

Introduction

Public services play a vital role in the lives of every citizen in Wales. County and county borough councils provide the services which educate our children, look after our elderly, dispose of our waste and light our streets. Community and town councils provide community level representation and a diverse range of services. However, very real challenges remain in local government and other public services local government works with in partnership. We share an ambition for consistently excellent services and provision but there will continue to be less money than previously for public services for the foreseeable future.

Given local government's contribution to Wales' communities and the need to maintain effective arrangements to promote good partnership governance, section 73 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Welsh Ministers to make a scheme ("the local government scheme") setting out how they propose to sustain and promote local government in Wales.

More broadly, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out the ways of working which Welsh Government, local authorities and other Welsh public bodies must adopt to put the sustainable development duty into practice. This includes specific emphasis on involvement, collaboration and integration in meeting well-being objectives and goals.

The Welsh Ministers are required under section 73 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 to publish an annual report on how the local government scheme was implemented in the previous financial year and lay a copy of the report before the National Assembly for Wales. In reporting on this new scheme, we will look to co-produce the report with members and observers of the Partnership Council for Wales.

As part of this, section 72 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 provides that the Partnership Council for Wales may give advice to the Welsh Ministers about matters affecting the exercise of any of their functions, make representations to the Welsh Ministers about matters affecting local government and give advice to those involved in local government in Wales. The Partnership Council therefore provides a forum for collaboration by the Welsh Ministers and local government to promote important cross-cutting issues and seek to agree how they can improve outcomes for citizens in Wales.

The Partnership Council for Wales is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary responsible for local government or another Welsh Minister as nominated by the Cabinet Secretary.

Its key responsibilities are to encourage dialogue between Welsh Ministers and local government on matters affecting local government in Wales, in accordance with sections 72 and 73 of the Government of Wales Act 2006; and to provide political accountability for action to improve the effectiveness and

efficiency of public services. (For the purposes of sections 72 and 73, local authorities include county councils, county borough councils and community councils in Wales, National Park authorities for National Parks in Wales, police and crime commissioners for police areas in Wales and fire and rescue authorities for areas in Wales).

Its current members are all Welsh Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers and Deputy Ministers (attending as appropriate). Up to eight members of county or county Borough Councils appointed by the members of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); one member to represent community and town councils appointed by One Voice Wales; one member from the National Park Authorities; one Police and Crime Commissioner; one member from the Fire and Rescue Authorities; and one member of the Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales. Officials of the WLGA, One Voice Wales, the WAO, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, and the Wales TUC also sit on the Council as observers.

1 Shared Roles and Responsibilities

- 1.1 Understanding the respective roles and responsibilities of the Welsh Government and local government and how they interrelate is crucial to the partnership. Through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (“the Act”), we share common goals for making Wales a better place to live. To deliver these goals, we must work together whilst respecting each other’s roles and responsibilities and recognising the validity of different approaches depending on circumstances and need.
- 1.2 The Act redefines the terms on which public bodies come together to improve the well-being of people and communities in Wales. The Act’s purpose is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It requires public bodies, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, to think more about the long term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined up approach.
- 1.3 In making decisions, all public bodies subject to the Act need to take into account the impact those decisions could have on people living in Wales in the future. To ensure we are all working towards the same vision, the Act puts into place seven well-being goals. It is not just about working to achieve one or two of these goals: public bodies need to think about how they can maximise the positive impact they have on them all.
- 1.4 The issues we face can only be tackled through new ways of working. We are fortunate in Wales that we have this new law to help us with the change needed. Each public body subject to the Act is required to develop well-being objectives which set out how that body will maximise its contribution to the well-being goals.
- 1.5 In working towards achieving the seven well-being goals, we will collaborate to meet our joint responsibility as set out in the Equality Act 2010, to take steps to fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty, ensuring that equality and fairness are considered throughout the decision making progress.

2 Role of the Welsh Government

- 2.1 The Welsh Government is the devolved, national government of Wales. The Welsh Government is working, including with others, to improve the lives of the people of Wales and to make our nation a better place in which to live and work. It provides the following:
 - national democratic leadership;
 - the legislative framework for many key policy areas;
 - establishment and the maintenance of a healthy system of representative democracy;

- policies and programmes which contribute to the well-being goals;
- conditions, through legislative, financial and delivery mechanisms, to enable local government and other organisations to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of public services;
- engagement with citizens and communities, public service partners, business and the third sector to ensure policies and programmes are well designed and delivered effectively; and
- promotion of good practice, innovation and collaboration.

