

Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Baltic House
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
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12 June 2018

Alun Davies, AM Cabinet Secretary for
Local Government and Public Services
Welsh Government
5th Floor
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Dear Alun,

Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People

Many thanks for the opportunity to meet to discuss the third sector view in relation to the consultation on 'Strengthening Local Government Delivering for People'. While I am conscious it is not possible to reflect all the views of the vast range of voluntary organisations that are working to strengthen communities across Wales, I believe that the perspectives gained from our respective roles would be widely shared.

Our key point was that change should focus on the culture that is required if local authorities are to play an effective role in delivering for people. We believe that local government needs to focus on an enabling citizen and community led solutions. This requires a different approach to top down delivery, either directly provided or contracted, which is designed to solve problems and provide services on behalf of citizens.

There are of course variations across local authorities but this focus on empowerment, as reflected in our legislative frameworks, requires a change in mindset as well as a greater role for town and community councils in working with their communities in shaping the future of their communities, building the sense of belonging and civic pride so essential for community wellbeing. This needs to be built around places, towns, neighbourhoods and communities, not around local authority areas.

This approach also sets the agenda for the role of the elected councillor as an advocate and enabler rather than a position of power. A stronger link between the democratic and participative roles is essential. We believe that this can play a part in the need to improve the diversity of elected representative and provide the basis for a wider review of function including remuneration.

We also stressed the need to reduce the complexity, reflected in the number of partnerships and structures that operate at local authority and regional level, with their overlapping footprints and cursory representation of the third sector. These structures are too often capacity and resource consumers, rather than capacity and resource creators. There needs to be a greater clarity of roles and functions between local (place based), area/regional and national, with the application of the common ways of working set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

As a third sector we have been very proud of the relationship with Government established as part of the devolution process. However, we feel that these structures and the compact with the sector need to be reviewed and strengthened with both national and local government. We would hope that the reforms being proposed for local government and be an opportunity to restate the principles and redesign the practice to reflect our common purpose. We simply see too many cases of bad commissioning practice and under valuing of the role of the sectors contribution to community wellbeing.

We would hope that the theme of empowering communities would be at the heart of the reforms being proposed. This will need to challenge existing structures and models of operating. It will need to move beyond citizen centred services to focus on building relationships and solutions with communities.

Yours sincerely

Peter Davies
Wales Council for
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Electoral Reform Society

