

Written Response to the Health, Well-being and Local Government Committee Inquiry into Local Service Boards by Andrew Davies, Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery, Welsh Assembly Government

Executive Summary

I welcome the Committee's report and agree with those recommendations which are for the Assembly Government to take forward. I also welcome the opportunity which the review has provided to the Assembly Government, the pilot LSBs and others, to take stock of the first eighteen months of the LSB development process.

I agree that it is still too early to draw firm conclusions, but I am encouraged that you have highlighted the potential of this new way of working, and have acknowledged the progress made in developing trust and confidence between partners.

I have set out my responses to the Report's individual recommendations below.

Detailed Responses

1. The Committee recommends that the Minister provides clarification of the role of LSBs as delivery mechanisms for the One Wales Government.

Response: Accept

Comment: Local Service Boards are a leadership group responsible for ensuring that all the public services in their area work together to improve delivery for citizens, across organisational boundaries. Their role is to focus on priorities of strategic relevance to each local area. The Boards work as teams of senior officers from the organisations responsible for local service delivery. They are expected to provide the joined-up leadership required to help overcome recurrent and difficult problems that can only be tackled through collaboration and partnership.

LSBs are not separate and formal institutions. They should not therefore be seen as distinct delivery mechanisms in themselves. They do not supplant the statutory responsibilities of local authorities or the established accountabilities of public bodies and other partners, whether devolved or non devolved.

The *One Wales* Government wants to see public service organisations across Wales working in high performing partnerships, putting the citizen at the centre of their planning and delivery. This is the underlying principle which will unleash innovation and improvement at every level of government. Strengthening collaborative leadership locally, by identifying common

challenges, building shared understanding and common purpose, is crucial to achieving the objectives of improved public services at all levels across Wales.

The leadership role of LSBs includes tackling the professional and organisational barriers that get in the way of excellent service delivery. Through the Local Delivery Agreement process, LSBs have a framework for identifying these barriers, and putting in place the projects required to overcome them. The projects on which LSBs are working have been identified through the local strategic planning process, such as the community plan, the health, social care and well-being strategy and the children and young people's plan. These processes both inform and are informed by national strategies. They should incorporate extensive consultation with citizens and stakeholders. Action to secure the effective delivery of these local plans is essential to realising our vision for better, more responsive, citizen-focussed public services as set out in *One Wales*.

Financial Implications: None

2. The Committee recommends that the Minister and his officials develop a common definition of LSBs that can be easily understood by the wider public.

Response: Accept

Comment: I will undertake to develop an explanation of LSBs for publication on the Welsh Assembly Government's LSB website, based on the response to the Committee's first recommendation above, and which includes links to local examples of how LSBs are enabling local public services to work together to deliver real citizen benefits.

Financial implications: None

3. The Committee recommends that LSB partners continue to use senior personnel, with the ability to make appropriate decisions on behalf of their organisations, to engage with the LSB.

Response: Accept.

Comment: The 2007 Prospectus and 2008 Route Map make clear the expectation that LSBs will comprise individuals in leadership roles, and this is how they are working in practice.

In order to minimise bureaucracy, and ensure that LSBs focus on the issues that need tackling at their level, we have not sought to make the approach statutory or to specify membership or processes. I want to see maximum local ownership of the problems and solutions, building on the groundwork of

existing strategic planning, but adding innovative techniques, and new ways of combining intelligence and resources.

One of the roles of the LSB is to oversee the way all the local partnerships work, to reduce compartmentalisation and duplication, and ensure a holistic view of citizens and communities. This includes looking at staffing, roles and responsibilities, and organisational development issues, which can have a major impact on partnership working. The LSB could not fulfil this role effectively without the direct involvement of senior leaders.

In the same way, as I explain further below, the Assembly Government representative needs to be an individual with the authority, skills and experience to contribute effectively to this group.

Financial Implications: None

4. The Committee recommends that structures and processes are put in place by LSBs to ensure continuity when key personalities on LSBs move on.

Response: Accept

Comment: I agree that induction and support for new members should be a key part of the planning work of LSBs and other partnerships, and should be part of the induction of senior people when they take on new roles which have a partnership dimension. Whilst this is not something that the Welsh Assembly Government can implement, my officials will encourage LSBs to include this aspect in their continuing development work.

Financial Implications: None

5. We recommend that the Assembly Government ensures that the 7 new NHS bodies fully understand the requirement to engage with LSBs, and other relevant partners to ensure continuity following restructuring.

Response: Accept

Comment: This matter was directly addressed in the consultation papers on the NHS reforms published in December, and will be considered within the responses to it which are due to be received by 25 February.

Financial implications: None

6. We recommend that, in establishing the 7 new NHS bodies, Ministers should establish clearly which local authority areas they cover for LSB purposes.

Response: Completed

Comment: The map at Annex A of the consultation document issued by the Minister for Health and Social Services in December 2008 has set out how the new Local Health Board areas map onto the boundaries of the local authorities.

Financial Implications: None

7. We recommend that senior Assembly Government officials continue to engage directly with LSBs and welcome the Minister's indication that this practice will continue.

Response: Accept

Comment: I welcome the Committee's recognition of the value this innovation is bringing to the relationship between local partners and the Welsh Assembly Government. I reiterate my commitment to the role and to developing it as part of our new engaged leadership approach to strengthening collaborative delivery at the local, regional and national levels.