2.2 *Prosperity for All: the National Strategy* which was published in September 2017. It sets out our long-term aim is to build a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning and united and connected. The purpose of the Strategy is to better direct the energy and resources of the whole public service to address the most fundamental challenges the nation faces. It promotes a radically different way of working, a way of working which reflects the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

3 Role of Local Government

3.1 Local authorities play a central role in governing Wales as they provide the local leadership and services necessary for their communities. County and county borough councils work with a range of local and national partners and with citizens and communities in providing democratic representation, delivering local services and shaping places. They:

- provide community and local democratic leadership, helping communities to define the futures to which they aspire within the context of national well-being goals and objectives;
- commission and deliver a range of discretionary and statutory services;
- discharge a range of statutory duties and exercising of functions;
- deliver policies and programmes in respect of local priorities focusing on the needs of local people;
- deliver regional and / or national programmes locally (working with public service partners, local people and others) to ensure the programmes are designed and delivered effectively; and to identify where such programmes might be needed;
- Lead on a regional or national basis for particular services or activities on behalf of other county/county borough councils and / or wider public service partners; and

- collaborate with others to deliver integrated services to ensure the right services are delivered by the right organisation at the right price to the right quality.

3.2 Community councils (including town councils) are an integral part of local government, closest to people and local communities and working with county and county borough councils and other partners to improve the well-being of their area. In Wales, there are 735 community councils in Wales covering 70% of the population. Where they are in place, they provide:

- community and democratic leadership;
- a range / increasing number of local services and assets; and
- collaboration with others, working with partners and communities to create a sustainable future.

4 Delivering National, Regional and Local Priorities

4.1 Taking Wales Forward provided immediate clarity about the Welsh Government's pledges for this five-year Assembly and a commitment to a different way of working. It sets out *what* Welsh Government will deliver for Wales during the Assembly term.

4.2 Prosperity for All: the National Strategy sets out *how* we will delivery for Wales during this Assembly term and sets the long-term foundations for the future. It has been published to better direct the energy and resources of the whole public service to address the most fundamental challenges the nation faces. It sets out the Welsh Government's long-term aim is to build a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning and united and connected. It promotes a radically different way of working, a way of working which reflects the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

4.3 The National Strategy takes the four key themes of Taking Wales Forward and sets out the Welsh Government's vision for each theme, showing how they will contribute to prosperity for all, and how delivering in a more integrated and collaborative way can enhance the well-being of the people of Wales.

4.4 The National Strategy goes on to identify five areas which have emerged as having the greatest contribution to long-term prosperity and well-being. They reflect the times in people's lives when they might be most in need of support, and when the right help can have a dramatic effect on their life course. They are:

- Early years
- Housing
- Social care
- Mental health

- Skills and employability
- 4.5 They are priority areas where it has been shown where early intervention – tackling the root causes, rather than treating the symptoms – pays dividends. Only a fully coordinated response from public services can prevent problems escalating. If we are to realise the full potential of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, then integration and collaboration between services, with early intervention and a people-centred approach, is essential to delivering long-term outcomes.
 - 4.6 Local government also has local priorities which seek to address the needs of their people and local communities. County and county borough councils and community councils are committed to setting out how they work together for the benefit of local communities; the preparation of charters is encouraged to define how they will interact with each other, consult on matters of mutual concern, and share information.
 - 4.7 Local government in Wales is responsible for developing, planning and providing a wide range of statutory and may provide various discretionary services. County and county borough councils are key participants in local partnerships through Public Services Boards and other formal arrangements. They also provide strong strategic leadership for their communities through these mechanisms.
 - 4.8 Local councillors within county and county borough councils and community councils, represent and speak up for their local community's ambitions and aspirations. They also hold to account those responsible for decisions around and delivery of services, ensuring that services meet the needs of local people and communities. Councillors must represent their communities, but they should also be representative of their communities.
 - 4.9 Community and town councillors are uniquely placed to help build resilience and renewal in areas through understanding communities' strengths and assets, and actively engaging local citizens and local business to help identify and meet local ambitions and needs. Community and town councils provide those services which can have a significant impact on an individual's well-being.
 - 4.10 Under the Equality Act 2010, regulations were introduced in 2011 to help public bodies in Wales better fulfil the Public Sector Equality Duty. This ensures that equality and fairness are considered throughout the decision process. The Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act 2015 requires us to take a different approach to working. It asks public services to be more holistic in its decision making, taking a much broader perspective and recognising the interdependencies that exist and the importance of working together and with citizens.

