

Minutes

WLGA Executive Board

29th July 2022

Via Zoom

PRESENT:

WLGA Presiding Officer, Cllr Huw David (Bridgend)
Cllr Andrew Morgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cllr Bryan Davies (Ceredigion)
Cllr Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy)
Cllr Darren Price (Carmarthenshire)
Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn (Gwynedd)
Cllr Ian Roberts (Flintshire)
Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)
Cllr Lis Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr Llinos Medi (Ynys Mon)
Cllr Mark Pritchard (Wrexham)
Cllr Mary Anne Brocklesby (Monmouthshire)
Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)
Cllr Sean Morgan (Caerphilly)
Cllr Stephen Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)
Cllr Steve Hunt (Neath Port Talbot)
Cllr Andrew Barry (Merthyr Tydfil) (substitute for Cllr Geraint Thomas)
Cllr Neil Prior (Pembrokeshire) (substitute for Cllr David Simpson)
Cllr Richard Clark (Torfaen) (substitute for Cllr Anthony Hunt)

ALSO PRESENT: Chris Llewelyn, Janet Davies, Jo Hendy, Jon Rae, Karen Higgins, ,
Lynwen Davies (interpreter), Naomi Alleyne, Nathan Gardner,
Richard Palmer, Sharon Davies, Stewart Blythe, Tim Peppin

Item 1: Welcome and Apologies

1. Apologies were noted from Cllr Anthony Hunt, Cllr David Simpson, Cllr Geraint Thomas, Cllr Huw Thomas, Cllr James Gibson-Watt and Cllr Jason McLellan

Item 2: Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

2. These were approved as a true and accurate record.

Item 3: WLGA Leader's Update

3. Cllr Morgan noted that most items to update on are contained within the agenda, however he highlighted the enormity of the budget pressures to be faced next year. The Leader confirmed that the group leaders have jointly written to the UK and Welsh Government outlining the pressures and job losses which could be faced. He noted the need to lobby back bench MSs early and stated there is an opportunity that as the Minister for Finance and Local Government is meeting with new leaders, the WLGA can provide briefings so the message conveyed is consistent.

Item 4: Budgets 2023-24 and FSG feedback including pay and cost of living crisis

4. In the absence of Cllr Hunt, Jon Rae provided feedback on the recent Finance Sub Group meeting with the Minister who gave an update on when they expect the budget to be available for Welsh Government, with the earliest being within 4 weeks of any budget announcement in the UK running up to the 13th December. Regarding Council Tax Reform, the 12 week consultation closes in October. Jon noted this was a phase one consultation around the broad principles. Jon also confirmed that at the FSG meeting, there was a paper on the Distribution Sub Group around the data used within the funding formula and what is needed to update that, so work on this will be taken forward.
5. Jon noted that the current pay offer from the employers would add an additional £85million, which when you add in teachers' pay, increases to approximately £100million.
6. Cllr Morgan commented that in RCT, £1,925 pay increase across all grades would add 7.4% to the overall pay which adds hugely to the budget gap. Cllr Morgan confirmed they had budgeted for 3.5% with some flexibility to go up to 4% so 7.4% would have a real impact. Alongside this, the message from Welsh Government is they have no extra money. Cllr Morgan noted that with no more support, one off funding to cover the pay gap would need to be used and if there is no uplift to the budget, then next year the budget gap for RCT would be £30million. In addition, there is a 285% uplift on gas projected for RCT next year. Cllr Morgan added that with the cost-of-living crisis, it cannot be justified to raise the council tax by as much as would be needed to fill the funding gap. Cllr Morgan also confirmed he is aware there is significant overspend in health boards, so there will be huge pressure on the WG budget going forward. The Leader did, however, note it is not too late in that there is an autumn budget in the UK, so local government will need to lobby the UK government hard, alongside colleagues in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
7. The political group leaders agreed we have to work together as the family of WLGA on this as most leaders put in an assumption of 4 – 5 % inflation and without further monies being made available, local authorities will have no option other than making redundancies.

8. Cllr Medi suggested the next steps described in the paper be agreed, but in addition there further engagement with the Senedd to discuss the financial situation and implications.

9. Resolved that:

9.1. The steps in the paper are agreed, but with an additional action to initiate further engagement with the Senedd to discuss the financial situation.

Item 5: Mileage rates

10. Karen Higgins introduced the paper, outlining the fuel pressures adding to the cost of living crisis and the work being done alongside the LGA to lobby HMRC for an increase in rates. The different options in the paper were highlighted and it was noted that the health service have already agreed to a temporary measure.
11. Cllr Morgan agreed that everyone would wish to do more, but the sums are different for each LA, adding the additional 5p per mile would costs RCT £100k and over 20% of that would be taken by the government in tax.
12. Cllr Pritchard stated he could not support 14.2.3 as it would split authorities and the Equalities chair would not be supportive. As doing nothing is not an option, he would support a national position. Acknowledging that whilst 20% gets taken away, he stated there are staff that cannot afford to put petrol in their car to go and do their jobs.
13. Cllr Morgan queried what mechanisms would need to be put in place to ensure these are temporary arrangements. It was requested that WLGA officers be tasked with looking into how this would work, with a figure set so if fuel goes below that amount, the extra allowance gets removed. As there should not be undue delays and each authority would need to take the recommendation through their cabinet due to the financial implications, it was recommended that group leaders sign this off so as to try and avoid significant delays over the summer period.

