

26 May 2023

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## **WLGA CORPORATE STRATEGY 2023-27**

### **Purpose**

1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an opportunity to shape and develop the WLGA's Corporate Strategy for 2023-27 and the remainder of the electoral term.

### **Background**

2 The WLGA's current Corporate Strategy covers the period 2019-2022 and needs to be reviewed and refreshed. The attached draft Strategy for 2023-27 reflects the WLGA's traditional values and priorities, includes the findings and issues raised in the recent senior management review and the dynamic political context in which the WLGA operates.

3 The Covid-19 pandemic and the recent economic and financial crises, the war in Ukraine and Climate Change have all changed the way the WLGA works and the relationship with the Welsh Government, the UK Government and all other partners. The Covid-19 Inquiry will be a resource intensive feature of the WLGA's work going into the future as well as the constant financial challenges facing councils, the service pressures within education, social services, housing, transport etc and other unpredictable events and crises. The draft Corporate Strategy attempts to reflect these changes and we will aim to reflect these in the WLGA's business planning processes and engagement with members and councils.

### **WLGA Corporate Strategy 2023-27**

4 The draft document is short, succinct and provides a high-level strategy for the WLGA to follow for the remainder of the current electoral term. Further business plans will be developed during the year in parallel with the implementation of the recommendations of the Senior Management Review.

5 The intention is that a final, reader friendly version of the document be presented to members at the WLGA Council AGM in June.

### **Recommendations**

#### **6 Members are recommended to:**

**6.1 Consider and discuss the contents of the draft WLGA Corporate Strategy.**

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# WLGA Corporate Strategy 2023-27

Subtitle/Further information

June 2023



Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh

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# Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

**We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.**

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

**Our ultimate goal** is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

**We'll achieve our vision by**

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils.
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce.

## How we work

**We are a cross party organisation, and our decision-making arrangements are politically balanced, reflecting the combined political composition of the members appointed by local authorities.**

We are a member-led organisation and our activities and priorities are agreed through our main decision-making bodies, the **Council** - comprising 72 members proportionately representing the populations they serve – and the **Executive Board** - comprising the 22 council leaders. The Rural Forum is also an increasingly important structure within the Association. Through these mechanisms, there is a direct link between our governance arrangements and every individual voter in Wales. Electors vote for their councillors in the local government elections; the elected councillors in turn for governing administrations and elect a leader, and those leaders and councillors are elected on to the WLGA Council and Executive Board. The WLGA includes, as Associate Members, the National Park Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and other local government bodies in Wales. They are all valued members and form part of the WLGA's governance arrangements.

Elected members are at the heart of policy and decision making within the WLGA. Through the Executive Board and Council, members determine our priorities and activities and agree an annual Business Plan and receive an Annual Report.

Although Labour forms the largest group within the WLGA and holds the post of Leader and Deputy Leaders, we operate on the basis of consensus across the political groups including Independents, and Plaid Cymru. Leaders and other WLGA Council Members act as **Spokespersons** for the WLGA covering a range of local government services or portfolios. These portfolio areas cover all aspects of local government service ranging from finance, education and social services to libraries and leisure and we share the collective ambition to provide excellent online digital services to the people and businesses of Wales.

We are recognised under the statutory **Local Government Partnership Scheme** derived from the Government of Wales Act 2006 as the negotiating body representing local government. The WLGA is also the Employers Organisation in Wales and play a significant role in workforce issues and the growing *Social Partnership* agenda. Thus, WLGA Spokespersons represent the whole of local government in discussions and negotiations with the Welsh Government, the UK Government and all other national partners in their particular service areas. In addition, a small team of officers provide professional expertise and support to assist in the lobbying, improvement and policy development process.

Much of our work is focused on the Senedd, the Welsh Parliament, and the Welsh Government and other national stakeholders and partners. We also liaise with the Wales Office and UK Government and work closely with the LGA in London in seeking to influence non-devolved policies and legislation. The WLGA will also

continue to monitor and respond to developments within the European Union and work with partner organisations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) across Europe.