- 4.11 Working on a regional basis should not be undertaken for the sake of it but there are occasions when a function, service area or activity would benefit from being considered at a regional level – for example to improve the resilience of a service; build capacity and capability; offer economies of scale or greater efficiencies; and enable more effective integration of services. The core test has to be whether doing so would improve or maintain outcomes for the people we serve.
- 4.12 Where regional working is in place, it is important there is strong democratic governance and oversight, including scrutiny. It will also be important to ensure that citizens and communities are clear about how decisions are made and how they can influence and contribute to decision making. The role of elected member in principal councils will be vital in this respect.
- 4.13 As well as working together regionally, it will also be important that local government is responsive to individual citizens and communities' ensuring local communities have a voice and are represented effectively. County and county borough councils and town and community councils have a very important role to play

5 Positive, Productive Relationships

- 5.1 History has taught us that interaction between the Welsh Government and local government has been far too complicated. For instance, statutory, financial and accountability arrangements differ between local authority services. We have an opportunity to take a more strategic approach and determine what we need to achieve through the revised partnership arrangements. It is an opportunity to consider how roles should complement each other.
- 5.2 We will take the opportunity to build new, high trust relationships between the Welsh Government and local government. The Welsh Government will be clearer about key things that matter and less prescriptive about how it is done. Where possible and respecting commercial confidentiality, the Welsh Ministers will inform local authority leaders, in confidence, of major decisions and investments affecting their local area, before they are announced officially.
- 5.3 The new relationship will also help to embed a prudent approach to public service delivery – where the focus is on making the most effective use of public assets, coproduction; de-escalation, minimum necessary intervention and avoiding creating dependency – encouraging communities to play a greater role in their own futures. A key feature of this will be the greater integration of public service delivery.

- 5.4 The Welsh Government shares with local government a commitment to working in partnership with the third sector and business organisations. The roles of the voluntary and third sector and business will be important in delivering this form of partnership working. This approach was set out in “Partnership and Managing Change”, a partnership agreement for public services in Wales.
- 5.5 Also, whilst policing is non devolved in Wales, the Welsh Government continue to have good working relationships with the four main police forces in Wales. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children has regular meetings with the four main Chief Constables and the Police and Crime Commissioners.
- 5.6 The Welsh Government also shares with local government a commitment to create a transparent and modern democracy that is open and participative, where policy is developed and evaluated openly and in partnership to meet the needs and aspirations of Welsh people.

6 Financial Framework

- 6.1 We want to develop a more mature relationship in relation to funding.
- 6.2 We are committed to developing the financial framework to support local government to become more sustainable and self-sufficient, giving it the space to lead, to take greater responsibility and accept greater ownership. This includes:
- where possible, provide indications on future funding to support medium term financial planning;
 - providing greater flexibility in the conditions governing the use of Welsh Government funding;
 - simplifying the administration of grants; and
 - being clear about the cost implications of any new Welsh Government initiatives or legislation and how they will be funded.
- 6.3 Local government can help public services and communities become more sustainable by shifting resources into preventative activity, tackling causes instead of symptoms.
- 6.4 We want to give local government the necessary tools and allow local government to deploy these financial tools in the most efficient and effective manner to deliver our shared aims and objectives.
- 6.5 We will continue to build on the existing consultative arrangements with local government on finance and funding matters, namely the Finance Sub Group of the Partnership Council for Wales and its technical working groups, the Distribution Sub Group and the Capital Finance and Investment Group, to ensure we consider how best to ensure that the financial framework supports and sustains the resilience and sustainability of services including through greater collaboration.

7 Better Policy Development

- 7.1 Co-production of policy should result in better, stronger more ambitious initiatives that are owned throughout the delivery chain.
- 7.2 In terms of the Welsh Government and local government relationship, this will require meaningful engagement across policy areas. It will require the Welsh Government to involve local government, at political and official levels, in discussion at the appropriate time. In turn, local government will need to provide appropriate experienced and skilled representatives and people to participate in discussions and to make decisions on behalf of the sector.
- 7.3 The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with local government to develop robust legislative arrangements to secure good governance and coherent accountability arrangements. This will include a promotion of self and sector-led improvement, with self and peer assessment of governance arrangements contributing to high quality services and value for money. Audit, inspection and inspection bodies should add value and should work collaboratively, proportionately and efficiently to help improve services and achieve value for money.
- 7.4 Consultations carried out by the Welsh Government and local government should be as joined up as possible, reducing the burden on those being engaged as well as releasing resources that could potentially be redirected to front line services.

