



Briefing paper

February 2017

Welsh Government White Paper - Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed

Background

Following several months of engagement with local authorities, on 31 January 2017, Welsh Government published its [White Paper](#), titled *Reforming local government: resilient and renewed*. In it, it states that reform is essential in order to ensure that local authorities remain financially resilient and able to maintain and improve the quality of their services, while also allowing citizens to have their say.

This briefing paper outlines the ideas that Welsh Government put forward in the White Paper that may affect the third sector. Of particular note are:

- Plans for mandatory regional working within social services;
- the concept of the third sector sharing administrative and other office functions with local authorities; and
- a clear commitment to co-production that allows citizens to contribute to decisions about their public services and scrutiny of local authorities.

How to respond to the consultation

The [consultation on the White Paper](#) runs until 11 April 2017. It is presented alongside impact assessments for children's rights, equality and Welsh Language.

The consultation seeks responses to 31 questions. Responses to the consultation can be submitted at the link above.

WCVA will be responding to this consultation, and if you'd like to feed in to our response you can do so by contacting David Cook, WCVA Policy Officer, on dcook@wcva.org.uk. Our response will particularly focus on the areas of work that should, or should not, be delivered on a regional basis; how functions could be shared to support regional working,

and how citizens can best be involved in decision-making about, and scrutiny of, their services.

Part 1: Regional working

The White Paper cites the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act as a requirement for local authorities to take a different approach to working. It references discussions held in 2016 with local government leaders and Chief Executives to demonstrate an appetite for such working.

The paper defines success for regional working as:

- Achieving better outcomes for people and communities in the short term
- A greater focus on prevention and de-escalation to bring about better outcomes over the much longer term
- Opportunities to transform and refocus services on a larger scale, or by the more efficient deployment of scarce or specialist resources.
- Improving the resilience of services
- Removing the duplication of work
- Reducing complexity
- Ensuring consistency

A series of tests are set out to help local authorities decide if particular areas of their work are suitable for regional working. However, the White Paper also lists a number of areas in which collaborative working among local authorities will become mandatory. These are:

Social services

The White Paper notes that there services that are '*recognised challenges*' to meet and that to do so will include planning and operating at a greater scale, with consistency in decision-making and delivery. It cites the partnership arrangements to be made in each Local Health Board area, as required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

It stresses that users of social services often need more than one intervention and that partners are expected to extend their partnership arrangements beyond the priority areas.

Economic development

Welsh Government proposes to adapt such arrangements at the Swansea Bay City Deal and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board as a basis for the regional delivery of economic development functions, including employment and skills development.

Transport

Regional transport plans are being prepared for most of Wales, using the model of the City Deals. Views are being sought on appropriate models for Ceredigion and Powys.

Land use and building control

Provisions within the Planning (Wales) Act may provide the basis for regionalisation of planning services. Joint Planning Boards are now able to prepare Local Development Plans, and have the ability to produce Strategic Development Plans to address issues across a wide area, ensuring connections to economic regeneration, transport and natural resource management.

Welsh Government is seeking views on how functions relating to planning are undertaken at sub-regional level but at a larger scale than individual authorities, while ensuring services are not distant from citizens and communities.

Education improvement

Regional arrangements already exist in education; however Welsh Government would like to re-examine and build upon them, creating flexibility to scale up activity to work across two or more regions if appropriate.

Information about Welsh language skills could be made available to allow local authorities and the education sector to develop regional training plans to ensure language skills are available and meet demand.

Additional Learning Needs

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2016, known as the ALNET Bill, will demand greater collaborative working on a regional and multi-agency basis to deliver services for those with additional learning needs. This will include integrated assessment, planning and monitoring with a focus on early intervention when needed, with a duty on health boards and local authorities to ensure a child of young person with additional learning needs are enabled to reach their full potential.

Public protection

This includes environmental health, trading standards and licensing. Views are sought on the scope of functions to be included in this remit.

The White Paper also makes reference to a series of areas that Welsh Government believes should mandatorily be delivered on a regional basis, but has not decided on these fully as yet. These are:

Housing

This would build on the likes of the Supporting People programme's operations under six Regional Collaborative Committees. Consideration will be given as to how operating regionally would interface with staff-intensive services such as tackling homelessness, which would continue to be delivered locally.

Waste

Welsh Government think there is 'potential' for current regional working arrangements to be expanded to include waste and recycling collections, although recognise the different arrangements currently in place across Wales. However they believe there is scope for efficiency savings, reductions in carbon emissions and a chance for a more consistent experience for citizens.

Community safety and youth justice

If other public services are delivered on a regional footprint, Welsh Government state there is a case for Community Safety Partnerships and Youth Offending Teams to do the same to match the services supporting their work.

Shared supporting services

Welsh Government has proposed that regional working for those services that support the functioning of public services could yield significant savings. It will also allow for the sharing of Welsh language capacity to allow those who want to receive services through

Welsh to do so, including giving local authorities the chance to come together to exploit digital technology.

