



Local Government

Introduction

There are 22 unitary county and county borough councils ("local authorities") in Wales, the largest of which is Cardiff with a population of 317,000 and the smallest is Merthyr Tydfil, with a population of 55,000. There are also 737 Town and Community Councils.

Local authorities provide statutory services as set out in legislation and are empowered to provide other services at their discretion. They provide some services directly, work in partnership with other organisations, and commission others to provide services on their behalf.

Local government receives around 80% of its funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. The 22 local authorities in Wales are responsible for £4 billion of public expenditure, over one third of the total Welsh budget.

Representatives from Local Government and Welsh Ministers sit on the Partnership Council for Wales and Ministers must make a Local Government Scheme setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales.ⁱ

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

"Local Government" is field 12 of Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over Local Government matters through Legislative Competence Orders or through Westminster Acts. New Measure-making powers regarding Local Government are included in the *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill*, currently before Parliament. These powers include:

- Altering boundaries of counties and county boroughs (i.e. to effect a reorganisation of local government).
- The making, coming into force and confirming of a byelaw.
- The conduct of elected members, co-opted members and employees of local authorities in Wales.
- County council and county borough council strategies for promoting and improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of local authority areas in Wales or contributing to sustainable development in the United Kingdom.
- The making of arrangements by specified authorities in Wales to secure improvement in the exercise of their functions, ie. provisions equivalent to the Best Value duties in Part 1 of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

A wide range of secondary legislation responsibilities of the Second Assembly relating to Local Government will transfer to Welsh Ministers in the Third Assembly.

Key Welsh Government documents and action plans from the Second Assembly:

In the Second Assembly the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a Review of Service Delivery in local government as part of its public service reform agenda, *Making the Connections*. The Report *Beyond Boundaries: Citizen-centred Public Services* ("the Beecham Report"), was published in July 2006.ⁱⁱ

The Welsh Assembly Government's Response to the Beecham Report, *Making the Connections - Delivering Beyond Boundaries: Transforming Public Services in Wales*, was published in November 2006. It includes proposals for Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements to promote joint working between local authorities.ⁱⁱⁱ

More detailed plans for Local Service Boards and the development of Local Service Agreements were set out in *Making the Connections –Local Service Boards in Wales: A prospectus for the first phase 2007-2008* in January 2007.^{iv}

In March 2007 the Assembly Government published its Policy Statement on Local Government, *A Shared Responsibility*.^v

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The Local Government and Public Services Committee recommended that successor Committee(s) should concentrate on the following high level strategic issues:

- The Beecham agenda – The proposals in *Delivering Beyond Boundaries*.
- The role and functions of elected Members, following the publication of research findings by the Assembly Government.
- Scrutiny of Local Authority Performance Measurement Data.
- The Role of Town and Community Councils.^{vi}
- Revised Community Planning Guidance.
- Promoting engagement in local democracy.
- Implications of the Lyons Report for Wales.^{vii}

Useful Links

- The Welsh Assembly Government Local Government WebPages:
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/?lang=en>
- The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) which represents the 22 local authorities:
<http://www.wlga.gov.uk/content.php?nID=home;IID=1>
- *One Voice Wales* which represents town and community councils in Wales:
<http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/index.cfm>
- The Local Government Data Unit
<http://www.lgdu-wales.gov.uk/eng/home.asp>

Further information

For further information on any aspect of Local Government, please contact Alys Thomas, Members' Research Service, on 029 2089 8219 (Alys.Thomas@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

ⁱ Government of Wales Act 2006, (Chapter 32) ss.72 & 73.

ⁱⁱ Report by the Beecham Review on Local Service Delivery, *Beyond Boundaries: Citizen-centred Public Services*, July 2006.
http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/403823121/40382213/528962/English_Report.pdf?lang=en

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Assembly Government: *Making the Connections - Delivering Beyond Boundaries: Transforming Public Services in Wales*, November 2006

http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/403823121/40382213/927634/mtc3_english.pdf?lang=en

^{iv} Welsh Assembly Government, *Making the Connections –Local Service Boards in Wales: A prospectus for the first phase 2007-2008*, January 2007.

http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/403823121/40382213/403822133/LSB_consultation-e.pdf?lang=en

^v Welsh Assembly Government, *A Shared Responsibility*, Policy Statement, March 2007.

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/403822/1287263/asharedresponse.pdf?lang=en>

^{vi} The Assembly Government has indicated that it wishes to implement some of the recommendations of the 2003 Report on the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Town and Community Councils by Aberystwyth University.

http://www.aber.ac.uk/communitygovernance/findings_assembly.htm

^{vii} The Lyons Inquiry is mainly about Local Government in England but some of its proposals on local government finance may impact on Wales. <http://www.lyonsinquiry.org.uk/>