



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: Response of the Welsh Assembly Government to the report of the Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales “Are we being served?”

Date: 12 May 2010

By: Carl Sargeant, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

The Councillor Commission Expert Panel Wales was established by my predecessor to examine the recommendations made by the Councillors Commission set up by the Rt Hon Ruth Kelly MP, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The remit of the Councillors Commission was to examine how local democracy could be revitalised and made more representative. The work undertaken by the Commission included an evidence session held in Wales. Its report contained 61 recommendations and was published in December 2007.

The remit of the Expert Panel was to consider the recommendations made by the Councillors Commission and the appropriateness of their implementation in Wales together with consideration of any other issues that were relevant to widening participation in local government. The Assembly Government wants to ensure that councillors at both community and unitary council level are drawn from the widest range of people and are more typical of the communities which they serve. It has been a concern for some years that the pool of people from which serving councillors is drawn is rather narrow and several key sectors are seriously under-represented. This situation denies our councils the full range of experiences and expertise they need to carry out their diverse roles.

The Expert Panel conducted an independent and wide ranging piece of work resulting in 35 recommendations in their report “Are we being served”

published in August 2009. The recommendations were addressed to a range of organisations, including the Assembly Government. The report was subject to a consultation with all the relevant parties and we have carefully considered all the 41 responses received.

The recommendations contained in the report fit well with the Assembly Government's current policy direction and I am pleased to be able to accept the majority of those which fall solely to the Assembly Government. Several other recommendations call for action from a range of organisations, the Assembly Government among them. These recommendations will require further consideration with partners but, in general, I support the intent of the proposed action and am happy to initiate steps to start things moving.

A number of recommendations in the Expert Panel report would require legislation to achieve the intended outcome. The Assembly Government wants to enable the Assembly to legislate to encourage broader and increased participation in local government. The National Assembly (Legislative Competence) (Local Government) Order 2010 ("the LCO") which came into force on 13 April will provide competence for the Assembly to legislate in this area.

The Assembly Government announced its intention to introduce a Local Government Measure later this year which will take advantage of the competence conferred on the Assembly by the Local Government LCO. It is intended that the Measure will deal with several important issues relating to local government in Wales and, amongst other things, we hope that it will address issues which we believe present barriers and disincentives to people standing for election to councils at community and unitary level. The recommendations made by the Expert Panel report will inform the development of our proposals for the Measure. I look forward to working with Assembly Members and others with an interest in local government on the Local Government Measure later this year.

The Assembly Government's response to the Expert Panel Report provides the detailed exposition of our policy position in relation to all 35 recommendations and is attached as a separate Appendix for information.