

Local Government Partnership Scheme Report 2013-2014

1. Introduction

1.1 Section 73 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 (“the Act”) requires the Welsh Ministers to make a scheme setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to sustain and promote Local Government in Wales. The current ‘*Local Government Partnership Scheme*’ (“the Scheme”) was published in 2008.

1.2 Section 73 of the Act also requires the Welsh Ministers to publish a report of how the proposals set out in the Scheme were implemented in each financial year. This report does so for the financial year 2013-14.

1.3 In January 2014, the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery¹ reported its findings and recommendations on how public services in Wales are currently governed and delivered and how this needs to change to meet the needs of people today and in future. The Welsh Government’s response was published on 8 July 2014, together with a White Paper setting out proposals for ‘Reforming Local Government’ in Wales². The White Paper sets out an initial vision for Local Government fit for the 21st Century and beyond. It provides the focus for engagement between the Welsh Government and Local Government in further shaping this vision and building Local Authorities designed for Wales, in Wales. This engagement falls outside the timeframe covered by this report and is not further addressed within it.

2. Implementation of the Scheme

Partnership Council for Wales

2.1 The Partnership Council for Wales (“the Partnership Council”), together with its working groups, is the principal statutory forum for dialogue and collaboration between the Welsh Ministers and Local Government.

2.2 In accordance with its current terms of reference, during 2013-14, the Partnership Council met once on 4 November 2013³. The meeting was chaired by Lesley Griffiths AM, the former Minister for Local Government and Government Business, with Jane Hutt AM, Minister for Finance and Gwenda Thomas AM, the former Deputy Minister for Social Services in attendance for part of the meeting. The key outcomes from the meeting included:

- i. Reflection on the Local Government Settlement for 2014-15. The Final Local Government Settlement was published on 11 December 2013;
- ii. Reflection on the Annual Report of the Reform Delivery Group ; and
- iii. Progression with the proposal for Local Authorities to review their fleet management arrangements.

¹ ([Welsh Government | The report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery](#))

² ([Welsh Government | Devolution, Democracy and Delivery White Paper – Reforming Local Government](#))

³ (www.wales.gov.uk/localgovernment)

2.3 The Reform Delivery Group, a standing working group of the Partnership Council, was established to provide effective collective accountability to drive forward and support the improvement of public services in Wales. The Group met on three occasions during 2013-14 (15 May 2013, 15 July 2013 and 29 January 2014). The former Minister for Local Government and Government Business chaired each meeting. The former Deputy Minister for Social Services attended the first of these meetings. Jeff Cuthbert AM, the former Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and Vaughan Gething AM, the former Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty attended for part of the July meeting. The Group considered:

- i. Projects developed through the Public Service Leadership Group⁴ including the Gwent Missing Persons project; National Procurement Service and management of public service assets;
- ii. Implications of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act;
- iii. The Regional Collaboration Fund and Intermediate Care Fund;
- iv. The work and report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, including potential arrangements for engagement around the response to the Commission's Report;
- v. Adoption of workplace policies to tackle domestic abuse;
- vi. Implementation of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan; and
- vii. Local Authority Service Performance.

2.4 The Finance Sub Group was established by the former Minister for Local Government and Government Business in 2013. Its remit and work is outlined in the Finance Matters section of this report (Section 6).

3. Local Government Organisation and Accountability

Scrutiny

3.1 A successful 'Scrutiny in the Spotlight' conference in November 2013, delivered in partnership with the Wales Audit Office and other key bodies, cemented the Welsh Government's commitment to support scrutiny within Local Authorities to improve its impact and effectiveness.

3.2 The Scrutiny Development Fund, established in 2012 continued to offer funding for innovative projects designed to support scrutiny in its widest sense. It has supported an accredited programme for Local Government scrutiny officers and the development of a Collaborative Scrutiny Handbook.

3.3 The Centre for Public Scrutiny, with funding from the Welsh Government, delivered a Wales Programme providing effective, professional support to Members and officers engaged in scrutiny. A series of regional events were held to provide guidance and support on issues such as budget scrutiny, the scrutiny of partnership working and collaborative scrutiny of Local Service Boards. The Centre has also provided demand-led support to individual Local Authorities in developing their scrutiny skills.

⁴ [Welsh Government | Public Service Leadership Group](#)

3.4 The need to support and strengthen scrutiny was a central theme of the report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery.