14. Resolved that:

14.1 A national approach be explored with a mechanism to ensure it is a temporary relief.

14.2 Group leaders sign off on this approach to ease the path through each cabinet session.

Item 6: Ukraine Update

15. Cllr Andrew Morgan highlighted the urgency surrounding Ukrainian refugees, as an increase of arrivals of 40 to 50 per day is coinciding with halls of residence having to be emptied by the end of August. More hotels and temporary centres are being used and it was understood that a ship may be under consideration as an option in Swansea. It was noted all agree that refugees are supported, but there needed to be a sustainable plan to move people on or they will still be in this accommodation in 12 months.

16. Concerns were expressed about the safety and other arrangements around a potential boat option and alternative options should be explored by Welsh Government. Cllr Stewart asked colleagues to support this position.
17. Cllrs Medi and Pritchard confirmed that the Plaid Cymru and Independent Groups fully support the position, adding that the situation is getting to the crisis stage, similar to Covid and the 22 Leaders need to come together as they did with Covid to support one another.
18. Cllr Mudd raised the issue of the lack of move-on accommodation, adding that people are being forced to compete against each other for scarce resources which impacts negatively on community cohesion and equality.
19. **Resolved that:**
 - 19.1 **The views of the 22 leaders about accommodation options be communicated in a constructive way to Welsh Government as soon as possible.**

Item 7: WLGA Consultation response: ‘One network, one timetable, one ticket: planning buses as a public service for Wales’

20. Cllr Andrew Morgan highlighted the importance of everybody responding as whilst all local authorities have different pressures, the general principle is we all need to do something with bus reform. With local authority officers, there is an opportunity to shape what is going back to Welsh Government. Cllr Morgan stated he hoped everyone could support the report as is, whilst accepting there may be a need for the rural forum to feed in for specific rural aspects.
21. Cllr Medi raised issues regarding the needs of rural communities and queried whether a separate response might be required, but after discussion it was agreed the WLGA response needs to better articulate implications for rural areas, specifically including interdependencies that support overall bus provision in a locality.
22. **Resolved:**
 - 22.1 **Additional comments from a rural perspective to be included and incorporated in the WLGA response**

Item 8: Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales

23. Chris Llewelyn introduced the paper, noting the membership of the commission is appended and most would be familiar names. The WLGA has been asked to give evidence to the commission in September, this being an initial discussion and very much a starting point. It was noted there is an opportunity to shape their thinking, so the WLGA are suggesting developing a paper setting out the Association’s existing position, agree the paper with group leaders over the summer and then have a meeting with the commission in September.

24. Cllr Charlie McCoubrey expressed concern that local democracy is being looked at, it is clear there is an appetite for independents since 25% of Cllrs are independent, but there are no Independent MSs. Cllr McCoubrey also highlighted that in the appendix of the members, there seems no representative of local government there.
25. Cllr Mark Pritchard confirmed he would be happy to take the first step, but then feels there needs to be a pause as he has serious concerns. Cllr Pritchard noted it reminded of the boundary commission where the independent group are being pushed by a timescale that doesn't suit.
26. Cllr Medi commented that on behalf of the Plaid Cymru group, she does support the recommendation, though her understanding was that the 22 Leaders would be invited to the meeting and it would be useful to have clarification as to exactly who is invited.
27. Chris Llewelyn confirmed his understanding was it was to be a selection of Leaders, but the WLGA could go back to the commission and request a meeting with the 22 Leaders instead. It was noted the difficulties might be getting everyone available at the same time and the group leaders might be a way to progress this as they could then feed back.
28. The Presiding Officer confirmed an update on the format of the meeting with the Commission will be obtained and we can then look at how to ensure the local voice is heard loudly and clearly
- 29. Resolved:**
29.1 WLGA to confirm the format of the meeting and then engage with Leaders as to how to ensure the local voice is best heard.

Item 9: Proposal to increase community capacity in social care – preparing for Winter pressures

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WLGA Constitution 20.6.3 Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Item 10: WLGA Spokespersons

30. Chris Llewelyn noted it had been hoped to present a final list at today's meeting but he appreciated how difficult it had been to get together. He confirmed there is now an agreed list of spokespersons, so with agreement he can circulate that after the meeting.
31. Cllr Morgan noted the Labour group agree on numbers, but may need to come back on the final names.
- 32. Resolved:**

37.1 The list of agreed spokespersons to be circulated following the meeting.

Item 11: Independent Review of WLGA Members Allowances

33. All members of the Executive Board declared an interest.

34. Chris Llewelyn noted the decision to review the allowances was taken by the council last year but felt the detail of the review should be taken by the new association.

35. Resolved that

40.1 The recommendations in the paper be progressed

Item 12: WLGA Corporate Strategy

36. Chris Llewelyn confirmed the intention to go out and visit authorities over the next few months and then come back with a strategy that reflects your priorities and needs. He noted one approach it would be useful to have a steer on would be whether to have a 5 year electoral cycle strategy or a rolling 3 year one like the LGA.

37. Cllr Neil Prior noted that in paragraph 14, maybe some of the work of the back bench councillors is being missed, adding there is an opportunity there to increase the perception of the good work the WLGA does.

38. Resolved:

43.1 To accept the recommendations in the report

Item 13: Application for Flexible Early Retirement

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WLGA Constitution 20.6.1 Information relating to a particular individual; and 20.6.3 Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)