Our work involves engagement with Welsh Government Ministers, Members of the Senedd, and other national and governmental organisations including UK Government Ministers. We promote the important role of local government to Senedd Members and the UK Parliament to seek to enhance and protect councils' reputation and secure positive change to legislation. The WLGA's lobbying work is therefore extensive.

The scale and scope of WLGA work has changed immeasurably since the Covid pandemic and the engagement with the Welsh Government and individual Ministers has seen a significant step change. This close partnership work has been sustained and continues to develop. Engagement with the Senedd as an institution has also been transformed with the establishment of fora such as the Cross-Party Group for north Wales and regional finance briefings.

This intensity of working with the Welsh Government, the UK Government and other partners has continued since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, through the ensuing economic crisis and during the current cost-of-living crisis. The WLGA has played its part in Wales's humanitarian response to the crisis in Ukraine and continues to support councils and the people and communities they represent during difficult financial and economic times.

Our key areas of work on behalf of local government include:

- Bilateral meetings between WLGA Spokespersons and Ministers;
- Pre and post-legislative scrutiny with the Senedd, UK Parliament and the European Parliament;
- Policy development and joint working with the Welsh Government and UK Government;
- Championing, promoting and sharing council's contributions, achievements and innovations;
- Engaging with the workforce unions in social partnership and professional networks and associations;
- Working with the various Inspectorates, regulators and Commissioners in Wales;
- Providing Improvement Support including Peer Review and Member Development and Training and promoting good practice;
- Arranging conferences, seminars, workshops and training events;
- The publication of reports, guidance documents and on-line resources; and

- Communications, press work, and social media.

We also host and deliver a range of national programmes or services on behalf of local government, many of which are funded through Welsh Government or UK Government grants. These include the Digital Team, the Improvement Team, Service Children in Education Project, School Holiday Enrichment Programme, Waste Improvement, the National Autism Team and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership.

## Our Values

Our primary purposes are to promote better local government, to promote its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

In working towards its primary purposes, we seek to be:

- **Ambitious** in our expectations and in our vision for local democracy and local services
- **Accountable** to our members and member authorities
- **Proactive** in our defence and promotion of local democracy, our policy development and our engagement with members
- **Receptive** through listening to and considering the range of views of our membership, partners and stakeholders
- **Responsive** through our services and support to our members and member authorities
- **Collaborative** in our approach to governance and partnership working with Welsh Government and other stakeholders.

We also work towards upholding and promoting equality, diversity and human rights; including promoting civility and diversity in democracy and supporting councillors in their role as democratically elected local representatives.

We are committed to equality and fairness and although we are not a statutory body, we operate in the spirit of legislation such as the Equalities Act, Freedom of Information Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Within this context, the WLGA is committed to creating a resilient environment and low carbon economy in Wales. We champion and promote the Welsh language and are subject to Welsh Language Standards.

# Our Aims and Priorities

Our priorities are underpinned by our core aims to secure:

- **Reform, continuous improvement and a commitment to partnership**  
- we believe in local government reform and seeking continuous improvement as a process for delivering better outcomes and services for the people of Wales, and in ensuring that resources are used as effectively and as efficiently as possible. A continued commitment to partnership working in Wales is essential to ensure that local government and the Welsh Government work together, based on clear principles of mutual respect and understanding, in order to deliver better outcomes for the people of Wales. We lead and support collaborative local public service reform and improvement and ensure that the governance of regional services is democratically accountable and, wherever possible, streamlined;
- **Fair and flexible funding** – councils need greater fiscal autonomy and flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. Specific grants should be transferred into the settlement, after an agreed period of time, and the Welsh Government should fully cost and fund any new national initiatives and/or legislation and should commit to multiyear financial settlements, so councils can plan more effectively;
- **Commitment to the principle of Subsidiarity** – the Welsh Government and the National Assembly should commit to the European Charter of Local Self Government and the principle of subsidiarity, where the presumption is that power is transferred to the level of government closest to the people. The Welsh Government has a clear national strategic role, but councils want to see momentum behind the devolution of powers beyond Cardiff Bay to local government and to local communities.

