

WLGA BUSINESS PLAN 2020-21

Purpose

1. To present the WLGA's Business Plan 2020-21.

Background

2. COVID-19 will inevitably dominate the work of local government and the WLGA for much of 2020-21.
3. Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness during the initial response phase and this will need to continue throughout the pandemic and as they plan for reconstruction and recovery. The WLGA will need to be as agile in supporting local authorities and in responding to challenges and changing priorities during the rapidly evolving pandemic.
4. The WLGA will also reshape its engagement with and priorities for the Welsh Government, UK Government and partners given the national refocus of collective resources on coordinating the response to COVID-19.
5. The Welsh Government intends to scale back planned policy reforms during 2020-21 and has revised its legislative programme for the remaining year of this Senedd term and intends to prioritise emergency coronavirus legislation and only continue with the planned Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and the Renting Homes (Amendment) (Wales) Bill. The WLGA will seek to influence the legislation as well as continue to support authorities in their preparations for the end of the transition period in December, following Brexit.
6. The WLGA's core aims, set out in the Corporate Strategy, however remain relevant and will shape local government's collective approach to the response phase and recovery phase during the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - **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 Senedd 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.

7. The WLGA has already realigned itself, both its organisational structure and work programme, to support the local government response to the coronavirus pandemic:

- Political leadership and coordination has been stepped up, through regular (initially daily now weekly) virtual meetings of leaders with Ministers, supplemented by regular bilateral meetings between Spokespersons and Ministers and more frequent Cabinet Member Network meetings.
- Organisationally, the WLGA has established an 'emergency planning' approach, convening a Covid Coordination Team which meets regularly during the week to prioritise activity, underpinned by Business Continuity Plans. Staff and resources have been redeployed where possible to support the local government response to COVID-19.

8. The Business Plan will prioritise '**Supporting councils' response to COVID 19**', and will refocus and re-prioritise activity across the WLGA's core priority themes:

- **Local Leadership, Freedom and Flexibility**
- **Finance**
- **Schools, Skills and Lifelong Learning**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **Housing and Community Safety**
- **Regeneration and a Resilient Environment**

9. The WLGA's Business Plan for 2020-21 is included in **Annex A**.

Recommendations

Members are recommended to note the WLGA's Business Plan 2020-21.

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ANNEX A

WLGA Business Plan 2020-21

Introduction

1. The WLGA is a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level.
2. It is a membership organisation that represents all 22 local authorities in Wales, the 3 fire and rescue authorities and the 3 national park authorities as associate members.
3. The WLGA's primary aims are to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of local authorities in Wales.
4. The WLGA's Corporate Strategy 2019-22 sets out the WLGA's values, its governance arrangements and how the organisation operates on behalf of its member authorities.

WLGA Priorities 2020-21

5. COVID-19 will inevitably dominate the work of local government and the WLGA for much of 2020-21.
6. Councils have demonstrated flexibility, innovation, resilience and responsiveness during the initial response phase and this will need to continue throughout the pandemic and as they plan for reconstruction and recovery. The WLGA will need to be as agile in supporting local authorities and in responding to challenges and changing priorities during the rapidly evolving pandemic.
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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;

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- **Health and Social Care**
- **Housing and Community Safety**
- **Regeneration and a Resilient Environment**

Supporting councils' response to COVID 19

The WLGA will:

11. Ensure the political leadership of the WLGA and local government is engaged in and influences the Welsh Government's and collective public service COVID 19 response and any future recovery and reconstruction planning.
12. Refocus and reprioritise organisational resources and priorities to support the aims of the political leadership and the collective needs of local government's COVID 19 response, including remote working and ongoing review of WLGA accommodation needs.
13. Seek to ensure local government funding is prioritised by Welsh Government and UK Government, making the case for additional funding to cover additional pressures and responsibilities and any lost income.
14. Working with professional groups, to engage and inform emerging Welsh Government policy announcements and the development of urgent guidance or regulations as they develop in response to the changing crisis.
15. Seek to maintain responsive and urgent communications and engagement channels and sharing of information and intelligence within local government and between Welsh Government and national partners and local authorities.
16. Champion and promote councils' community leadership role and responsiveness and encourage and facilitate shared learning in 'real-time', working with partners such as Audit Wales as appropriate, to ensure innovative practice and lessons are shared to shape councils' response to the pandemic.