3.5 All of the above has created a platform to take up the scrutiny challenge ahead.

Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP)

3.6 The Panel operated under the revised arrangements brought about by the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013. Its Annual Report was published in February 2014, following a major consultation exercise with Local Government. This included a “roadshow” which visited all 22 Principal Councils, the National Park and Fire and Rescue Authorities. The report provided for a small increase to Councillors’ Basic Salaries (of less than 1%) and a cost neutral rounding exercise on Senior Salaries. With effect from April 2014, the Panel must be consulted on any proposal to vary the pay of a Council Chief Executive or Chief Fire Officer, unless the variation is in line with a more general change in officers’ pay.

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

3.7 The Commission published its forward programme of Electoral Reviews in September 2013, followed by a guide to their Principles and Practice of conducting these reviews in December 2013. However, for much of 2013-14, the Commission suspended its core work to await the outcome of consideration of the Report of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, which recommended a change to the make-up and operation of Wales’ 22 Principal Councils. Once the future map of Local Government in Wales is known, the Commission will seek to recommence its work as soon as possible.

Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government

3.8 In March 2014 the Expert Group on Diversity in Local Government published its report ‘*On Balance: Diversifying Democracy in Local Government in Wales*’. The report set out an action plan and 24 recommendations to improve the diversity of candidates by the next Local Government Elections in 2017.

3.9 The Welsh Government has established a ‘Diversity in Democracy Steering Group’, with members from political parties and stakeholder partners, to have oversight of a programme of work falling out from the action plan and recommendations in the report. Its main aims will be:

- i. **Improving the response to the Local Government Candidates Survey of Candidates:** including promoting the survey in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and One Voice Wales; making the survey available online and using a single research and analysis provider.
- ii. **Improving information from the Survey:** including updating the questions in the survey; Local Government’s use of information from the survey; and the conduct of exit interviews for elected Members.
- iii. **Action for Political Parties:** including mentoring schemes and strategies to promote female Members being nominated as candidates.

- iv. **Widening participation in Local Government:** including establishing a shadowing/mentoring scheme; encouraging youth involvement through co-option; establishing a network of member champions; and a campaign to promote the role and work of Councillors and Local Government.

4. Local Government Services - Collaboration and Partnership

4.1 The *Compact for Change*⁵ between the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government, signed at the Partnership Council on 5 December 2011, set out a joint commitment to service reform aimed at delivering improved and cost effective services to communities across Wales. The final report from the Organisational Development and Simpson Implementation Work Programme on implementation of the Compact was published in autumn 2013⁶. The report documented progress made against the commitments in the Compact ranging from translation services to emergency planning.

4.2 The Welsh Government also encouraged and supported Local Authorities to work with other public services across Wales to improve their performance through collaboration and partnership and the sharing of good practice. Over the summer of 2013, the former Minister for Local Government and Government Business visited all 22 Local Authorities across Wales to see first-hand how Councils, in partnership with other public and voluntary organisations, are delivering improved services and a better quality of life for people in Wales⁷. Initiatives such as the Regional Collaboration Fund and the Intermediate Care Fund (see Section 6) are supporting this work, enabling the Welsh Government to deliver on its objective of connecting and integrating services for the benefit of the people in Wales.

4.3 The Welsh Government's response to the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery sets out a new agenda to transform public services in Wales. *Devolution, Democracy and Delivery: Improving public services for people in Wales*⁸ includes a wide-ranging, ambitious programme of reform which encompasses the whole public sector including Health, Education, Social Services, Fire, National Parks and Academi Wales. This programme will be taken forward during 2014-15.

Local Service Boards (LSBs) and Single Integrated Plans

4.4 Single Integrated Plans are now in place in all Local Authorities, and have driven good examples of integrated planning, which the former Minister for Local Government and Government Business saw first hand during her summer visits to each Local Authority. A lack of reliable data and community engagement in setting local priorities uncovered some gaps in evidence. A few areas have sought to rectify this by employing a neighbourhood management approach, which is proving to be an effective way of aligning the work of different public service providers at the front line for the improvement of well-being in communities. There is evidence the

⁵ [Welsh Government | A Compact for Change between the Welsh Government and Welsh local government](#)

⁶ [Welsh Government | 40th Meeting Partnership Council - 4 November 2013](#)

⁷ [Welsh Government | Summer visits to local authorities](#)

⁸ [Welsh Government /Devolution Democracy Delivery](#)

integrated planning approach is leading to more joined up commissioning where local partners make sense of complexity through their understanding of local population.

