

## **Review of Strategic Partnerships**

### **PURPOSE**

1. To note the Final Report of the Review of Strategic Partnerships.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. The complexity of the partnership landscape is an issue which is raised frequently and has been consistently highlighted in independent reviews of the public service landscape in Wales, including the Williams Review. Many public service and third sector partners are engaged in several partnerships covering a range of issues, priorities or themes.
3. The Welsh Government and WLGA agreed in April 2019 to undertake a review of strategic partnerships, reporting to the Partnership Council for Wales. The review was undertaken as a joint exercise, and later included the Welsh NHS Confederation as part of the review team.
4. The review was undertaken as a proportionate and pragmatic task and finish piece of work, building on existing evidence and reviews and taking stock of public service leaders' views. The aim has been to identify actions which can be taken immediately by the relevant groups or by Welsh Government to rationalise partnerships and improve alignment; and to identify if/where any legislative change would be required.
5. A letter to public service leaders and chairs of partnerships seeking their initial views on partnership working in Wales was circulated in June 2019 with responses received over the summer.
6. Partnership Council received an interim report in October 2019, which set out the key issues raised through the call for evidence and agreed that a second phase of fieldwork would be undertaken to explore these issues further before making recommendations.

### **UPDATE**

7. This additional fieldwork has now been completed. Discussions were held with several national organisations, elected member and professional groupings and sixteen in-depth interviews were undertaken with a range of stakeholders.
8. This has been drawn together into a final report (attached) which sets out the findings from the review and makes a number of recommendations on ways in which the strategic partnership landscape can be rationalised and simplified.
9. The initial findings were considered by the Local Government Sub Group on 11 March. The intention had been to then discuss the findings at the Partnership Council for Wales meeting on 25 March however this was cancelled.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The recommendations have been grouped under four key themes which emerged during the review. Where the owner is not named a collective effort is needed to achieve the key outcomes of rationalising and simplifying the partnership landscape.

### **Theme A: Clarifying the strategic partnership landscape**

It is important to consider the existing strategic partnership landscape whenever new requirements for public services to work in partnerships emerge – to ensure that no unnecessary complexity, or duplication of activity, is added.

Recommendation 1. No new partnerships should be established or required without referring to the existing landscape or considering whether an existing partnership can deliver the outcome required.

Recommendation 2. No new functions should be given to existing partnerships without considering what obligations can be reviewed or removed or what additional resources may be required.

Recommendation 3. Welsh Government considers whether departments can reduce the partnership arrangements set up to administer specific grant programmes.

### **Theme B: Making use of flexibilities to provide local solutions to aligning partnerships**

The review has demonstrated throughout that there is no consensus on the optimal way of rationalising partnerships. Indeed, there were few consistent views. The optimal solution appears to be whatever works best in a given region based on local priorities and existing relationships. A legislative solution to rationalising partnerships at this stage, would be disproportionate and have limited impact given few of the partnerships have a statutory basis but that all partners should prioritise finding their own solutions.

Recommendation 4. Welsh Government to write to Chairs of all partnerships to clarify and confirm that flexibilities exist to for partnerships to review their own arrangements and alignment as appropriate – in terms of policy and geography.

Recommendation 5. All strategic partnerships in an area should seek to play an active role to ensure that they are aligned more closely so that there are fewer partnerships. The multi-purpose strategic partnerships (such as PSBs and RPBs) have a natural leadership role in initiating this.

Recommendation 6. Welsh Government to provide offer of facilitation for partnerships to review how they are aligned on their footprints.

Recommendation 7. Welsh Government to explore and communicate how funding might best be distributed across strategic partnerships where it may be sensible to do so and to consider the capacity of partners to support these partnerships.

Recommendation 8. All strategic partnerships should commit to, and invest in, board development and the development of collaborative cultures throughout the constituent organisations.

**Theme C: Making the work and impact of partnerships clear**

Citizens and those with a responsibility to represent citizens and scrutinise the work of public services, have a right to understand how public services and any partnerships are serving them.

Recommendation 9. All strategic partnerships should publish basic information online, which is easily accessible, outlining terms of reference, vision, membership, reporting on outcomes/progress and how citizens or communities can get involved.

**Theme D: Periodic Proportionate Review**

Partnerships should take a lead role in finding their own solutions, with the offer of facilitation and training to support changes. Most partnerships report on the delivery of objectives or outcomes and many produce annual reports and many already periodically self-review the continued relevance of their governance arrangements.

The Partnership Council, with representatives from public services who work together through a range of partnerships, is well placed to refer matters of concern from local or regional partnerships for the attention of Welsh Ministers.

Recommendation 10. As part of the normal cycle of review and reporting, all strategic partnerships should seek to build in periodic reviews of their terms of reference, governance arrangements, membership and alignment to other groups or partnerships

Recommendation 11. The Partnership Council to periodically review the partnership landscape to consider whether, when and where Welsh Government policy or legislative change may be required.

**NEXT STEPS**

11. The final report of the review will be shared with key stakeholders (including all those that submitted evidence and/or were interviewed) for information.
12. The focus will now turn to taking forward the recommended actions, working closely with the strategic partnerships identified through the review. An update on progress can be provided to a future Partnership Council for Wales meeting.