Local Leadership, Freedom and Flexibility

Councils are respected, empowered and have the freedom and flexibility to respond to local needs

The WLGA will:

17. Champion the role of councillors and council leaders, promoting the reputation of councils, their crucial role and contribution.
18. Embed constructive engagement with the Welsh Government and the Senedd, seeking to influence policy and manifesto development ahead of the Senedd elections in 2021 and building relations, awareness and understanding of local government priorities with new Ministers and Members of the Senedd following the election.
19. Continue to engage and lobby the Welsh Government and Senedd on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, **and co-producing guidance and regulations** to ensure maximum flexibilities and powers for councils.

20. Promote collaborative local public service reform and ensure that the governance of regional services is democratically accountable and, wherever possible, streamlined.
21. Establish a new sector-led improvement and support programme and digital collaboration programme, focussing on digital transformation, innovation, supporting good governance, coordinating peer support and a programme of peer challenge and review.
22. Champion and promote vibrant local democracy, including a focus on greater diversity and democratic engagement and civility and respect and supporting councillors' development and training.
23. Support authorities to effectively manage their workforce through our role as the Employers' Organisation, with a particular focus on enhancing social partnership working at national and local levels which builds upon authorities' responsibility to determine local workforce issues at a local level following early and meaningful consultation with trade unions and staff alike.
24. Deliver an EU Transition Support Programme to local authorities and continue to engage with the other local government associations and Welsh and UK Governments to ensure local government interests are heard and met. Produce materials and information to assist local authorities in preparing for a range of changes associated with the ending of the transition period and whatever new arrangements are put in place.

Finance

Financial reform and fair funding for local services

The WLGA will:

25. Lobby for fair and sustainable funding for local public services including evidenced pressures and new responsibilities.
26. Promote greater financial freedoms and flexibilities for councils within a longer-term financial framework including a move towards multiyear settlements.
27. Continue to work towards the incorporation of all specific grants into the core grant and timely financial announcements.
28. Seek greater powers for councils to explore other sources of income, including new sources of taxation.
29. Lobby the UK Government and support authorities to ensure that welfare reforms are fair on our communities.

Schools, Skills and Lifelong Learning

National education standards delivered at a local level

The WLGA will:

30. Ensure that local government plays a full role working with partners on the national mission to raise standards in schools and improve outcomes for learners, including the new national curriculum for Wales.
31. Working with the WJEC, Qualifications Wales and the Welsh Government to make sure the qualifications framework during COVID 19 is fit for purpose and places learners at the heart of the system.
32. Continue to support investment in the 21st Century Schools programme and contribute towards refining the model.
33. Continue to make the case for education to be funded through local authorities through the RSG ensuring full flexibility and local determination for their own and schools' budgets.
34. Prioritise social partnership in working with the Welsh Government, trade unions and other bodies to influence the determination of teachers' pay and conditions in Wales.
35. Seek 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.
36. promote and support equalities and diversity and pupil wellbeing as a priority for schools and local authorities through initiatives such as hate crimes in schools programme, period poverty work, healthy eating and school holiday enrichment programmes, as well as aspects of youth support service work.
37. Continue to monitor and scrutinise legislation and funding in relation to children with additional learning needs (ALN).

Health and Social Care

Ensuring good quality and sustainable social care services for the future

The WLGA will:

38. Support local authorities in responding to the stabilisation and reconstruction of social care in light of COVID-19, as well as implementing Ministerial priorities for social services, including rebalancing the care market to improve its resilience and sustainability and safely reducing the number of Looked After Children in the care of local authorities.

39. Enable local government's input and contribution to Welsh Government's research and policy development on how best to secure long-term sustainable funding for social care services in Wales.
40. Continue to support implementation of *A Healthier Wales* as part of the approach to reconstruction and stabilisation of social care, aimed at transforming and increasing the pace and scale of integration across social care and health, and including other relevant local government services such as housing.
41. Work with Public Health Wales in highlighting local government's contribution to addressing the wider determinants of health through *Building a Healthier Wales* and the provision of preventative services provided by local authorities, and continue to convene Cymru Well Wales which aims to tackle the issues that contribute most towards poor health.
42. work closely with our social care partners and professional groups (Solace Cymru, Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales (ADSS Cymru) and Social Care Wales) to strengthen the voice of and promote the work of local government and to identify and highlight common issues of concern and/or improved ways of working.

