

16th March 2022

WLGA END OF TERM REPORT

Purpose

- 1 To provide a report outlining WLGA achievements and work during the 2017-22 term.

Background

- 2 The WLGA will produce an annual report for 2021-22 for the Annual General Meeting in June, however, given the collective efforts of the Association's members during the past 5 years, it is appropriate to place on record the activity and achievements during the past term.
- 3 Management Sub-Committee discussed the WLGA's approach to Post-Election engagement and induction of new councils and councillors at its February meeting. It was agreed that the WLGA would produce individual reports for each authority, summarising the WLGA achievements during 2017-22 and highlighting how the WLGA has specifically contributed to or supported that particular authority.
- 4 The following report provides a high-level summary of the full End of Term report in Annex A.

Summary

- 5 The 2017-22 municipal term has seen significant challenge and change not just within Welsh local government and public services, but across the world.
- 6 Political debate has been dominated by and public services focused on the unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic, tackling climate change and transitioning from the European Union. As the term ends, we face a cost-of-living crisis and European conflict, which could see the worst refugee crisis in Europe possibly since the Second World War
- 7 We have seen 2 First Ministers and 4 Local Government Ministers in the Welsh Government and 1 Senedd election. There have been 2 Prime Ministers and 2 General Elections. The WLGA's own leadership has seen change with 2 leaders and 2 chief executives.
- 8 Cllr Debbie Wilcox became the first woman leader of the WLGA in June 2017 and was succeeded by Cllr Andrew Morgan in November 2019, when Cllr Wilcox was elevated to the House of Lords. As leaders, both have sought and have successfully built a collective and consensual approach to leadership, where all leaders and spokespersons shape WLGA priorities and represent local government's interests.

9. Brexit and, for the past two years, the pandemic have dominated; councils' immediate and ongoing response during the pandemic has rightly been recognised and valued by many, including the Welsh Government and Senedd.
10. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of local democracy and local delivery experience and operational expertise. Councils demonstrated that they are uniquely placed at the heart of their communities and public service delivery and are invariably the first port of call for the most vulnerable or those in need of support or assurance. Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness and the crisis demonstrated councils' ability to respond irrespective of scale and reaffirmed the WLGA's stance on the importance of subsidiarity and localism, with elected members and officers rooted in their local communities.
11. Local government reform remained a core theme throughout the term; where once reorganisation was the contested Welsh Government blueprint for reform, the WLGA successfully made the case for increased flexibility, self-improvement and collaborative reform. This work culminated in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and though there has been some opposition to the mandated establishment of regional corporate joint committees, these bodies can build on the success and lessons of councils' own city and growth deal arrangements and will be led by local leaders.
12. 2021 also saw the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the 22 local authorities and the WLGA as an organisation, although the marking of this anniversary was set firmly in the context of the ongoing pandemic.

2017-22 in Numbers

13. During the past term:

- We have made the case for fair funding for local services and, despite some challenging settlements given austerity, **over the course of the term the settlement has increased by £1bn in cash terms, with the biggest ever settlement increase achieved in 2022-23.**
- We **successfully made the case for around £1bn additional financial support for councils** to meet pressures or lost income through the pandemic during 2020-22.
- We have **helped secure several hundred millions of pounds in additional one-off revenue and capital grants to invest in local services or infrastructure**, including £50m in 2021-22 for Winter pressures and social care overspends, £70m general and £25m schools capital investment for 2022-23, £6m in response to Storm Callum, £4.3m for green recovery projects and £1.2m for the Brexit Support Programme.
- We have **responded to 245 Welsh Government consultations or submitted evidence to Senedd or Parliamentary Inquiries**, many of which included oral evidence sessions at Senedd Committees led by WLGA Spokespersons, senior officers or professional colleagues.

- We have **handled 1,350 media enquiries, issued 168 press releases and over 600 statements to the press**, championing, defending and promoting local government and WLGA priorities.
- Our **twitter followership has grown from 6,760 in 2017 to nearly 10,300 in 2022**.
- We have **organised 117 training sessions to over 700 councillors, including 156 councillors attending the WLGA's highly regarded Leadership Academy**.

WLGA as an organisation

14. The 2017-22 term has been a period of significant change and modernisation for the WLGA as an organisation.
15. We have moved to a new office, developed new branding, will shortly be launching a new website and have expanded our communications capacity. Our leading members set the strategic direction and policy priorities of the organisation and invest significant commitment, energy and time in making the case on behalf of local government and all local authorities at a national level.
16. **Increased engagement with Ministers** – The WLGA's leadership has developed constructive relations with Ministers, particularly during the pandemic; at the beginning of the term Ministers would meet with leaders and cabinet members twice per year and bilateral meetings with Spokespersons were irregular. During the pandemic, leaders were meeting with Ministers daily and a routine of monthly cycles of Ministerial meetings with all leaders has been established, supplemented by several bilateral meetings with Spokespersons most weeks.
17. **Engagement with UK Government Ministers has been a priority**, particularly around post-Brexit arrangements and funding, with regular constructive engagement between the WLGA leadership and the Secretary of State for Wales and, more recently, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
18. **Increased engagement with Senedd Members** - The WLGA leadership has focused on extending and development this constructive with wider Senedd Members; we produced a WLGA Manifesto and Rural Manifesto ahead of the Senedd elections and have since held several national and regional engagement events and individual engagement building constructive relations with new and returning Senedd Members.
19. An IPSOS Mori survey of non-executive Senedd Members (during November-December 2021) shows that this engagement is successful and well-received:
 - **All MSs (100%) know at least a fair amount and two thirds of MSs state they know WLGA very well (66%).**
 - **Almost nine in ten (88%) MSs are favourable towards the WLGA.** This number represents **huge growth in favourability since 2018** when only half (50%) of MSs were favourable and a **significant decline in those unfavourable, from 25% in 2018 to just 7%**.
 - **Nearly two thirds (63%) of MSs are advocates for WLGA**, with just one in ten (12%) saying they are critical. The **number of advocates of WLGA has almost doubled over time (32% in 2018 vs 63% in 2021)** and is higher than the average of organisations measured (41%).