4.5 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, introduced in July 2014, will seek to reform the approach to integrated community planning by putting it on a statutory basis, with better alignment between national and local well-being goals. There are early signs that some LSBs are adopting this approach voluntarily.

Social Services

4.6 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 received Royal Assent in May 2014, putting in place the legislative framework to support the transformation of social services in Wales. The Act received a high level of cross-party consensus, and was enhanced by the debate and input during the inclusive engagement process.

4.7 The collaborative leadership arrangements put in place by the former Deputy Minister for Social Services were an important factor in securing cross-party and cross-sector engagement and leadership in delivering the Act. The National Social Services Partnership Forum tackled strategic issues relevant to the transformation agenda. Welsh Local Government membership was made up of the WLGA Presiding officer and portfolio leads from all parties, with the Chief Executive of the WLGA supporting this work. They tackled strategic issues, and worked with partners across the sector to identify solutions to secure transformed social services.

4.8 To support transformation an additional £1.5 million was made available in 2013-14, and will also be provided in 2014-15. This additional funding has been targeted at securing the delivery of the Act, supporting Local Authorities working with the NHS, reflecting the collaborative and partnership requirements set out in the Act.

National Park Authorities

4.9 During 2013-14 John Griffiths AM, the former Minister for Culture and Sport met regularly with the Park Authorities to discuss strategic issues affecting the Parks. This included ongoing progress with the medium term strategic policy agenda set out in the Policy Statement for the National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales which the Welsh Government published in March 2007.

4.10 A new policy statement for protected landscapes is due to be published in September 2014. The purpose of the statement will be to set out the Welsh Government's strategic policy framework for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks in Wales. It will replace the Policy Statement for National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales.

4.11 In June 2014, the former Minister for Culture and Sport announced a review of Wales' designated landscapes and their governance will take place in 2014-15. This will be the vehicle through which the recommendations of the Commission on Public Services Governance and Delivery will be taken forward.

Resilience

4.12 The First Minister and the former Minister for Local Government and Government Business continued to work closely with senior officers from the Police and Fire and Rescue Services on civil contingencies through the Wales Resilience Forum. During 2013-14 the Forum has considered such issues as the planning for the Wales NATO Summit, the coastal flooding event and inland water rescue capability.

Fire and Armed Forces

4.13 The former Minister for Local Government and Government Business met with the Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and the WLGA on three occasions to ensure strategic and political dialogue is maintained.

4.14 The Fire and Rescue Consultative Forum which comprises Chief Fire Officers, Welsh Government officials, the WLGA and the Fire Brigades Union, met on four occasions. The Forum provided strategic oversight of the work programme to deliver commitments contained in the 'Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 onwards'. FRAs have continued to take forward a collaborative agenda through their National Issues Committee and the Welsh Government has also encouraged FRAs to engage regionally in the establishment of work programmes for community safety activities.

Education

4.15 In October 2013, following a public consultation on the review into the Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales and consideration of the options, Huw Lewis AM, the Minister for Education and Skills issued a Written Statement. The Statement outlined his acceptance of the proposal from Local Government to protect school improvement funding within the Local Government budget settlement and to jointly construct a National Model for Regional working. The agreement replaced the proposal, in the Hill Review, to fund regional school improvement services through a 'top-slice' of the Revenue Support Grant.

4.16 The detail of the model was co-constructed with representatives from Local Government (Chief Executives and Directors of Education), consortia representatives, practicing head teachers, representatives of the WLGA and Estyn, an expert group appointed by the Minister and officials from the Department for Education and Skills. The model itself was accepted by the Minister and the 22 Local Authority Leaders early in 2014.

4.17 The National Model clarifies and strengthens regional consortia working ensuring a more consistent approach across the four consortia regions, and clarifies the way Local Authorities commission the services of regional consortia to achieve school improvement. The model came into place from 1 April 2014, with each consortia submitting a business plan articulating how during the course of 2014-15 they will meet the requirements of the model.

5. Community Focus

5.1 The Welsh Government continued to collaborate with One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks, along with other key partners and stakeholders. Training and development for Community and Town Councillors and officers was once again a priority, with Ministerial approval secured for the design of new training modules and the delivery of continuous professional development.

5.2 In March 2014 the Welsh Government published final guidance, following consultation, to facilitate the implementation of Community Council related provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

5.3 As of 31 March 2014, 11 charter agreements had been signed between Local Authorities and Community and Town Councils in Wales, setting out how they will co-operate with each other.

