

WLGA Council

Minutes

25th November 2022

Via Zoom

PRESENT:

WLGA Presiding Officer: Cyngh/Cllr Huw David (Bridgend)

Cyngh/Cllr Stephen Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)	Cyngh/Cllr Mary-Ann Brocklesby (Monmouthshire)
Cyngh/Cllr Helen Cunningham (Blaenau Gwent)	Cyngh/Cllr Paul Griffiths (Monmouthshire)
Cyngh/Cllr Jane Gebbie (Bridgend)	Cyngh/Cllr Alun Llewelyn (Neath Port Talbot)
Cyngh/Cllr Sean Morgan (Caerphilly)	Cyngh/Cllr Simon Knoyle (Neath Port Talbot)
Cyngh/Cllr Neil George (Caerphilly)	Cyngh/Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)
Cyngh/Cllr James Pritchard (Caerphilly)	Cyngh/Cllr James Clarke (Newport)
Cyngh/Cllr Huw Thomas (Cardiff)	Cyngh/Cllr Deb Davies (Newport)
Cyngh/Cllr Norma Mackie (Cardiff)	Cyngh/Cllr David Simpson (Pembrokeshire)
Cyngh/Cllr Ashley Lister (Cardiff)	Cyngh/Cllr James Gibson-Watt (Powys)
Cyngh/Cllr Sarah Merry (Cardiff)	Cyngh/Cllr Jackie Charlton (Powys)
Cyngh/Cllr Darran Price (Carmarthenshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Matthew Dorrance (Powys)
Cyngh/Cllr Linda Evans (Carmarthenshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Christina Leyshon (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cyngh/Cllr Alun Lenny (Carmarthenshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Mark Norris (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cyngh/Cllr Jane Tremlett (Carmarthenshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)
Cyngh/Cllr Alun Williams (Ceredigion)	Cyngh/Cllr Andrea Lewis (Swansea)
Cyngh/Cllr Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy)	Cyngh/Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen)
Cyngh/Cllr Jason McLellan (Denbighshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Richard Clark (Torfaen)
Cyngh/Cllr Ian Roberts (Flintshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Lis Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cyngh/Cllr Christine Jones (Flintshire)	Cyngh/Cllr Mark Pritchard (Wrexham)
Cyngh/Cllr Bernie Attridge (Flintshire)	Cyngh/Cllr David A Bithell (Wrexham)
Cyngh/Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn (Gwynedd)	Cyngh/Cllr Jeremy Kent (Wrexham)
Cyngh/Cllr Llinos Medi (Isle of Anglesey)	
Cyngh/Cllr Carwyn Ellis (Isle of Anglesey)	
Cyngh/Cllr Andrew Barry (Merthyr)	

Associate Members

Cllr Elwyn Williams (Carmarthenshire) Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Authority
Cllr Mike James (Pembrokeshire) Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Apologies

Cyngh/Cllr Andrew Morgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Cyngh/Cllr Bryan Davies (Ceredigion)
Cyngh/Cllr Geraint Thomas (Merthyr)
Cyngh/Cllr Steve Hunt (Neath Port Talbot)
Cyngh/Cllr Jon-Paul Blundell (Bridgend)
Cyngh/Cllr Eluned Stenner (Caerphilly)
Cyngh/Cllr Bryan Davies (Ceredigion)
Cyngh/Cllr Nia Wyn Jeffreys (Gwynedd)
Cyngh/Cllr Mark Spencer (Newport)
Cyngh/Cllr Neil Prior (Pembrokeshire)
Cyngh/Cllr Louise Gibbard (Swansea)
Cyngh/Cllr Bronwen Brooks (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cyngh/Cllr Gwyn John (Vale of Glamorgan)

Associate Members

Cyngh/Cllr Gareth Ratcliffe (Brecon Beacons National Park)

Item 1: Welcome, apologies for absence and International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women