- Over half of MSs (57%) say that they would advocate for WLGA because they feel it represents the local government and its needs well. MSs also appreciate WLGA's level of communication and proactivity and are impressed by WLGA's level of expertise across many different areas (42% for both).

New office accommodation and new ways of working

20. In late 2021, we **moved to new, modern offices at One Canal Parade co-locating with public service partners**. The new office promotes and supports a culture of collaboration and agile working and will deliver annual savings and a significantly reduced carbon footprint, incorporating recycled furniture through local suppliers and community-owned enterprises.
21. We have **adopted new ways of working, reflecting the approaches of councils by moving to remote and recently hybrid working**. Working with partner authorities, we promoted and pioneered the approach to bilingual online meetings, including transition from Teams to Zoom and we are currently working with Microsoft in the development of simultaneous interpretation via Teams.
22. **Leaders and wider members became more engaged in and led WLGA business**, with more regular leaders' meetings, the establishment of regular Group Leaders' meetings to discuss emerging issues or forthcoming business, and the increased involvement of Deputy Spokespersons in regular bilateral dialogue with Ministers as well as regular cabinet member meetings to extend the engagement.
23. We have **continued to engage with wider elected members**, through a range of regular cabinet member networks, training and development sessions, good practice seminars.
24. We have **established a dedicated Audit Committee**, separating it from the Management Sub-Committee, to oversee audit, budgetary, internal policy and risk management functions.

New services and support for member authorities

25. Building on constructive relations with the Welsh Government, we have successfully made the case for additional resources to provide services and wider support to local authorities. This includes:
 - The **appointment of a Chief Digital Officer and digital team** for local government, which is funded by Welsh Government through a transfer of a grant as a new top-slice of £900,000 per annum.
 - The **re-establishment of sector-led improvement capacity and resource** through the WLGA, funded by an £800,000 annual grant, which includes member development support, performance and governance improvement, transformation and peer challenge and support.
 - **Establishment of a Decarbonisation Support Programme** until 2030, funded by Welsh Government grant, to support authorities around the decarbonisation agenda
 - **Setting up the Wales Safer Communities Network**, with a team of officers hosted by the WLGA. The Network also provides support to the Safer Communities Board.

- Expansion of the work of the Waste Improvement team to encompass the **Circular Economy** (including reuse and repair), with steps being taken to integrate this with our work on decarbonisation
- An expansion to the role and remit of the **Wales Strategic Migration Partnership** (funded by the Home Office), hosted by the WLGA, to support local authorities in their work with asylum seekers and refugees
- Re-establishment of a **National Commissioning Board**, hosted by the WLGA and jointly chaired by local government and health, to support improvements in the commissioning process in social services
- **Established and managing** a network of all 22 councils to support them to prepare to implement the **Universal Primary Free School Meals Programme**.
- **Plans to establish a National Music Service in 2022-23**, funded by Welsh Government grant, led by the WLGA, to assist councils with the implementation of the new National Plan for Music Education in Wales.

Recommendations

26. Members are asked to note the report.

Author: **Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive**

Tel: 02920 468610

E-mail: chris.llewelyn.wlga.gov.uk

Item 4 - Annex A

WLGA END OF TERM REPORT 2017-22

March 2022

Introduction

The 2017-22 municipal term has seen significant challenge and change not just within Welsh local government and public services, but across the world.

Political debate has been dominated by and public services focused on the unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic, tackling climate change and transitioning from the European Union. As the term ends, we face a cost-of-living crisis and European conflict, which could see the worst refugee crisis in Europe possibly since the Second World War

We have seen 2 First Ministers and 4 Local Government Ministers in the Welsh Government and 1 Senedd election. There have been 2 Prime Ministers and 2 General Elections. The WLGA's own leadership has seen change with 2 leaders and 2 chief executives.

Cllr Debbie Wilcox became the first woman leader of the WLGA in June 2017 and was succeeded by Cllr Andrew Morgan in November 2019, when Cllr Wilcox was elevated to the House of Lords. As leaders, both have sought and have successfully built a collective and consensual approach to leadership, where all leaders and spokespersons shape WLGA priorities and represent local government's interests.

Brexit and, for the past two years, the pandemic have dominated; councils' immediate and ongoing response during the pandemic has rightly been recognised and valued by many, including the Welsh Government and Senedd.

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of local democracy and local delivery experience and operational expertise. Councils demonstrated that they are uniquely placed at the heart of their communities and public service delivery and are invariably the first port of call for the most vulnerable or those in need of support or assurance. Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness and the crisis demonstrated councils' ability to respond irrespective of scale and reaffirmed the WLGA's stance on the importance of subsidiarity and localism, with elected members and officers rooted in their local communities.

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This End of Term report is a high-level summary outlining achievements and progress on behalf of local government since 2017 and how the WLGA as a politically-led organisation has evolved during this period.

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During the past term:

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members set the strategic direction and policy priorities of the organisation and invest significant commitment, energy and time in making the case on behalf of local government and all local authorities at a national level.