8 Engagement between the Welsh Government and Local Government

- 8.1 The Welsh Government will work with local government to ensure there is frequent and timely liaison between all parts of the Welsh Government and local government at elected member and officer levels.
- 8.2 The Partnership Council provides the statutory commitment to partnership working. However, on a day-to-day basis, engagement will be via local authorities, both individually and collectively and through the Welsh Local Government Association or One Voice Wales, as appropriate.
- 8.3 County and county borough councils and community and town councils have established the Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales to provide a collective, representative voice for their membership and to also provide an interface to help coordinate views and support dialogue between the Welsh Government and a range of diverse stakeholders.

- 8.4 The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all county and county borough councils determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA also appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
- 8.5 The Welsh Government will aim to co-produce policy and legislation with an impact on local government. This will involve engaging with local authorities and, particularly on local government matters with legislative, national or strategic policy implications, working with and through the representative mechanisms established between the Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association, for example:
- Partnership Council and its sub-groups
 - Bilateral Meetings between Welsh Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers and WLGA Spokespersons
 - Meetings between Welsh Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers and the WLGA's Executive Board, WLGA Council or WLGA convened Cabinet Member networks.
- 8.6 In the spirit of co-production, the Welsh Government will seek the assistance of local government in developing policies and guidance to local government, and in providing measures to enable authorities to implement new legislation, effectively and consistently. In that same spirit, local government will offer advice, expertise and commitment to creating proposals which will work and committing to delivering them.
- 8.7 The Welsh Government will work with the representative associations of local government to ensure there is political approval 'in principle' to explore policy proposals prior to the development of further detail and to ensure appropriate engagement from relevant local government professionals. The Welsh Government and local government will share policy review process and development through working groups of members and / or officers where appropriate. There is a shared commitment to respecting the confidentiality of information.
- 8.8 Both the Welsh Government and the associations of local government will look to inform each other of their activities, proposals and policies. Both will also share research reports and other analysis, where available and relevant, which provide the evidence base for policy proposals.
- 8.9 The Welsh Government will consult the representative associations of Welsh local government (that is the Welsh Local Government Association, One Voice Wales - and bodies and representatives of the police, fire and rescue and national park authorities) on all matters of common concern affecting local government (with the exception of matters relating to national security and proposals which affect only particular authorities). On major issues of policy, the Welsh Government will also consult individual councils on matters relating to their functions. This consultation

will be undertaken as earlier as possible, while recognising the constraint of proper confidentiality at the early stages of policy development.

- 8.10 The Welsh Government will undertake formal consultation which is full, open and transparent and as part of ongoing wider engagement in line with the ways of working set out in the Act. The Welsh Government will give proper consideration to the views of local government and will value its experience in making decisions that affect local government. Any formal consultation will be undertaken in line with the Welsh Government's consultation guidance.
- 8.11 The Welsh Government will aim to share news releases and public statements concerning local government with the associations representing Welsh local government in advance of the media. If it is not possible to share fully, the text of any such pending release or statement, the Welsh Government's press office will liaise with those necessary to provide advance notice of the timing and likely content of a release or statement.
- 8.12 News releases and public statements relating to an individual local authority or its geographical area will be shared with the press officer or other appropriate officer of that authority in advance of the media.
- 8.13 Where public announcements regarding co-operation on policies, publications or projects take place, a joint statement incorporating comments from the Welsh Government and the relevant association may be used when appropriate in place of complementary press releases.
- 8.14 Associations representing Welsh local government will adopt reciprocal arrangements with the Welsh Government
- 8.15 Where a Welsh Cabinet Secretary or Minister is to undertake a visit in an official capacity to a county or county borough owned premises such as a school, the authority's leader and chief executive or relevant chief officer will be notified in advance. Similar arrangements would also apply if the visit were to a community or town council owned facility.

9. Reporting on and Reviewing the Local Government Partnership Scheme

- 9.1 The Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Welsh Ministers to publish an annual report of how the Local Government Partnership Scheme was implemented during the financial year and lay the report before the National Assembly for Wales.

- 9.2 The draft annual report will be co-produced between the Welsh Government and local government and shared with associations representing local government prior to being considered by the Partnership Council. Following Partnership Council endorsement, the annual report will be laid.
- 9.3 The Welsh Ministers, in conjunction with local government associations, will keep the Scheme under review and consider whether it should be remade.