1. Apologies as detailed above.
2. The Presiding Officer noted that today, 25th November, is International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women, also known as White Ribbon Day, which aims to encourage action to raise awareness of and address violence against women.
3. He highlighted that this year the White Ribbon campaign has linked into the World Cup with its #TheGoal campaign to raise awareness about the challenges — and dangers — women and girls face in traditionally male-dominated contexts like the football pitch, but also public transportation.
4. The White Ribbon campaign has identified 11 traits, one for each player on a football team, and encourages us all to strive to incorporate them into our daily lives in support of women and girls. The campaign wants to encourage everyone to work together to achieve gender equality by embodying the following 11 traits, which the Presiding Officer encouraged members to endorse — ALLY, CARING, EMPATHETIC, COURAGEOUS, GENTLE, RESILIENT, RELIABLE, HOPEFUL, PRINCIPLED, REFLECTIVE and SUPPORTIVE.
5. He reported that his authority, Bridgend, is working with staff from South Wales Police and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service in organising a one-off staff football match later today to support White Ribbon Day and help end the abuse of women and girls. He noted that several other councils are marking International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women in the coming days and weeks.
6. Cllr Mudd, Community Safety Spokesperson, noted how positive it was that members and councils were actively supporting White Ribbon Day. She reported she had recently welcomed Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England

and Wales to Gwent and facilitated meetings with organisations that support victims and service users. Cllr Mudd emphasised how important for members, as individuals in positions of influence, continue to raise awareness and do all that we can to lobby for change. Cllr Mudd encouraged everyone to get involved in the wide range of activities that are going on to 16th December.

7. Cllr Brocklesby, Equalities Spokesperson, commented that these sixteen days of action against gender-based violence against women and girls are needed because incidents of violence against women and girls have increased. She noted that days such as these are needed to remind us that there are positive actions we, as individuals and councils, can publicly take to stand with the victims of gender based violence to show it is not acceptable and to stop it happening. She highlighted the role and responsibility councils have in challenging this behaviour and also the legal framework the Welsh Government has put in place to make all people in Wales safe. She reported that the Welsh Government is signing up to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) - the first devolved nation to do so.
8. Council members backed the words of the Presiding Officer and Spokespersons' and the work of the WLGA and councils in support of White Ribbon Day.

Item 2: Minutes of WLGA Meetings

9. **Resolved that:**
 - 9.1 **Members approved the draft minutes of the WLGA Council AGM, 24th June 2022;**
 - 9.2 **Member noted the draft minutes of the WLGA Executive Board, 28th October 2022.**

Item 3: WLGA Leader's Update

10. Cllr Rob Stewart, WLGA Deputy Leader, highlighted a number of matters.
11. **Finance Seminar 18th November** - hosted in RCT for Leaders, Chief Executives and Chief Finance Officers to go through the budget situation in Wales following the UK Autumn Statement the previous day and looking at the challenges and solutions councils are considering to balance their budgets. It is clear all councils are facing a difficult situation and will have to make stark choices. Cllr Stewart noted the scale of the challenge exceeds that seen even during the days of austerity. An anonymised account (to maintain confidentiality) of the event will be shared with members in due course.
12. **Consequentials to Wales as a result of the UK GOV Autumn Statement** – the Wales Fiscal Analysis Unit estimates this to be £1.2bn over a two-year period and while local government will be lobbying hard for a fair share of that money, it will also have to go across other Welsh Government departments including health.

Spokespersons and members were clear those consequentials are vital and should be used to support local services in Wales including social care and education.