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Our core Purpose and Values

During the term, we revised our corporate strategy and will do again in the new term with our new membership. We reaffirmed our core purpose to secure:

- **Reform, continuous improvement and a commitment to partnership –**
- **Fair and flexible funding**
- **Commitment to the principle of Subsidiarity**

In working towards its core purpose, we have sought 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

Supporting Councils' COVID-19 Response

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of local democracy and local delivery experience and operational expertise. Councils have demonstrated that they are uniquely placed at the heart of their communities and public service delivery and are invariably the first port of call for the most vulnerable or those in need of support or assurance.

Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness and the crisis demonstrated councils' ability to respond irrespective of scale and reaffirmed the WLGA's stance on the importance of subsidiarity and localism, with elected members and officers rooted in their local communities.

Throughout the pandemic, the WLGA has sought to provide an interface between leaders and cabinet members and Ministers, sharing information and intelligence, providing a sounding board for approaches and escalating local issues of concern.

Engagement

The WLGA, through the political leadership and all 22 leaders, has played a key role in Wales' collective COVID-19 response. Political engagement has been extensive and has been a unique feature of Wales' approach to the pandemic response:

- The Leader and Spokespersons have engaged regularly with the Welsh Government Cabinet and Ministers.
- Senior Spokespersons held weekly bilateral meetings with Welsh Government Ministers and stakeholders, including unions.
- Leaders met weekly (initially daily) with Ministers throughout the pandemic. The Minister for Housing and Local Government and Minister for Health and Social Services regularly attended these weekly meetings.

We convened leaders' meetings throughout the pandemic, initially daily at the outset of the pandemic, and then weekly - ensuring that leaders were able to meet with Ministers on a regular basis. WLGA Cabinet Member networks also met regularly throughout the pandemic, often with Ministers to discuss concerns, pressures or to shape emerging policy.

Supporting Councils' Response

Through the WLGA, leaders helped shape the Welsh COVID-19 response, including the approach to closure and reopening of services and the economy, making the case for improved testing capacity and prioritisation and the supply of PPE supply and helped ensure a world-leading roll-out of the vaccine, supported locally by councils through staffing, logistics and facilities.

We helped make the case for around £1bn additional financial support for councils to meet pressures or lost income through the pandemic during 2020-22.

We worked with Business Wales, Welsh Government, Society of Welsh Treasurers and several officer groups to deliver various packages of financial support as a result of the pandemic. This included an initial round of emergency grants to businesses on the rating list, a specific scheme for Child Care Providers, Start Up Grants, Freelancer Fund and cultural sector support.

During the course of the 2020 lockdowns, **council finance teams made over 250,000 awards totalling £1.3bn to businesses.**

Social care was on the front-line of the COVID-19 response and **we made the case for greater PPE support, better testing regimes and improved guidance to support social care and care homes** in particular, securing funding for additional expenditure through the Hardship Fund for Social Care.

We facilitated a collective and sustained effort in providing Personal Protective Equipment to front line services. The WLGA established the provision of PPE through NHS Shared Services, supported by a Service Level Agreement; the first of its kind. This arrangement resolved many of the earlier issues associated with supply management of PPE at scale and continues to provide pandemic supply to front line care providers.

We secured Welsh Government funding and procured and supplied high quality and re-usable three-layer face masks for schools, which were manufactured in Wales; to protect pupils in High Schools. Over 2,000 'Taxi Packs' of PPE and Cleaning Materials were provided to support local transport infrastructure.

We worked with councils, the Welsh Government and the WCVA, to **provide support for those required to self-isolate, initially for people on the shielded patients list and other vulnerable and at-risk groups and latterly for those who tested positive for COVID-19 as part of the Protect workstream.**

We worked closely with senior civil servants and lawyers to **shape and review Coronavirus restrictions regulations**, ensuring Public Protection teams, Registration Services, Emergency Planning teams, and Cemetery and Cremations teams can work efficiently and effectively when applying new rules to protect public health.

We presented **evidence to 10 Senedd COVID-19 Inquiry sessions**, evidencing the significant impact on council finances, service delivery, in particular housing and social services, and communities and demonstrating how councils have been relied upon and have led a flexible and innovative front-line response to the crisis.

Local Leadership, Freedom and Flexibility

Our core purpose is to promote local democracy, local flexibility and local leadership to seek to ensure that **“Councils are respected, empowered and have the freedom and flexibility to respond to local needs”**.

Throughout the term, we have championed local democracy, promoted the role of the councillor and leaders, supported and advised elected members and have sought to encourage more diverse people to stand for election.

We have engaged with Ministers and Members of the Senedd, promoting local government and the principle of subsidiarity, outlining policies and priorities and making the case for flexible, less prescriptive legislation and regulation.

Local government reform has dominated central-local relations and political debate in Wales for over a decade. We rejected the proposals for mergers in the 2017 Green Paper, outlining a bold alternative vision based on collaborative reform underpinned by demands for sustainable funding and greater powers. With Welsh Government, we convened a Local Government Reform working group, chaired by Derek Vaughan, which led to wholesale reorganisation being rejected in favour of self and sector-led improvement and regional reform based on existing collaborative vehicles. Although, though there has been some opposition to the establishment of regional corporate joint committees through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2022, these bodies can build on the success and lessons of councils' own city and growth deal arrangements and will be led by local leaders.

We have also sought to promote engagement in and participation in local government, supporting electoral reforms, encouraging electoral pilots and promoting an ambitious Diversity in Democracy programme.