We will also:

- **Promote the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders**, emphasising their equal democratic mandate with national politicians.
- **Ensure maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance** where councils and regions have flexibility in determining regional priorities, services and governance arrangements.
- **Promote sector-led improvement**, with an emphasis around digital and innovation, supporting authorities in sharing best practice, developing workforce skills and developing a new corporate peer review programme.
- **Encourage a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity** and enhanced democratic engagement and supporting councillors' development and training.
- **Support authorities to effectively manage their workforce** through our role as the Employers' Organisation.

- Support Councils and other partners in **promoting Equalities and creating an Anti-Racism Wales**
- **Promote a just Transition to a Net Zero Economy** and respond to the wider challenges of climate change.
- **Work with councils to Make Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs)** work as efficiently and effectively as possible for the people and communities they represent.
- **Promote the role of Councils in Social Care** with an enhanced focus on prevention and early intervention and community and primary care.

## **An Organisation that is fit for purpose**

The WLGA has always placed a strong emphasis on adding value to the work of member councils and doing things efficiently and effectively. We also look to align existing capacity as closely as possible to the business needs of the organisation and we will make further efficiencies in our processes, in particular, using new and emerging technologies.

The shape and structure of the WLGA going forward will be further driven by member priorities and guided by the recent senior management review.

Accountability and transparency are core principles of the WLGA. Our formal meetings are held in public, corporate documents, such as our budget, pay policy statement and members' allowances are available publicly, where appropriate.

The members of the WLGA Management Sub Committee oversee the organisation's management in relation to financial, legal and contractual matters. The members of the WLGA Audit Committee have overall responsibility for monitoring the integrity of the financial statements of the organisation and for overseeing internal control and risk management systems.

To be successful in delivering on the WLGA's values, aims and priorities, we will be rigorous and tireless in everything that we do. A renewed focus on campaigning, lobbying and public affairs along with a continuing adherence to the needs and priorities of local authorities and other members will shape and inform our work. This will inevitably require us to be agile and responsive, reflecting the dynamic policy setting and the continuous but changing pressures impacting on local government and its partners across Wales.

We will continue to be a member led organisation, always reflecting the priorities and interests of local government and our member organisations. When appropriate, we will seek and encourage collaborative approaches to meeting the campaigning, policy development and service needs of local government and its partners.

The WLGA has a long and valued reputation for effective representation and lobbying and meaningful interventions at all levels of government. This will

continue, and we will maintain and develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise across the fullest range of local government services and priorities to support this work.

## **Our Staff**

Our staff continue to be important to us as an organisation and key to the delivery of the ambitions set out in our Corporate Strategy. A renewed focus on our performance appraisal processes will support staff to continually develop on an individual basis while our induction process and monthly all staff updates and the regular Staff Bulletin are significant vehicles for collective staff development and engagement. Collective intelligence is vital to us and we value every staff member's contribution to the continued success of the organisation.

We will therefore encourage and support staff in achieving their individual personal goals, in improving their skills and knowledge because they are intrinsic to the organisation's wider success.

The term of this Strategic Plan will see us recruiting new staff, both to fill-vacancies as they arise but to refocus resources to support new priorities as the develop in the delivery of our Strategic Plan. Building resilience and limiting reliance on individuals is always a challenge in a small organisation but we will seek to align these challenges with the commitment to be agile and responsive to the needs of members and other partners.

The global economic context, rising energy costs, the impact of climate change and the cost-of-living crisis are all placing council services under huge financial pressure and these pressures have also had an impact on the WLGA. We have always placed a strong emphasis on doing things efficiently and delivering value for money, and this will continue under the scrutiny and guidance of our members.