



White Paper: Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed

Council
March 2017



Background

- Long-standing Welsh Government intent to reform local government
- Phases of change over the past 15 years at UK and later Welsh Government levels
- Public Services Commission (2014)
- White Paper *Power to the People* (2015)
- Further Regulations passed (2015)
- Draft Local Government (Wales) Bill (2015)
- Change of Minister/Cabinet Secretary 2016

Over-riding points

- For local government to be resilient – it is all about powers, freedoms and money
- The reform of local government finance is passed over in the White Paper
- Local government has been the most adaptable and resilient part of the public sector for decades and performance in Wales continues to improve. So why a ‘play thing’ for constant reform?

Obsession with reinvention?



White Paper Contents

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: Regional Working
- Part 3: Voluntary Mergers
- Part 4: A Framework for Local Leadership
- Part 5: Leading Localities
- Part 6: Community Councils
- Part 7: Elections and Voting



Critique of the White Paper

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Reminder of what we said in response to the last Bill

- Localist principles in a devolved Wales
- Re-frame a vision for local government which builds on our roles and strengths
- Invest trust in local government
- Legislate for the majority not the minority
- Reduce centralist bureaucracy
- Balanced self and external regulation
- A longer-term funding strategy to match

Part 2: Regional Working

- The tests to evaluate the potential for regional working are reasonable as a guide
- Need to distinguish between regionalism and regionalisation – collaboration or enforcement
- Economic Development and Transport supported
- Questions over the extent of social care, education and land use planning collaboration. Cases for building control and Additional Learning Needs collaboration need testing
- List of regional working functional areas to be explored is 'random' and needs testing

Part 2: Regional Working

- Limited potential for shared services. This is an obsessive theme. The previous KPMG report on shared services was discredited by some. The NHS shared services model is not directly comparable and its cost-benefit is challengeable
- Added benefits of the proposed Joint Governance Committee are unclear
- No dispute over the 'foot print' for co-terminous working in the North Wales region
- Option 3 'a framework and a footprint' is to be preferred
- Major practical barriers to regional funding models

Part 3: Voluntary Mergers

- The option is unlikely to be taken by any of the North Wales local authorities
- Flintshire has argued that it should be properly funded as a sustainable local authority in its own right as the largest in North Wales and the sixth largest in Wales (by population)
- Welsh Government should concentrate on the question of the sustainability of the smallest local authorities in Wales and proper funding models

Part 4: Local Leadership

- A somewhat parental 'essay' on how we should run our local authorities
- Removal of the 2009 Measure on performance and improvement welcomed
- A suitable and sustainable funding model for fire and rescue authorities is more important than constitutional reform
- The use of the intervention power for Welsh Government is questionable based on experience

Part 5: Leading Localities

- Removal of the previous proposal to require community area committees is to be welcomed
- Greater requirements of Group Leaders over the management of member conduct
- The constitutional proposal for remote attendance by members - practical or necessary?
- Review of codes of conduct necessary?
- The option for a local authority to review and change its constitutional model already exists
- Professional concern over diluting statutory advisor roles for regional working

Part 6: Community Councils

- Since the last full review by the Welsh Government (2003) there has been no significant reform
- The expectations of town and community councils could be raised
- Some councils are coming to the fore taking more responsibility with innovation
- Clustering proposal could be workable with councils being at the hub of wider community action

Part 7: Elections and Voting

- Proposals to reform electoral processes under the new legislative competence conferred by the Wales Act – such as digital registration and ‘self-serve’, digital voting, flexible voting – are to be welcomed
- Any trials should be on a whole-Wales basis
- Major investment in technology, systems, training and public awareness will be required
- The elections system for Welsh local government should be uniform
- Any major reform should be debated and set at national level and not devolved for local determination

Other proposals

- Some other proposals are carried forward from the previous Bill
- General Power of Competence retained with the support of local government
- General Power needs meaning; prior English local government experience shows limited benefit from the conferment of the Power
- Some contested proposals remain e.g status of Head of Democratic Services; workforce directions
- Some proposals have been removed e.g community improvement requests, electoral qualifications

Central-local relations