Promoting localism, local flexibility and local leadership

We published a bold **‘Manifesto for Localism’ and a separate Rural Manifesto ahead of the Senedd Elections**, which articulated the local government's core policy priorities and calling for mutual respect and the concept of subsidiarity.

Through its engagement and lobbying around the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the WLGA has:

- resisted prescription, promoted flexibility and reform based on good practice
- promoted the track-record of council collaboration, supported voluntary CJs but has rejected the concept of mandation
- secured amendments, including ‘job sharing’ and extended family absence provisions for councillors and removal of contentious chief executive performance management arrangements.

We worked helped shape the Welsh Government's emergency Coronavirus meeting regulations, **ensuring the flexibility of remote attendance arrangements have been made permanent**, unlike in England.

Promoting Local Democracy and Diversity

We have **championed the role of councillors and senior leaders** and have made the case for realistic remuneration and protection, including making the case for parachute payments. Following meetings with the Independent Remuneration Panel, their final report of the term sees a 'resetting' of councillors' salaries to the original benchmark.

We convened a cross party member '**diversity in democracy**' working group to address barriers and promote action and improvement in diversity, making bold commitments around increasing diversity ahead of the next local elections. The WLGA has produced <https://www.beacouncillor.wales> with information and e-learning materials for candidates and has promoted councillor case studies and videos.

We have contributed to the **UK Civility in Public Life campaign**, with LGA, COSLA and NILGA, including production of Councillors' Guide on Handling Intimidation and 'Digital Citizenship' resources for members. The WLGA also agreed the first national 'Fair Campaigns Pledge' in January 2022

We have, feeding into various consultations and Welsh Government equality **promoted and supported equalities** plans, including Race Equality Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan. We have been involved in Welsh Government convened COVID BAME work, including participation in the BAME Advisory Group and Socio-Economic Sub Group and the audit of statues and monuments. The WLGA has signed the #ZeroRacismWales pledge and coordinated the signing by all 22 local authorities.

Supporting Improvement and Innovation

We successfully made the case to Welsh Government for the **reinvestment in and reinstatement of sector-led improvement support through the WLGA**. Funded by a Welsh Government grant, this will embed peer support and challenge within and across the sector and has 6 peer challenges in the past 2 years, development of e-learning resources and induction support for new and returning members.

With the support of Heads of IT, we successfully made the case to Welsh Government for grant funding for a **Chief Digital Officer for Local Government** (CDO) who was appointed Nov 2020. A digital team has been established, providing support to local authorities, and funding will be made permanent and transferred into a top-slice from April 2022. Since established, the team has:

- completed several discovery projects across local government, including the future online learning platform, food poverty data project and webcasting for council meetings.
- Inception of working groups on digital topics, with over 100 officers regularly engaging in problem solving and learning sessions.

- Provided training to over 400 officers in a range of subjects including user research, user experience design, service design and accessibility.

Co-produced with Welsh Government a Review of Strategic Partnerships which concluded no new partnerships should be set up without considering whether existing partnerships could deliver new functions and partnerships should be transparent and accountable.

Established a **member task and finish group with One Voice Wales considering partnership working**, asset transfers and place-based planning with community and town councils (progress impacted by COVID 19).

Agreed a joint working protocol with WCVA and One Voice Wales, which has included the sharing of resources and knowledge in relation to volunteering to support local working arrangements, sharing good practice and webinars.

Workforce Leadership

The context of Covid 19 has brought into sharper focus the role of the workforce in delivering essential public services. The activity required at all levels has intensified and the WLGA has sought to ensure local authorities are properly supported.

The WLGA has represented local authorities at strategic meetings of the **Workforce Partnership Council and Shadow Social Partnership Council**, ensuring effective communications with Welsh Government Ministers and officials.

Links with national trade union representatives have been strengthened through meetings of the **Joint Council for Wales** and in particular its Executive Committee which have promoted and supported effective social partnership working between local authorities and trade unions.

The **Schools Social Partnership Forum** has been established during the pandemic to enable schools and local authority employer representatives to discuss schools' workforce matters directly with trade unions and Welsh Government officials.

Finance

One of the main priorities for the WLGA is to make the strongest possible case for **financial reform and fair funding for local services**. We also want the £4bn we spend on procurement to be spent in ways that support our communities. Although difficult to quantify in exact terms, we estimate that we have successfully lobbied for an additional £2.2bn over the course of this term, and an additional £1.5bn has been administered by councils to support businesses and individuals at times of greatest national crisis.

The last three settlements have marked a step change towards sustainable funding for councils and the hardship fund has provided one of the most generous packages of support to local government anywhere in the UK. We have seen a return to multiyear settlements in support of better medium-term financial planning. Working in partnership with the Treasurers and Finance Cabinet Members across Wales, the WLGA has made a clear case for what can be achieved with proper investment in local public services.

With other public service partners, the WLGA has funded the work programme of Wales Fiscal Analysis to provide the insight, analysis and expertise that is needed to scrutinise public finances in Wales. This work forms one of the cornerstones of the knowledge base needed to build a fiscal framework that will help inform proposed work such as the reform of local taxation and proposals for a new tourist tax.

Working with finance leads across the UK, we were able to partner a UK-wide finance event in December 2021 that was chaired by the WLGA Finance Spokesperson and led by the WLGA Leader with the support of LGA, COSLA and NILGA.

Settlements

We embarked on powerful and consistent evidence-based lobbying to show the value of local services which resulted in one of the best ever settlements since devolution, with an increase of £438m or 9.4%. Core funding for local government topped £5bn for the first time ever and is £1bn higher, in cash terms, than the 2017-18 baseline at start of the term.

