As a place, it has all the ingredients to make it ripe for investment. Part of the Swansea Bay City Deal, the area sits in the centre of South Wales, with superb rail and road links and a deep water port. It is 30 minutes from Cardiff, and 15 from Swansea and with easy access to Cardiff International Airport, it is unrivalled in its connectivity.

'We want people to come here for

work and for play. But we also want people to come to invest in what we have to offer,' Cllr Jones says. 'We want people to see the opportunities.'

When it comes to the new chief executive, Cllr Jones is looking for someone who understands local government completely, and its relationship with the Welsh and Westminster governments.

'We need someone who will be clear in their decision making, and who can communicate well with members and officers,' Cllr Jones says. 'We want someone who is forward looking, anticipating what is on the horizon. And with the need of a commercial approach to providing services set to increase, we want someone who can address the challenges and embrace the opportunities this might bring.'

'They have to have an appreciation, not just about the urban context, but they also have to value and understand our rural and valleys communities.'

It is just one of the many contrasts and contradictions that the next chief executive of Neath Port Talbot will learn to love. ■



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