

Local Government Partnership Scheme Report 2001-02

1. Under Section 113(1) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 the National Assembly is required to make a Scheme "setting out how the Assembly proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales". The Assembly is also required to prepare a report after each financial year of how its proposals in the Scheme were implemented in that financial year. The Local Government Partnership Scheme was agreed in July 2000. This is the second report on the implementation of the Scheme.

Chapters 1 and 2: Introduction and Partnership

2. These chapters lay out broad themes and aspirations which are covered in more detail in subsequent chapters and reported on under those chapter headings.

Chapter 3: Policy Agreements

expenditure plans covering such periods as will enable local government to plan their programmes effectively

3. The 2002-03 local government settlement was delivered over 3 weeks earlier than in previous years, in line with the wishes of local government as expressed through the Partnership Council.

Policy agreements

4. Policy Agreements have been agreed with all 22 local authorities in Wales, and the £10 million Performance Incentive Grant allocation has been distributed, on an RSG-based formula basis.

5. Baselines and targets in the key policy areas of educational attainment, social services outcomes, recycling and composting, and modal shift in transport have been agreed, but will be subject to annual review that could result in mutually-agreed changes to targets (either upward or downward) if this is seen as appropriate in response to changed circumstances.

6. The Welsh Assembly Government has agreed with the Welsh Local Government Association a protocol for evaluation of the policy agreements, and this will be used as the basis for assessment of performance during 2002-2003 and will inform the allocation to each authority of its share of the £30 million Performance Incentive Grant in 2003-2004.

to give authorities maximum discretion over the decisions on spending the funding available to them

7. The National Assembly has provided local government with an unhypothecated revenue settlement for 2001-02 and 2002-03.

Chapter 4: The Community Leadership Role of Local Authorities

provide the framework which supports local government

On 1 March 2002 the Welsh Assembly Government published the policy statement "Freedom and Responsibility in Local Government" which set out its vision for local government and the policy framework to support its achievement.

4.2 The National Assembly will enable local authorities to work with others, including the private and voluntary sectors and community councils, to develop local strategies (community plans) for promoting community well being. The National Assembly is committed to ensuring that its executive agencies and sponsored bodies co-operate with local government in preparing community plans, focus on the problems and opportunities identified in them, and have proper regard to those plans in implementing the Assembly™s priorities. The Assembly in its advice to its executive agencies and the bodies it funds will emphasis the importance of joint working with others and adopt a holistic approach to problems and opportunities. The Assembly will expect that the local strategies will build upon the partnerships between neighbouring local authorities and will assist in resolving issues which are of regional concern. Community and town councils also have an important role to play in identifying local needs and opportunities, providing leadership to encourage local people and agencies to meet those needs and exploit opportunities through the provision of facilities and services.

8. Assembly guidance on preparing community strategies was published in August 2001. Chief Executives of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies have been advised of the importance of community strategies. A series of regional seminars have been organised around Wales to share experience and good practice, involving representatives from the full range of bodies concerned.

public-private sector partnerships

9. The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities, during the plenary debate on 31 December 2001, announced the conclusions of the consultation on Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in Wales. The following principles will be adopted by the Assembly Government for employment of PPP and PFI in Wales.

10. All such arrangements should be governed by the public interest in the quality of public services;

11. The relationship with the private sector should be based on partnerships which improve services rather than just arrangements to access finance;

12. The interests of employees are at least maintained and the partnerships between people who work together to serve the public are enhanced rather than diminished.

13. To give PPP and PFI in Wales, a distinctive identity and to reflect the responses to the consultation, it will be known as "investment through Partnership Wales".

14. The Assembly Government will seek to reduce the bureaucracy of PFI and to improve the co-ordination of resources within the Assembly Government to provide an improved service.

15. The Assembly Government is supporting eleven local authority schemes with PFI credits. Penweddig School in Aberystwyth and Pembroke Dock primary school are already operational. One other project is now under construction, while one other contract has recently been signed.

Chapter 5: Modernising Welsh Local Government

modernise political management structures, scrutinise performance and adopt the highest standards of probity

16. Following the making of Assembly legislation under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 on 21 June 2001, new political structures have been approved in almost all county and county borough councils in Wales, which should enable them to take decisions in a more effective, transparent and accountable fashion.

17. The ten statutory instruments under Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 relating to a new ethical framework took effect on 28 July 2001. Local authorities, community councils, fire authorities and national park authorities had until 21 December 2001 to adopt their code of conduct, six months from when the Model Code of Conduct was approved by the National Assembly. If they had not done so by this date, the Model Code of Conduct automatically applied to them. Members have to abide by the Model Code of Conduct from that date. Standards committees were to be established and to have met at least once by 31 December 2001. Thereafter they must meet at least once a year.

performance review

18. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association undertook a stocktake of the application of best value in Wales. The stocktake accepted that the key principles of best value, robust service review, continuous improvement, objective assurance, and the provision of quality public services, continued to be important and valid policy principles.

19. However, the stocktake identified that the accepted principles of best value were bogged down in the bureaucratic best value process, and it was not delivering continuously improving, high-quality, cost effective services to the public.

20. In response to this the Welsh Assembly Government and its partners in the Best Value Project Group developed the Wales Programme for Improvement (see below) .

effective external checks

21. The Best Value Project Group responded to the stocktake of best value and recommended to the Welsh Assembly Government that it put in place the Wales Programme for Improvement.