With persistent lobbying by the WLGA, the Welsh Government has produced a multiyear settlement providing indicative allocations of an additional £177m (3.5%) in 2023-24 and £128m (2.4%) in 2024-25. This will take core funding to £5.4bn in 2024-25, some £1.3bn higher than it was at the start of this term.

For the first time in nearly 10 years, the settlement outcomes in both 2020-21 and 2021-22 significantly addressed the evidenced cost pressures set out to the Finance Sub Group, being 4.3% and 3.8% respectively.

COVID Funding

The operation of the hardship fund in Wales differed from elsewhere in the UK and during 2020-21, in the first full year of the pandemic, led to an additional £400m being made available for pressures and £190m for lost income. The available budget for 2021-22 is £368m. As a claims-based scheme, the fund ensured that funding went to those authorities in most in need. The scheme provided funding for income lost and additional pressures and grew from an initial £30m fund announced by the then Minister Julie James in May 2020 in response to a request from WLGA leaders.

In addition to the hardship fund, the Welsh Government has provided just over £53m in support of the pressures councils have faced over the past two years due to reduced council tax collection rates and larger numbers of Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) claimants. The funding has come with maximum flexibility.

Support for Businesses

Local government support for business was critical in shoring up local economies at their time of greatest need. During the course of the 2020 lockdowns, council finance teams across Wales made over 250,000 awards totalling £1.3 billion. With the help and advice of WLGA leaders, the Welsh Government provided targeted and discretionary schemes so that support was aimed where it was most needed and there were special schemes for Child Care Providers and the self-employed. Revenues teams across the 22 authorities provided the expertise and capacity to deliver this important support.

Support for Individuals and Cost of Living

Local expertise and capacity have also been the cornerstone of administering schemes to individuals over a range of Welsh Government initiatives. This includes the funding of Isolation Payments, Sick Pay for Social Workers, Additional Payments for Social Workers and Discretionary Housing Payments. As the cost-of-living crisis unfolded, local finance teams have found themselves front and centre, delivering winter fuel payments and forthcoming support to those in the lower council tax bands.

The expertise of council benefits teams contributes to ongoing work with the Department for Work and Pensions and Welsh Government on Universal Credit. They worked with Welsh Government on a key piece of work to understand the impact of Universal Credit on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and rent arrears.

Councils also continue to be innovative in the use of the Discretionary Housing Payment budget to deliver positive outcomes for low-income households in their area. The flexibility and autonomy provided through the budget has allowed councils to respond quickly to the effect of the cost-of-living crisis on eligible households.

Additional In-Year Funding in 2022-23

WLGA Leaders have proactively pushed Welsh Government for any additional funding flowing from consequentials in the current financial year to come to councils. Over £200m has been announced in the past couple of months which includes £25m for schools' capital and £70m in general capital which comes with the flexibility so it can be spent this year, so that it frees up the funding for next year.

The 2021-22 settlement has been topped up with an additional £60m and with the help of Treasurers, Leaders made a strong case for a £50m fund to address winter pressures and social care overspends.

Procurement

Public sector spend in Wales is circa £7bn and of that spend 56% - nearly £4bn is spent by local government. This level of spend commands significant influence and there are increasing expectations on councils to do more with the money. To deliver against a wider policy agenda in respect of decarbonisation, social value, foundational economy, and fair work.

We have supported the collaborative operational delivery of procurement by partnering councils, the Welsh Government and other public service organisations to improve procurement process and resourcing. A reform programme is repositioning procurement as an integral part of the delivery of public services and as a lever for the deployment of policy into practice.

Regional Delivery Groups are supporting the National Procurement Network. Sub-groups are working on Social Value; which includes support for the Wellbeing of Future Generations, Collaborative Contract Pipeline, Decarbonisation, and Standardisation of Contracts.

Procurement rules reform is also being extensively supported. The UK Government set out its procurement reform plans in a Green Paper and the Welsh Government has broadly welcomed the proposals. Welsh Ministers have agreed to work with the UK Government on the reforms. The WLGA National Procurement Network is supporting the practice change process and the WLGA is providing valuable additional support through its links with the LGA and the procurement National Advisory Group.

Much of the procurement reform programme has been undertaken alongside emergency measures relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. WLGA has been actively supporting the arrangements. The provision of Personal Protective Equipment has been challenging with 2019-2020 being particularly difficult. By 2021-2022 stable supply arrangements had been established with procurement activity within the year focused on continuity and assurance of provision. Welsh Government funding for PPE has recently been committed to 31st March 2023. Supply arrangements have been extended and are assured for the equivalent period.

Regeneration and a Resilient Environment

Over the last term, we have undertaken much work to help councils support “**inclusive growth locally, regionally and nationally and promoting a resilient environment for future generations**”.

Never has this been more of a priority, particularly in the context of the urgency posed by the pandemic, Brexit and climate change. During the course of the last term, we have worked closely with all local authorities to help support communities right across Wales in the face of all of these challenges.

We worked closely to co-ordinate the economic response to the pandemic to ensure that the financial support reached businesses who had been impacted.

We commissioned a programme, including producing toolkits, hosting events and regular liaison with all partners, to help support local authorities to prepare for Brexit.

As decarbonisation and climate change rose to the top of the agenda, we established a Decarbonisation Strategy Panel and sought funding for a support programme to help co-ordinate local authorities' continued response.

Also, the Rural Manifesto was launched which outlined leaders' vision for rural Wales, and we took steps to boost the profile of the Rural Forum.