13. **Energy price increase** – clarified local government is specifically excluded from the Energy Price Guarantee Scheme. Will continue to lobby UK Gov for help with increased energy costs faced by schools, care homes and community buildings. All the consequentials projected to come to Wales will not cover the increases forecast in energy prices faced by councils.
14. **Funding pressures** - Cllr Stewart was clear the WLGA would be seeking several hundred million pounds additional to the RSG settlement. The baseline RSG for this year is 3.5% - part of the three-year settlement but this won't cover all the pressures.
15. **Messaging** - Members commented that there appears to be a lack of understanding among local MPs around the pressures councils face. Some MPs think councils are being protected by the Welsh Government and that local government is getting adequate settlements. It was noted that if MPs in Westminster need a clear picture of the situation local authorities in Wales are facing. Cllr Stewart urged members to meet with their local elected representatives in both Westminster and the Senedd to ensure they have a clear account of the pressures councils are under if this is not already happening. Members also mentioned that the public needs to understand that inflation affects council services not just residents. Inflation and energy costs are having a massive impact on council budgets.
16. **WLGA Finance lobbying** - Regional Finance Sessions with non-cabinet MSs being held to make the local government funding position clear and keep the pressure on. The WLGA is currently working on key lines to share with Leaders to keep pressure on UK Gov and the Welsh Government in advance of their budget announcement in mid-December. Members also noted that the public needs to understand the Welsh Government budget is dependent on funding from the UK Gov and that council tax only forms a small part of the council budget. Increasing council tax will not cover the pressures councils face.
17. **Social Care** – Cllrs Morgan, Medi and David continue to meet with Ministers for Health and Social Services on a fortnightly basis to oversee the increasing Community Capacity Programme where councils and LHBs have been working together to increase the number of community beds to reduce delayed discharges from hospital. Progress has been made but it remains challenging particularly due to the lack of domiciliary care provision. The WLGA has this week submitted a detailed report to Ministers on the significant financial challenges facing social care and reinforcing the need for long term sustainable funding to meet continuing rising demand and increased complexity. WLGA spokespersons will meet to discuss the report and issues with Ministers shortly.
18. **Independent Review Panel for Wales (IRP)** – a number of group leaders and spokespersons met with the new IRP chair Frances Duffy to discuss their Draft Annual Report (consultation closes 1st December). Leaders gave an impassioned set of requirements to the IRP including highlighting the dramatic change to the role of leaders, cabinet members and members over the years and argue the three days out of five calculation they use is out of date. The lack of step-down payments for councillors who lose their seats in contrast to MSs and MPs was raised along with

the pressures and challenges of the role. The need to take IRPW reports through council procedures was challenged and the points made that the report is something councils have no control over, and it looks as if councillors are voting on their own pay when they are actually not. It needs to be taken out of the council chamber and kept completely independent. It was noted that whether members accept any increase proposed is an individual decision. It was also suggested that councils look at their standing order and possibly come up with a consistent position across Wales.

19. **Climate Change Week** – in support the Leader called a second meeting of Leaders and Climate Change Cabinet members to discuss the link between climate change and nature loss and the energy needs of communities in the future.
20. **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** - councils awaiting allocation from UK Government. The Levelling-Up line disappeared from the Treasury Green book this week but assured it is still there but not as a specific item. Understanding an announcement is imminent and Levelling-Up round two bids will be announced later, possibly January.
21. **Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15: Development & Flood Risk** – TAN 15 is Welsh Government guidance for local planning authorities to reduce flood risk and develop away from high-risk areas. The way it is currently drafted presents risks and challenges to councils to progress regeneration and development across Wales. The WLGA engaged with Welsh Government on the issue last year and were successful in getting a deferral in full implementation of the guidance. Since then, planning officers have been working on revised wording that is more workable and won't lead to the halting of regeneration work in Wales – a risk with the current wording. A number of leaders and officers met to discuss the wording with the plan to submit it to the Welsh Government the week commencing 5th December to consider the drafting changes and possibly consult on them early in the New Year. If accepted, those changes would be adopted as the revised wording for TAN 15. The aim is to get something that councils can work with. Cllr Stewart asked that councils stand together on this issue and that if there were any technical issues to feed them through in advance of the 5th December.
22. Members agreed with the Deputy Leader's comments in terms of the currently deferred TAN 15 and the detrimental impact it would have on economic growth across Wales and stressed that subtle but important, in legal terms, changes to the guidance are needed. Members made it clear this is not just a planning matter but will impact economic growth. It's about doing proper assessments.
23. **Fire & Rescue Services Update** – Workforce Spokesperson, Cllr Jane Gebbie, reported the FBU is balloting firefighters over Christmas and New Year period on whether to strike over pay. Cllr Gebbie recently met with the FBU and lead employers and reported that the situation in Wales is different to England and that in Wales as the F&RS are fully funded by councils which will be a significant pressure for councils.