Local authorities will be asked to consider how back office and administrative services can support regional working and create opportunities to share support services, perhaps on a pan-Wales basis in some cases. They also state: *'this is an area offering scope to integrate across public services, for example encompassing health or third sector systems'*, although offer no details on how this may work.

Shared services have been split into four categories:

- Joint procurement, such as the National Procurement Services and electronic procurements system.
- Shared platforms, such as Public Sector Broadband Aggregation
- Shared service delivery, such as Archives Services and Regulatory Services
- Shared back office services, such as NHS Wales Shared Service Partnership

Welsh Government would like to hear views on where the greatest value will come from in pursuing shared supporting services.

Governance and accountability

The White Paper states that: *'Our proposals for regional working will require different governance mechanisms to underpin them. This will ensure that collaborative behaviour is embedded in decision making, accountability and scrutiny.'*

This 'regional governance model' will aim to ensure service provision improves across the region by providing services no local authority could deliver alone. For instance, it could mean a region allocating more resources to one area than another. Governance arrangements will need to be 'robust enough to make and be accountable for these difficult decisions'.

This model will also need to ensure clarity for local people - as well as elected members, officers and public service organisations - about where decisions are made and who is exercising what function. Citizens will need to be clear about how they can interact with these new arrangements.

The White Paper also suggests a development of 'smart scrutiny approaches', focusing on where the major impacts are for citizens or on matters which are 'new or contentious'. It states this will mean adopting different approaches, including using digital and other technology, to give citizens a key role and real voice in scrutiny of their services.

Joint Governance Committees [JGC] would build on existing committee arrangements, but add in a requirement to 'think regionally', creating a 'robust common platform from which everyone is working'. The proposed JGC areas are North Wales, Central and South West Wales and South East Wales. A 'mandatory financial framework' to ensure that expenditure of each JGC is met through pooled contributions from constituent local authorities is proposed.

Workforce matters

The White Paper states that establishing resilient services is paramount to the future of local government, meaning specialist skills will need to be shared and technical expertise

utilised collaboratively, and notes that 'a range of organisations are already working collaboratively to do this'. However, it also notes that there is no standard model to this, and local government has the opportunity to develop 'greater standardisation of approach, where appropriate'.

Public service boards

Public Service Boards are asked to consider how they work with the new regional arrangements, and whether it would be appropriate to reorganise themselves to reflect these.

Part 2: Voluntary mergers

Local authorities are asked to '*give serious thought*' as to how best to organise themselves to maximise their impact. The White Paper says that '*it may be that authorities choose to come together into a single larger authority to better deliver for local people*'. This will require the development of a robust proposal in dialogue with Welsh Government.

Part 3: A framework for local leadership

Welsh Government is to refresh the Local Government Partnership Scheme, which sets out how Welsh Government and local government work together to support the people of Wales, with a commitment remaining to reduce 'unnecessary burdens' on the public sector and business. It will provide a framework for local government to operate in to meet the current and future needs of individuals and communities.

A 'general power of competence' is pledged to local authorities and those community councils meeting a minimum set of criteria. This will allow local authorities to be more innovative and flexible in providing cost effective services and facilities, while a council could lend or invest money or set up a company or co-operative.

The White Paper notes that there are expectations for individuals, elected members and officers to lead, describing this as 'an ethos, a commitment to developing learning organisations' where the needs of people and communities are put at the heart of decision making. Leaders of Local Authorities will be expected to undertake objective setting with Cabinet Members.

Part 4: Leading localities

This is the area of the White Paper that gives its most emphatic commitment to co-production, stating it must be at the heart of how organisations work together with their communities. It notes that there must be close working between community councils, local authorities, other public bodies and any regional arrangements to achieve the Framework set out in the Wellbeing Goals.

There is an aim to promote greater diversity among those standing for election.

Local authorities will be asked to produce strategies explaining how the public can understand how decisions are made and how they can participate in decision-making processes.

Part 5: Community Councils

As per the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the White Paper states that community councils should be considering how they can work with other partners and citizens to contribute to the wellbeing of their area. However, Welsh Government intends to undertake a 'comprehensive review' of the community council sector, with no structural reform until this is complete.

In the meantime, the production of a supportive toolkit for community councils is promised, to help work through what is required in terms of taking on new assets and services, while a conference will be held to help develop ties between community councils and local authorities. Welsh Government will also facilitate the creation of clusters of smaller councils via some 'modest funding'.

Welsh Government will also legislate for community councils to plan their training needs and ensure that they keep citizens informed, with a right to make representations at council meetings - 'part of an ethos of co-production'.

Part 6: Elections and voting

Initial views are sought to help inform thinking on reforms to electoral registration and voting procedures once the Wales Bill ends its passage through Parliament. This includes councils deciding whether to use the first-past-the-post voting system or proportional representation, and proposals for lowering the voting age to 16.