Housing and Community Safety

Creating good quality homes and safer communities for people to live and work

The WLGA will:

43. Support the work of local authorities in tackling and preventing homelessness and rough sleeping 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 services.
44. Continue to work with local authorities and Welsh Government in implementing relevant recommendations from the *Independent Review of Affordable Housing Supply* in Wales, including supporting and enabling increased plans for building council houses across Wales to meet housing need, and as part of the pandemic recovery activities.
45. Contribute to the development and implementation of plans for the decarbonisation of existing homes in Wales, focusing initially on the social housing stock and identifying likely overall resource implications.
46. Continue to contribute to on-going work to improve building safety following the findings of the Hackitt Review and work with local authorities and other partners in implementing the findings and recommendations of the Building Safety Expert Group following Welsh Governments' anticipated White Paper which will set out changes to the law in relation to Housing, Building Regulation and Fire Safety.
47. Support the development of a Safer Communities Network for Wales through the WLGA hosting the team and developing its workplan. The WLGA will also continue to play an active enabling role in the Safer Communities Board that has been established in partnership with Policing in Wales to ensure there is effective strategic

leadership of community safety and that there is collective discussion and collaborative actions to address shared national priorities, as well as support the work of CSPs and partners at local and regional levels as appropriate.

48. Work with the Fire and Rescue Authorities and Welsh Government to consider any further proposals aimed at improving their current governance, financial and performance management arrangements of FRAs and to participate in discussions on any potential to widen the role of firefighter's roles, including identified implications.
49. Continue to support Police and Crime Panels through regular engagement with Chairs, Vice Chairs and Lead Officers and to engage with Welsh Government to raise awareness of the role they play in holding Police and Crime Commissioners to account.

Regeneration and a Resilient Environment

Local councils supporting inclusive growth locally, regionally and nationally and promoting a resilient environment for future generations

The WLGA will:

50. Continue to lobby for local government's role in regional development to be fully respected in any new funding and delivery arrangements introduced by the UK and/or Welsh Governments (including the Shared Prosperity Fund). This will require the bringing together of local and regional proposals with national objectives, building on the work of the City Deal and Growth Deal partnerships.
51. Continue to work through the Rural Forum in championing the needs and priorities of Wales' rural communities, including the production of a rural vision and an associated rural recovery plan.
52. Influence the development of Welsh Government's Circular Economy Strategy including the next iteration of statutory recycling targets and plans for new facilities to deal with waste/resources within Wales. Support the regional political structures linked to the Ministerial Waste Programme Board in feeding into these matters.
53. Work with local authorities to collate and model costs of handling packaging waste and managing litter, so they are well-placed to push for full cost recovery under Extended Producer Responsibility proposals expected by 2023. Also, participate in the Defra working group reviewing Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) and facilitate pilot work on DRS at home to promote the use of kerbside services within DRS.
54. Continue to lobby for new ways of maintaining the highway network (including county, unadopted roads and active travel routes) through a long-term investment programme.
55. Ensure local government input to the new Transport Strategy for Wales, bringing together regional proposals with national objectives and pressing the case for existing regional transport arrangements to form the basis for any move towards

Corporate Joint Committees for transport. Ensure Members' views feed into proposals for reform of bus services in Wales.

56. Work with Welsh Government and other partners to assist employees to have more opportunities to work from home, or in a local office, more of the time, where it works for them and for their employer; this will complement the "Transforming Towns" vision and help to create new opportunities for regeneration and economic activity in our towns and communities.
57. Engage with Welsh Government in understanding the changing impacts on town centres in light of the COVID crisis and ensure they remain relevant and sustainable environments, including support for reuse and repair services on high streets.
58. Develop a decarbonisation support programme to support authorities with their plans to reduce their own carbon emissions, in pursuit of the target of a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. Continue to support local authorities in addressing biodiversity loss and work to ensure nature-based approaches and upholding of environmental standards are central to 'green recovery' efforts.
59. Continue to support local authorities in their work to respond and adapt to flood and coastal erosion risks and events, including efforts to ensure effective Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes.
60. Ensure the Senedd consultation on the National Development Framework reflects local planning authority concerns. Influence discussions on the Local Government Bill to ensure Corporate Joint Committee proposals in relation to strategic planning respond to local government concerns, especially around engagement and accountability. Continue to lobby for income from planning applications to meet appropriate costs of delivering the service.