Environment and Sustainability

Green Recovery and Decarbonisation

We undertook joint work with Welsh Government on decarbonisation and net zero plans, including establishment of Decarbonisation Strategy Panel at the request of Partnership Council.

We secured initial funding of £500,000 from Welsh Government to run a Decarbonisation Support Programme up to 2030.

Council Net Zero commitments were agreed, and we commissioned consultants to support authorities. We worked with COSLA, LGA and NILGA on local government input to the COP 26 Conference and with Welsh Government on COP Cymru and the launch of Net Zero Wales.

Funding of £4.3m was secured from Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales for councils to undertake a range of Green Recovery projects aimed at tackling nature loss and improving biodiversity.

We responded to Law Commission on coal tip legislation, and contributed to Welsh Government coal tip safety group, reviewing status and allocating funding to support remedial works.

Waste and Recycling

A working group was set up to look at future recycling and Circular Economy targets considering likely significant changes in collections following introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Deposit Return Schemes (DRS).

We attracted £300,000 from Welsh Government for waste behaviour change pilot work by local authorities and provided training sessions for local authorities on waste and recycling enforcement, whilst inputting to consultations by Welsh and UK governments on EPR.

Flood and Water

We secured ongoing Welsh Government funding for the Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre and agreed £95,000 per council for winter floods preparedness.

We succeeded in delaying the start of the Coastal Risk Management Programme by a year to enable proposals to be worked up, with 25 schemes progressing to the next stage.

Transport and Roads

We negotiated £6m in revenue and capital from Welsh Government to help meet the repair and clean-up costs associated with Storm Callum.

Adaptations to travel became a key focus, especially in the context of the response to climate change and COVID 19. Much work was undertaken to promote Active Travel and to support the hard-hit public transport sector.

Economy, Regeneration and Rural

Brexit

An extensive £1.2m support programme was secured by WLGA to help local authorities to prepare for the UK's momentous exit from the EU.

We worked intensively with UK Government, Welsh Government and regional partnerships on replacement EU funding to maximise potential of the Shared Prosperity Fund in Wales and avoid gaps in provision.

COVID-19

An ambitious proposal was developed for a £750m Economic Stimulus package for a local government-led post COVID-19 recovery. Several of the proposals were incorporated into the Counsel General's Reconstruction programme.

We worked with Business Wales, Welsh Government, SWT and other officer groups to deliver:

- Support Grants worth over £770m to over 64,000 hard hit businesses
- over 1,600 Business Start Up Grants worth £4.25m
- a further £60m for Local Lockdown Grants.

Rural Forum

Work was undertaken to boost the profile of the Rural Forum, driven by the launch of the Rural Manifesto which outlines the priorities of rural communities. Leaders featured in a series of podcasts which promoted the Manifesto and wider rural concerns.

Planning

Phosphates

We have supported local planning authorities in commissioning legal advice on the implementation of Natural Resources Wales guidance on the issue of phosphates which has been identified as a concern for local authorities.

TAN 15

We successfully lobbied Welsh Government for an extension of the introduction of TAN 15, and suspension of a key element which was creating problems for authorities without a five-year supply of housing land.

A 20% increase in planning fees was secured for councils after we undertook evidence-based lobbying.

Schools, Skills and Lifelong Learning

Despite the huge challenges this term, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to see “**National education standards delivered at a local level**”.

Councils’ education workforce has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to continue to deliver education and to maintain support for pupils in difficult circumstances. The WLGA refocused its work to support these efforts, including procuring face masks for school children and helping to find ways innovative ways to deliver free school meals to eligible pupils.

Throughout this term, we have engaged closely with Ministers, officials and partners in order to represent the interests and priorities of local government in the education field. We established the Schools Shadow Partnership Forum (SSPF) which has brought Welsh Government, elected members, ADEW and trade unions together, and has become a cornerstone forum to engage constructively with partners.

We worked closely with new bodies and systems set up to manage and oversee the determination of teacher’s pay and conditions in Wales. Also, we have sought to work with and guide Welsh Government in its desire to support schools causing concern, by encouraging each part of the system - schools, local authorities, and consortia – to play an appropriate role in schools making and sustaining progress.

We continued to support investment in the 21st Century Schools programme, and contributed towards refining the model, and have provided support to councils in securing full flexibility and local determination for their own and schools’ budgets.

During the term, the WLGA has also contributed towards pupil wellbeing through initiatives including those relating to healthy eating and the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP), as well as aspects of youth support service work.

Responding to COVID-19

We produced regular briefings on COVID-19 and education related issues for elected members. More detailed briefings on specific issues such as free school meals and schools re-opening were also regularly prepared to inform leaders’ discussions with ministers.

In partnership with the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and Welsh Government, we have developed guidance documents for schools and settings for the autumn term.

Written evidence was provided on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people to the Senedd’s Children, Young People and Education Committee.

We supported local authorities in developing and delivering innovative alternative free school meals provision whilst schools were closed during lockdown.

The WLGA procured face coverings for all school children in Wales to help protect learners and staff during the pandemic.

In July 2020, we set up the Schools Social Partnership Forum (SSPF) which includes representation from Welsh Government, ADEW, elected members and schools' trade unions to discuss COVID-19 related issues including qualifications and exams for 2020 and 2021.

We have engaged through a number of strategic groups set up with the Welsh Government, which have involved a number of partners from schools, colleges and higher education, local authorities (through ADEW), Estyn, the Education Workforce Council, bodies managing examinations and others.