Financial Implications: None

8. We recommend that the Minister publishes a clear definition of the role and accountability of Assembly Government officials in relation to LSBs.

Response: Accept in principle

Comment: The purpose of the role was set out in the initial January 2007 prospectus, and included:

- being a purposeful two-way conduit between the Local Service Board and Assembly Government;
- feeding back to the Assembly Government on local issues and priorities, and the actions it needs to take to facilitate local problem-solving and help support local service improvement;
- identifying ways of reducing central bureaucratic and other barriers to responsive and innovative service delivery at local level;
- contributing to local problem-solving and acting as honest broker, if necessary, particularly between sectors;
- communicating good practice from elsewhere – including other Boards;
- contributing to mutual constructive challenge on service performance within the Board;

- contributing to a change network within the Assembly Government whose aim is to develop the organisation and help it become more citizen-centred, outward-facing and delivery-focused.

The role will continue to evolve and adapt to local circumstances, but I think the experience so far suggest that the above remain the core of the role. The September 2008 routemap 'Realising the Potential' confirms the need for the role to be flexible and adapt as we learn.

We will continue to work with the twenty two Welsh Assembly Government LSB representatives as a group, to ensure that they share their experiences with colleagues across the Assembly Government including both policy and Spatial Plan representatives. This, together with continued close working with local LSB support teams, will help ensure the development of a consistent approach and understanding.

Financial Implications: None

9. We recommend that, once all 22 LSBs are fully established, the Minister reviews the involvement of Assembly Government officials to ensure that it is sustainable in terms of maintaining a senior presence while also ensuring that the efforts of these officials are not unnecessarily distracted from their core functions.

Response: Accept

Comment: I agree that our commitment should be kept under review, this is good practice for all organisations involved in partnership. I meet regularly with our representatives on LSBs to hear their feedback and discuss the nature of the commitment the LSB role demands. I recognise that the LSB role is an additional challenge for them and I am grateful that so many have volunteered because they see it as an important part of their corporate role as senior officials. I have been impressed by the way they have succeeded in balancing this role with that of their portfolio responsibilities.

I see the LSB representative role as complementing portfolio roles. It is an important element of an outward facing, delivery focussed, innovative Assembly Government that its officials should have first hand experience of working with delivery organisations, including understanding the reality of partnership delivery. I encourage them to learn from this experience and share it with their colleagues, to the benefit of the organisation more widely.

Financial Implications: None

10. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and LSB partners investigate any means by which support can be provided to the third sector to improve their capacity for engagement with LSBs.

Response: Accept

Comment: I see the involvement of the third sector as an essential ingredient of the success of LSBs, and partnership delivery more widely, not least because it creates an opportunity for dialogue and new thinking about the relationship with citizens and communities. I recognise that CVCs are small organisations and my officials are looking for ways to help them contribute effectively to this work. For example, the LSB Project Team is working with the WCVA and PSMW to help create development opportunities for the CVC leads. We have also encouraged LSBs to think creatively about how they might use their LSB Development Support Grant (£50,000 per LSB) to facilitate partner engagement at a local level. In addition, the WCVA has submitted a bid for convergence funding to support third sector engagement which Assembly Government officials are helping to support.

Financial Implications: None. LSB development support grant is being funded out of existing budgets.

11. We recommend that officers continue to meet and thinking about scrutiny of LSBs is developed and disseminated to LSB partners.

Response: Accept

Comment: We will continue to support and facilitate meetings of the scrutiny officers from the six pilot LSBs and work with them to ensure that learning from their work is disseminated to scrutiny officers and lead elected members involved with the WLGA's scrutiny network.

We will be organising an event in the summer and publishing updates in both the local government e-bulletin and LSB newsletters to disseminate the learning from those cross-public service scrutiny projects supported by the Scrutiny Development Fund.

Financial Implications: None

12. We recommend that the Assembly Government should establish a clear and transparent model of scrutiny that can be applied to all LSB situations with sufficient flexibility to allow for local application.

Response: Accept in principle.

Comment: I believe that the Assembly Government should promulgate clear principles, but that the precise models and working arrangements should be determined locally and agreed between partners. The principles are that:

- partnership delivery should be transparent and open to democratic scrutiny

- scrutiny should be citizen not organisation focused, and all the services which contribute to a particular outcome should be included;
- scrutiny should be constructive and improvement focused;
- local partners should be involved as appropriate to the topic under consideration, both as scrutineers and scrutinised.

I believe these principles should not only apply to LSBs but to the scrutiny of all joint working at a local authority level.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill contains provisions that will confer legislative competence on the National Assembly for Wales that will enable it to make an Assembly Measure/Measures in respect of local authority governance arrangements and in respect of local authority scrutiny committees except for crime and disorder committees. The measure powers will enable the Assembly Government to consult on proposals that could introduce a duty to scrutinise the public sector, but arrangements for crime and disorder committees will continue to be governed by the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government has agreed with the Home Office to commence sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 that will establish and make arrangements for statutory crime and disorder committees in Wales to improve local accountability for community safety. The provisions will come into force with effect from 1 October 2009. They include a power for Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to local authorities as to how these committees should operate and for the Secretary of State, after consulting with Welsh Ministers, to make regulations concerning the membership of the committees, the frequency of their meetings, and their powers to require information and attendance by others at their meetings.

Financial Implications: None

Andrew Davies
Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery
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