5.4 A Charter Network Meeting, organised by the WLGA and One Voice Wales, was held in March 2014, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations in November 2013. The Charter Network provides an opportunity for the two tiers of Local Government to share learning and best practice, and identify opportunities for development.

5.5 The work of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery brought about a need for an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the Community and Town Council sector in Wales. Aberystwyth University was commissioned by the Welsh Government in the latter half of 2013 to undertake a synthesis of existing research and data about the sector. This was published in 'Developing a Comprehensive Understanding of Community and Town Councils in Wales' in January 2014.

6. Finance Matters

Financial Framework

6.1 The former Minister for Local Government and Government Business established the Finance Sub Group as a sub-group of the Partnership Council in 2013. The Group provides a forum for discussion of Local Government finance matters which may benefit from more detailed consideration than is possible at the full Partnership Council. It complements the work of the Partnership Council which continues to include a remit to consider funding matters in relation to public service reform. Finance Sub Group met on three occasions during 2013-14 (8 July 2013, 30 September 2013, and 6 March 2014). The former Minister for Local Government and Government Business chaired each meeting. The Minister for Finance also attended the first two of these meetings and the Minister for Education and Skills attended the September meeting.

6.2 The Group was supported by technical working groups, which previously reported to the Partnership Council. The Distribution Sub Group produced its annual report on changes to the settlement distribution formula for Unitary Authorities. Capital funding developments were considered by the Capital Finance

and Investment Group. The settlements for 2014-15 for the Unitary Authorities and for Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales were prepared and published in accordance with partnership arrangements between the Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Welsh Police Forces and the Home Office.

6.3 Local Authority input into the compilation of the Whole of Government Accounts for Wales for 2012-13 was collected, collated and processed and contributed to the Whole of Government Accounts for the UK. Good financial management was supported through the approval of eligible applications from Local Authorities to capitalise certain revenue expenditure commitments. At official level, regular engagement on financial matters has been maintained between Welsh Government and Local Government through the WLGA, the Society of Welsh Treasurers and the Welsh Police Finance and Resources Group. This engagement has been complemented by working groups to consider specific topics, for example in connection with the Spending Round 2013 and the review of Council Tax support.

Regional Collaboration Fund

6.4 The Regional Collaboration Fund (RCF) has continued to invest in projects which aim to bring about real and significant change at a regional level. The fund is supporting 29 projects in 2014-15 with £5 million for 18 projects tackling issues ranging from delivering shared ICT services to bringing three Authorities' Regulatory Services under a single management structure; and £5 million for 11 projects as part of the Intermediate Care Fund. Work on an external evaluation of the RCF has been commissioned and this will help identify evidence of best practice approaches which can then be rolled out across Wales.

Intermediate Care Fund

6.5 A one-year Intermediate Care Fund was announced in December 2013 for the financial year 2014-15. £50 million was set aside for its purpose for projects which bring about real and significant change at a regional level. The Fund comprises £35 million revenue in the Local Government budget and £15 million capital in the Housing and Regeneration budget.

6.6 Local Authorities have taken the lead role in developing proposals for each region, (North Wales, Mid and West, Cwm Taf, Gwent, Cardiff and Vale, Western Bay) in collaboration with social care, health and housing, with third and independent sector partners. Those proposals contain a range of programmes which will help manage demand for services and support people maintain their independence and remain in their own home. They will also avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, inappropriate admission to residential care and prevent delayed discharges from hospital.

The Statutory Provision

Section 73 of The Government of Wales Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act") makes provision for Welsh Ministers to make a Local Government Scheme as follows:

73 Local government scheme

- (1) The Welsh Ministers must make a scheme ("the local government scheme") setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales.
- (2) The Welsh Ministers -
 - (a) must keep the local government scheme under review, and
 - (b) may from time to time remake or revise it.
- (3) In determining the provision to be included in the local government scheme, the Welsh Ministers must have regard to any advice which has been given, and to any representations which have been made, to them by the Partnership Council.
- (4) The Welsh Ministers must publish the local government scheme when they make it and whenever they remake it; and, if they revise the scheme without remaking it, they must publish either the revisions or the scheme as revised (as they consider appropriate).
- (5) If the Welsh Ministers publish a scheme or revisions under subsection (4) they must lay a copy of the scheme or revisions before the Assembly.
- (6) After each financial year the Welsh Ministers must –
 - (a) publish a report of how the proposals set out in the local government scheme were implemented in that financial year, and
 - (b) lay a copy of the report before the Assembly.