Schools Funding

The WLGA has continued to lobby for schools to be funded through the RSG and for a reduction in specific grants to provide as much flexibility as possible in school funding. In partnership with ADEW, we provided evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Senedd Committee into the sufficiency of school funding and worked closely with the Committee and Welsh Government in taking the recommendations forward.

Additional Learning Needs

We regularly raised ALN funding at political and official-level meetings with Welsh Government. Through the Distribution Sub-Group, we engaged on the transfer of post-16 specialist funding to councils under the Additional Learning Needs Act, and we maintained regular dialogue with partners on the detail of implementation of the Act.

Teachers' Pay

Continued discussions with Welsh Government secured an additional £6 million to support local authorities with teachers' pay increase.

21st Century Schools

The WLGA lobbied successfully to reduce the local authority contribution for Band B from 50% to 35%, with the Welsh Government contribution increasing to 65%.

Food in Schools

We secured £4.85m for the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) from Welsh Government, with the aim of reaching 14,000 children in Wales.

We appointed a National Dietitian for Special Diets in schools and continued to support and advise local authorities and schools regarding healthy eating in schools and provided certificates for compliance with the regulations.

Youth Work Training

We commissioned three Trauma Recovery Model courses from the Trauma Recovery Academy, contributing to a trauma informed Youth Workforce. We also worked with the ACE Hub on delivering ACE's training, and developing accredited modules, to the youth workforce.

Arts and Culture

Through the WLGA, both the Eisteddfod and Urdd are supported through annual funding provided collectively by the 22 local authorities, with this financial support continuing throughout the pandemic.

We secured a lead role for the WLGA in the new National Music Service to ensure that it is driven by local government.

For the continuation of music education in Wales, and to support local authorities' music services, we secured:

- The usual £1.4m
- £6.82 additional music resources
- £503,200 as a Winter Full of Wellbeing resource pack for music activities.

National Exercise Referral Scheme

The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS), established in 2007, has provided to provide valued and valuable services and support, focused on reducing ill-health in clients by using physical activity, behavioural change and healthier lifestyle choices. Unfortunately, Public Health Wales has informed the WLGA that the funding for the service will be withdrawn from the WLGA from April 2022. The WLGA has raised concerns about this development and is making the case to Public Health Wales and the Welsh Government for the continuation of the funding arrangement.

Rhythm of the School Day

We continue to engage closely with Welsh Government and partners on bold proposals to change the rhythm of the school day.

Welsh Language

The WLGA recruited a new policy offer to provide oversight of the Welsh Language Standards and the promotion of Welsh across local government.

We re-established the Welsh Language, Culture, Sports and Arts network for Cabinet members, which has met regularly since 2021.

Health and Social Care

Despite many challenges, increasing demand for care and support services and increased complexity of needs, **“ensuring good quality and sustainable social care services for the future”** has been a focus over the past five years.

Increasing demand for services, across both Adults and Children’s Services, with increased complexity of cases and support packages required, along with workforce challenges and funding levels that have not kept pace with demand, all these issues have been key challenges facing social care services over the past term and key areas of activity for the WLGA.

The Covid19 pandemic, while hugely challenging for social care staff and those in receipt of services, truly demonstrated the real value and worth of social care and increased public understanding of the roles social care undertake in supporting vulnerable people. Ensuring staff were protected with the necessary PPE, advising on testing regimes for the workforce and residential care residents, developing and supporting implementation of the shielding scheme and inputting to the development of policy and guidance were areas of work WLGA engaged with during this time, supporting the workforce to undertake their roles safely.

There was continual engagement and ongoing discussions between Welsh Ministers and Cabinet Members with responsibility for social services through the Cabinet Members network operated by WLGA, as well as the opportunity to hear from key partners on issues of concern. WLGA spokespeople have met regularly with Ministers and others in representing local government’s interests. All these meetings have covered the wide range of issues facing social services, and along with joint work with ADSS Cymru and other partners, have contributed to the progress being made.

Sustainable Funding

We have continued to lobby consistently and compellingly on the urgent need to place social services on a long-term sustainable footing. Increased demand for services and increased complexity, as well as transforming services in meeting the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act was putting funding levels under severe strain and social services was a priority area for councils to protect from the worst impacts of austerity.

Building on the significant and valued contribution social services provided during the pandemic, strong arguments and business cases have led to increased funding levels in 2022-23 and 2022-23, including:

- £10 million for councils to purchase equipment to help people with care and support needs to live independently in their own homes
- £50m towards overspends and winter pressures; £42m social care funding as part of the Winter Plan which included £21m additional for Children’s Services; and

- continuation of £40m for councils towards social care recovery funding

A significant uplift is also included in the budget for 2022-23 for social services, including funding to ensure all registered social care staff are paid the Real Living Wage.

Workforce

The pandemic brought to the fore the fragility of the social care workforce and WLGA has continually championed the importance of social care and critical role social workers play. WLGA has long held concerns about the low pay received by many social care workers and has lobbied for the payment of the Real Living Wage as a minimum and welcomed Welsh Government's commitment to implement this from April 2022. The WLGA is also a member of the Social Care Fair Work Forum which is addressing wider terms and conditions facing the social care workforce and contributed to the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy.

Supporting Transformation and Change

The WLGA continues to support the National Adoption Service with the aim of improving adoption services across Wales and the experience of adoptees and adopters as they travel the system. This includes supporting the establishment of a Joint Committee to provide oversight and governance and clarity of decision-making. The Joint Committee will also oversee Foster Wales, the branding working at both national and local levels and coordinating a marketing campaign launched in 2021 with the aim of recruiting more local authority foster carers across Wales.