22. The Programme is intended to provide a policy framework in which the bureaucracy associated with the previous best value regime, and the subsequent lack of evidence for improved services, is replaced by a Programme that is led by Local Government, with robust regulatory assurance that the self-assessment is legitimate, and will allow the authority to focus on those service areas where improvements are most needed, and where the biggest service gains can be made.

23. The Whole Authority Analysis, which is at the heart of the Wales Programme for Improvement, will provide an in-depth analysis of authorities' capacity to improve, and also lead to a risk-based assessment of those service areas where attention is most needed.

providing an independent mechanism for investigating allegations of wrongdoing against elected members

24. All written allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct will be scrutinised by the Commissioner for Local Administration in Wales. The Commissioner has discretion over whether complaints are investigated further and whether the investigation is undertaken by

his office or by the Monitoring Officer of the authority concerned. Appropriate action following investigation will be decided by Standards Committees comprising at least half independent members or by the Adjudication Panel for Wales – an independent public body.

introduce a Beacon-type Scheme to encourage innovation, recognise excellent performance and spread best practice

25. No formal Beacon Scheme is in place at present, but the Welsh Local Government Association is developing an “Excellence Scheme” to support the Local Government Improvement Agenda, and allow exemplars of excellence to be disseminated across the local government community.

intervention powers under Section 15 of the Local Government Act

26. The Intervention Protocol, and the principles that underpin it, remains in place. It is important that the Welsh Assembly Government has the capability to take action when the situation demands it, but the Wales Programme for Improvement’s emphasis on support for improvement suggests that intervention, as before, will be limited to exceptional circumstances.

Chapter 6: Liaison and Consultation with Local Government

The Partnership Council and Local Government and Housing Committee

27. The Partnership Council has met 12 times (as of April 2002) since its first meeting proper on 11 October 1999 (a shadow meeting to confirm procedures was held on 22 July 1999). Five of those meetings took place outside Cardiff: in Wrexham, Haverfordwest, Llandudno, Newport and Llanelli.

28. A technical sub-group of the Consultative Forum on Finance has been established to undertake preparatory work for the 2005 Council Tax revaluation.

29. The Local Government & Housing Committee meets on a fortnightly basis. Action points from the Partnership Council are reported to the Local Government and Housing Committee to keep members up-to-date with the activity of the Partnership Council and allow some co-ordination of subject matter. The WLGA have been asked to give evidence to a range of Assembly committees throughout the year. This has included presentations on the policy review of community regeneration to the LGH Committee and the Welsh Language review to the Culture Committee.

frequent and open consultation

30. Full consultations took place before the introduction of further provisions under the Local Government Act 2000, the new version of the Code on Local Authority Publicity and guidance on councillors allowances

31. Any consultations lasting less than 8 weeks have been carried out with the agreement of the WLGA.

32. Consultation took place on a range of local taxation policy issues and implementation of subordinate legislation.

exchange of information

33. The Local Government Data Unit Wales was created in April 2001, within Syniad, and has successfully taken on a range of data collection and advisory responsibilities in its first year. It now has some 18 staff and, from April 2002, has been established as a separate company limited by guarantee. The Unit has become recognised as a key central resource within local government and, more generally, as the main source for statistical information on local government functions

town and community councils

As a result of a proposal from the Partnership Council, the Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned a research study of town and community councils as a basis for future policy development. It is being carried out by the Regional Change and Development Research Group, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. It commenced on 1 April 2002 and will last for one year.

co-operation and joint working arrangements

34. . Close formal and informal co-operation has continued throughout the year. In addition to the working groups already mentioned, joint working groups with local government representatives and others have been addressing the development of community strategies; examining the factors underlying differences in school performance; and developing a joint approach to using new technologies to improve services. One result of the latter is that local authorities have produced Implementing Electronic Government Statements which are now being evaluated. £9.4 million of borrowing authority has been provided to local authorities in Wales in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 to support the development of e-government capacity in Wales.

35. The Welsh Assembly Government has also provided funding to enable the Welsh Local Government Association to establish an Equalities Unit to advise local authorities.

sharing of public announcements

36. In consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association an expanded protocol relating to the sharing of public announcements has been agreed. Wherever possible the following principles will be applied:

- 6.17 The National Assembly will seek to convey all public announcements (news releases, statements and publications) to associations representing Welsh local government no later than to the media.
- 6.18 News releases and public statements concerning local government should be shared with associations representing Welsh local government in advance of the media. If it is not possible to fully share the text of any such pending release or statement, the National Assembly press office should liaise with counterparts in the relevant association representing Welsh local government to provide advance notice of the imminence and likely content of a release or statement.
- 6.19 News releases and public statements directly concerning an individual local authority or its geographical area should be shared with the press officer or other appropriate officer of that authority in advance of the media.

- 6.20 Where public announcements regarding cooperation on policies, publications or projects take place (e.g. policy agreements), a joint statement incorporating comments from the National Assembly for Wales and the relevant association representing Welsh local government may be used when appropriate in place of complementary press releases.
- 6.21 Associations representing Welsh local government will follow the above guidelines (6.17 - 6.20) when dealing with the National Assembly for Wales.

37. The National Assembly will explore Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies adopting such a protocol.

Visits by Assembly Ministers and Committees

6.19 Where an Assembly Minister or Committee is to visit in an official capacity a local authority-owned premises, such as a school, the authority™s Chief Executive or relevant chief officer will be notified in advance.

Relevant officials were reminded of this commitment during the year.

38. Conclusion

The partnership between the Assembly and local government has continued to develop during this year. This has led to policy agreements, the Wales Programme for Improvement and the policy statement "Freedom and Responsibility" which further develop the themes set out in this scheme.