Item 4: Local Authority Budgets 2023-24

24. Cllr Anthony Hunt, WLGA Finance Spokesperson, introduced the item and gave an oral update and presentation which was shared with all Council members immediately following the meeting.

25. Cllr Hunt noted the lobbying and activity being undertaken to highlight the situation facing local services and the consequences of funding decisions being made that are out of the control of local government. The message is not about giving more money to local government it's about investing in services councils provide that communities depend on and value. He noted the successful Finance Seminar (see Leader's Update above) and the Regional Finance events with Senedd members.

26. Cllr Hunt reported the budget pressures are nearly £800m for 2023-24 not including in year pressures and nearly £500m for 2024-25 including for pay, energy, inflation, and commissioning costs. Assumptions of a 3.5% RSG and council tax leave a gap of £548m in councils funding for 2023-24 and £255m 2024-25.

27. The positive media exposure was noted, including the interview the WLGA leader, Cllr Morgan, gave to Channel 4 highlighting the very real threat to local services that communities depend on and value. Cllr Hunt encouraged members to share the message that local services are under threat.

28. Cllr Hunt noted the Welsh Government would be receiving £1.2bn over the next two years from the UK GOV Autumn Statement and that the WLGA is working with them to be clear on what is new or previously allocated money – about 44% is from Non-Domestic Rates and likely to be used for the same thing. The WLGA has made the case that councils should get the consequentials from increased funding going to schools and social care in England. The role councils play in early intervention and prevention is critical in stopping acute services becoming overwhelmed and the Welsh Government needs properly functioning local services to deliver its priorities. The WLGA has made it clear the key phrased is there's a health 'system' not a health 'service' – health and social care are inextricably linked and intertwined. Investment in social care is an investment in health in reducing the burdens on health services. Funding cannot just go to the NHS and neglect social care otherwise with situation within the NHS will continue to get worse.

29. The WLGA has suggested other asked the Welsh Government for other things they can do to help with the financial pressures on councils including, that specific grants be included in the RSG, extending the tapering from the Intermediate Care Fund, updated capitalisation direction and flexibilities, a greater understanding of the reserves position of councils and the Welsh Government, tax, regulatory expectations and new burdens and extra pressures, floors, and service redesign. Members were asked to raise these issues with their local MSs.

30. Director of Resources, Jon Rae, noted that the figures for the consequentials on the slides come from Wales Fiscal Analysis (WFA) who aggregated the figures for presentational purposes. In England there has been additional £1bn for social care for 2023-24 and in 2024-25 £1.7bn. The reported that the WLGA sent a letter to the Welsh Government earlier in the week summarising the WFA view of the consequentials and made the case that they should be passed through to local government in Wales. The letter was shared with Council members immediately following the meeting for reference.

31. Members noted that in conversations with ministers it needs to be made clear its not just about the direct social impact of losing or contacting of services but also the wider economic impact, beyond councils, which can't be ignored. Businesses want to invest

in communities and areas with good public services – statutory and non-statutory – so affects potential business investment. The economic role of councils cannot be underestimated.

32. The Chief Executive noted the Association's lobbying work – both formal and informal - covers all service Ministers not just the Finance and Local Government Minister to strengthen the voice of local government around the Welsh Government cabinet table.

Item 5: COVID-19 Inquiry Update - EXEMPT

The presentation given by Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy (Improvement and Governance) contained information of the description set out in the paragraphs 20.7 and 20.8 of the WLGA Constitution as the Association "...is preparing itself to take evidence from or meet with any person." As a COVID-19 Core Participant, the WLGA is also in receipt of information shared confidentially by the COVID-19 Inquiry team

33. Resolved that:

33.1 Members agreed that a special meeting of the WLGA Management Sub-Committee and serving Leaders during the pandemic, be convened the week beginning 5th December for a briefing on the COVID-19 Inquiry ahead of the deadline for submission on 16th December 2022.