Input continues in supporting implementation of *A Healthier Wales* with the aim of increasing integration across health and social care services, but also involving housing, education and other services as required. The WLGA Spokesperson chairs *Building a Healthier Wales* with a focus on prevention and early intervention in addressing health inequalities. The WLGA also continues to support implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, contributing to evaluation and learning. The WLGA believes further focus is needed on increasing preventative and early intervention services as a way to help reduce demand for crisis intervention and will build upon this work in the future.

Influencing Policy

The WLGA continues to influence the development of policy, working with Welsh Government, the Senedd and others as appropriate. The WLGA helped influence the proposals included for consultation by Welsh Government in their *Rebalancing Care and Support White Paper* and continues to input and influence the future direction, including the development of a National Framework. Regular briefing papers are produced and circulated to keep members up to date on a range of issues,

importantly linking to other policy areas as appropriate to promote and highlight the importance of social care services.

The WLGA also hosts the National Commissioning Board which has a key role in supporting improvements across the commissioning of health and social care services.

Housing and Community Safety

“Creating good quality homes and safer communities for people to live and work” are key foundation of leading good lives for citizens and in helping to maintain good overall wellbeing.

Key housing-related achievements by councils during this period have included the increasing numbers of new affordable homes being built by councils directly and in partnership, and the incredible efforts which have secured and maintained emergency temporary accommodation for over 18,000 people who were previously homeless since the start of the pandemic.

Community safety work has been reinvigorated over the period of this term, having been negatively affected by significant cuts in funding for community safety work during austerity. New forums and support networks have developed and there is real enthusiasm for the significant impact having safer communities has on local communities.

Asylum and migration issues and the role of councils has also increased during this time, with all authorities gaining experience in resettling refugees and contributing to the UK’s humanitarian responsibilities.

Housing

Working with Welsh Government and Community Housing Cymru, on behalf of local authorities, the WLGA negotiated and developing an appropriate *Housing Pact* setting out shared ambitions, outcomes and requirements covering the Senedd term. The WLGA continues to support the work of local authorities in tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping following changes to legislation and ensuring that those brought into temporary accommodation during the pandemic are supported into permanent housing, while transforming current and future temporary accommodation provision and homelessness. This has been a significant achievement by the housing sector, while hugely challenging and clearly highlights the need for more housing, including council housing, across Wales.

The WLGA was an active member of the Homelessness Advisory Group reporting to the Minister for Housing, the recommendations of which helped underpin the current approach of ‘everyone in’.

We lobbied strongly for changes to the Housing Revenue Account to enable councils to start council house building again at pace and scale to help meet housing demand.

A Housing Cabinet Members Network is also arranged on a regular basis, which has enabled elected members to discuss a wide range of housing related issues, influencing Welsh Government policy and delivery.

Fire and Building Safety

The WLGA contributed to Welsh Government led review examining and developing options around how a Joint Building Safety Inspection team with multiple disciplines (Building Control, Environmental Health and FRS) could work in Wales, with associated benefits and risks, continuing to support implementation of recommendations of the Hackett Review and highlighting the need for improvements to fire and building safety following the tragedy of Grenfell Tower.

Community Safety

The WLGA contributed to a Welsh Government review of community safety and in addressing the recommendations, the WLGA and Policing in Wales established a joint Safer Communities Project, supported by Welsh Government, to provide joint leadership to supporting Community Safety Partnerships. The community safety agenda has become more complex, addressing issues such as counter terrorism, tackling knife crime and trafficking alongside very local issues such as anti-social behaviour and safer streets.

The establishment of a Safer Communities Network for Wales, hosted by the WLGA, is also a significant achievement in supporting improvements and better outcomes in creating safer communities, and co-chaired by the WLGA Spokesperson and a Police and Crime Commissioner, the Safer Communities Board provides leadership in encouraging more collaborative working.

We established a Cabinet Members for Community Safety and Public Protection network, with the Minister for Social Justice attending the first meeting.

The WLGA also continues to facilitate the Police and Crime Panels Group and support PCPs, facilitating engagement with the Minister for Social Justice and the Association also contributed evidence to the recent review of Police and Crime Commissioners undertaken by the Home Office.

Fire and Rescue Services and Armed Forces

The WLGA continues to facilitate its Fire and Rescue Panel which ensure the issues and concerns raised by Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) are understood and represented by the WLGA. We coordinated and represented views on Welsh Government White Paper on the future funding and governance of FRAs and was successful in preventing some reforms which were of concern. Officers have also worked with FRAs and liaised with Welsh Ministers in relation to the work around broadening the role of fire fighters and the associated implications

An Armed Forces Network is also facilitated by the WLGA to support Armed Forces Champions across Wales in sharing information and best practice in embedding the Armed Forces Covenant. Securing funding from the Ministry of Defence, the WLGA developed and rolled out a training course on the Covenant, created a micro-site with examples of good practice and coordinated the bid which resulted in Armed Forces Liaison Officers in each region. Officers also contributed to UK Government

legislation on placing a duty on public bodies to promote the Covenant, helping to shape the requirements based on what already works well across Wales.

Asylum and Migration

The past term has seen the active involvement and participation of all local authorities in Wales in resettling refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other part of North Africa and the Middle East and more recently in accommodating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The WLGA engages regularly with the Home Office, Welsh Government, the LGA and others in the development and implementation of non-devolved policy in a devolved setting.

We host the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, who have played a key role in putting in place the arrangements necessary for resettling refugees in Wales, working closely with councils and other partners. Working together and through engagement with councils, an increased number of councils have agreed to participate in asylum dispersal across Wales.