

WLGA Executive Board

Minutes 23rd February 2024

via Teams



Present:

WLGA Presiding Officer, Cllr Huw David OBE (Bridgend)

Cllr Stephen Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)
Cllr Sean Morgan (Caerphilly)
Cllr Huw Thomas (Cardiff)
Cllr Darren Price (Carmarthenshire)
Cllr Bryan Davies (Ceredigion)
Cllr Jason McLellan (Denbighshire)
Cllr. Ian Roberts (Flintshire)
Cllr. Dyfrig Siencyn (Gwynedd)
Cllr Geraint Thomas (Merthyr Tydfil)
Cllr Steve Hunt (Neath Port Talbot)
Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)
Cllr David Simpson (Pembrokeshire)
Cllr James Gibson-Watt (Powys)
Cllr. Andrew Morgan OBE (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)
Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen)
Cllr Lis Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr Mark Pritchard (Wrexham)

Apologies

- Cllr. Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy) - Substitute Cllr. Emily Owen

WLGA Officers: Chris Llewelyn, Naomi Alleyne, Tim Peppin, Karen Higgins, Sharon Davies, Luke Nicholas and Evelyn James.

Prior to the WLGA Executive Board, the following were in attendance:

Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance & Local Government provided an update on the financial situation and the work being done on abuse in politics.

Jane Davidson, Chair, Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group Wales Centre for Public Policy gave an update on work being undertaken. A meeting for Leaders is to be arranged jointly with WLGA in May to provide an opportunity to comment on, and input to, the findings of the Challenge Group.

Item 1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

1. Apologies and substitutes noted as above.

Item 2. Minutes of the meeting 19th January 2024 – were agreed.

Item 3. WLGA Leader & Spokespersons Update

2. No updates and the discussion preceding the meeting involving the Minister covered all current issues.

Item 4. Review of Grants administration

3. Cllr. Hunt reported that there has been small progress as outlined in the paper and that work continues.
4. Cllr. Siencyn: Concerned about the cuts to Welsh language education grants in - £600k across Gwynedd and Anglesey. A letter was sent to the Welsh Government at the beginning of the month but no response to date.
5. Cllr. Medi: Further work should happen on changes to grants as there are implications for every council and how they are merged into the formula (the value when they are merged into the RSG).
6. Members noted there can be inconsistency between grants in education - some are direct, and some go through councils. There was concern that grants could be reduced once they go into the settlement.
7. Chris reported that discussions are ongoing with the aim of reducing bureaucracy in grant management while ensuring any settlement increases are not undermined by cuts to specific grants. There are also service grants which are not published at the same time as the settlement so details available currently. It was noted most grants outside the settlement have been cut in real terms. The 26 education grants have been reduced to 4, it has been agreed that before they go into the settlement, they should be discussed by the Distribution Sub-Group.
8. The £300k cut to flood prevention grants was raised and it was agreed that an explanatory note would be circulated.
9. Members noted that as well as the FCERM revenue grant there is a capital grant programme for coastal areas and the implications for both needed to be understood.

ACTION: Tim Peppin to review the flood and coastal grant queries and report back.

10. Resolved:

- 10.1 Members noted the contents of the report.
- 10.2 Members agreed the WLGA should look at the impact of grants being transitioned into the RSG.

Item 5. South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Culture Review Report

11. Naomi Alleyne outlined the findings of the report and noted there is limited additional detail at the moment from officials. One area of concern is the potential impact on other fire and rescue authorities if the general governance model is being reviewed. An Audit Wales review is also already underway (predating the current report).
12. The WLGA is engaging with spokespeople on how to move forward at this stage and it was reported that the role of the Commissioners is not yet fully clear. The WLGA will continue to update members as discussions and progress and all councils were encouraged to look at the findings of the report and consider their own cultures in light of the Review.
13. Chris Llewelyn added that the WLGA was alert to the potential of fire and rescue being moved to a national level body although Welsh Government have previously indicated they had no plans in this regard.
14. Members were unhappy with the Welsh Government failure to engage with the WLGA before bringing in Commissioners. Members highlighted that local government funds the service and should have been consulted - the Fire Authority are members of the Association. The Chief Executive shared concern about the lack of engagement and will action the letter on behalf of members and conveying a strong WLGA message to highlight the need to be treated with respect by the Commissioners and the Welsh Government.
15. Members agreed the narrative should not be of a failure of local government and were clear the offensive failings lie with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, not, the Fire and Rescue Authority or local government.
16. Chris agreed to circulate draft letter in advance and maintain close contact with the three Fire Authorities and was clear the Commissioners need to understand the role of local government in relation to the fire service.
17. **Resolved:**
 - 17.1 **Members noted the contents of the report.**
 - 17.2 **Members agreed the WLGA should write to the Welsh Government about the failure to consult the WLGA prior to the appointment of the Commissioners.**

Item 6. Child Burial Fees: Renewal of Memorandum of Understanding

18. Since 2017 the Welsh Government has provided funding to councils to support bereaved families in relation to child burial or cremations fees, as well as for additional financial support for bereaved families. The previous review of the grant was undertaken in 2020-21, with a commitment to reviewing the grant again prior to the 2024-25 financial year.
19. As part of the Programme for Government the Welsh Government committed to reduce the administrative burden on local authorities. As part of this undertaking, the proposal is to transfer the support for child burial fees into the Revenue Support Grant for 2024-25.

20. Resolved:

- 20.1 Members agreed to support the proposed change to the funding method for local authorities; and**
- 20.2 Members agreed Cllr Morgan, as Leader of the WLGA, should sign the renewed Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of councils in Wales.**

Item 7. Any Other Business

Members were reminded that the WLGA Annual Conference is being held on the 26th and 27th of June in [Swansea Arena](#).