Item 6: WLGA Draft Financial Statements 2021-22

34. The Chief Executive, Chris Llewelyn, introduced the Audit Findings Report March 2022 and noted it covered the period up to the end of March 2022 and recognised that some of the current Council members may not have experience of the issues covered in the report.

35. Chris explained that the period had been dominated by Covid which challenged the way the WLGA worked and noted how difficult it is to overstate the demand placed on the Association during that time. He described the level and intensity of engagement between Leaders and Ministers, resulting at times in daily and weekly meetings. The scale and scope of the work during that time was noted which in fact still hasn't eased.

36. Chris noted the Revenue Settlement, published December 2021, was a 9.4% increase which was possibly the best in memory, if not ever. There was a sense that a corner had been turned, and no one anticipated the problems that lay ahead. Issues because of Brexit and workforce pressures were still being felt across local government services but the war in Ukraine and global economic and energy prices and impact on inflation and the cost of living was not anticipated during the period covered by the report.

37. The 9.4% settlement was in part a reflection of the relationship and engagement with the Welsh Government and service ministers and the Senedd as an institution, during

the Covid period. They recognised that they rely on councils to deliver services and their strategic aims and ambitions. The close relationship has continued and the approach adopted last year to the settlement discussions continues into this year.

38. Chris reported that during the period covered by the report the Association has moved into smaller offices in One Canal Parade resulting in efficiency savings. The office refit was carried out by the Ministry of Furniture, previously called Remploy, and reused materials from the previous office. Merthyr RNIB and other community groups were also used in the refit. We are also working in partnership with other public and third sector organisations and going forward into the challenging times ahead, the Association will continue to generate as much benefit and efficiency savings from the accommodation as possible to supplement the WLGA's income. The WLGA has also adopted an Agile Working policy.
39. Additional income sources are also being considered and the WLGA always looks to add as much value to the work of local authorities and uses subscriptions to further that aim. Income to the WLGA was £37m with a small part (£2/3m) coming from subscriptions. Most of the Association's income goes back out to authorities in the forms of grants
40. Chris noted that while the work of the Association has increased massively in the last two/three years the workforce is roughly the same as it was in 1996 when the WLGA was formed.
41. Chris reported that during austerity, to support authorities, subscriptions to the WLGA were always linked to the lowest settlement increase. When the settlement was cut, the WLGA took the highest settlement decrease to subscriptions.
42. Chris reported that in terms of setting next year's budget, the WLGA is on a stable financial footing and the Medium-Term Financial Plan looks positive and reserves will be used to cushion any losses. He committed to engage fully with members in setting the budget for the years ahead. Chris reported that a review of the senior management structure is being initiated to ensure it is effective and efficient going forward.
43. Harri Lloyd-Davies from the auditors Bevan and Buckland, noted that members had been sent two sets of accounts. One was the consolidated accounts for the WLGA and Data Cymru and the other the stand-alone accounts for the WLGA. He acknowledged the Chief Executive's description for the year and explained that this meant that financially there was a deficit for the WLGA for the year. This year's was similar to last year's deficit and both years were in surplus prior to pension adjustment being made. Both years the Association made a surplus in its core activities but the adjustments as a result of the defined pension scheme led to a deficit both years.
44. Harri reported no significant issues and gave the WLGA a 'clean' audit opinion and no issues to report. He noted under the going concern findings, that the Association is technically insolvent due to the £8.2m pension deficit which meant the Association had more liabilities than assets. The March 2022 year end for the accounts may be affecting this figure.

45. The Letter of Representation, sent to all clients, says nothing of significance most standard comments. Harri drew attention to 'deferred income' which is grants received but not utilised within the year.

46. Director of Resources, Jon Rae, reported the latest triennial valuation of the Associations pension fund is positive, which is done slightly different than the valuation in the accounts, showed the Association's balance sheet within the fund is currently 112% funded.

47. Resolved that:

- 47.1 Members approved the WLGA Strategic Report, Report of the Chief Executive and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022; and**
- 47.2 Members approved the Consolidated Statement of Accounts for the WLGA and Data Cymru for the year ended 31 March 2022.**

14:00: Meeting Close

The Presiding Officer thanked members for their attendance.