

WLGA ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Introduction

- 1 This Annual Report covers the period from July 2022 to June 2023 and no one could have predicted or anticipated the global events that infolded during that time nor the challenges they would present to the people and communities of Wales.
- 2 At the start of 2022, it seemed that Wales was recovering from the Covid pandemic with a sense that at last things were starting to improve. Local government played a major part in the Covid-19 response and recovery and there was a sense of optimism about the coming years. The war in Ukraine and the subsequent humanitarian crisis, and the ensuing global financial and economic crises changed everything.
- 3 Wales is a *Nation of Sanctuary* and the WLGA and councils in Wales are proud of their collective response to the humanitarian crisis. As a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the world experienced unparalleled rates of inflation and saw food, commodity and energy prices rocket to unprecedented levels. Climate change has also become a feature of recent years with crop failure around the world raising food prices and closer to home, the impact of extreme weather changes resulting in more frequent floods and disruption to daily life.
- 4 All these factors combine to create an unprecedented demand for local government services - but increasing cost pressures and diminishing resources have presented local government with immense challenges.
- 5 Despite generous revenue settlements from the Welsh Government of 9.4% (2022-23) and 7.9% (2023-24) councils were confronted over the last year with having to cut services, reduce reserves and increase council tax levels to balance their budgets. Negotiating the local government revenue settlement is an important part of the WLGA's work every year and the close working relationship between the WLGA and the Welsh Government, at all levels, has been a growing feature of recent years.
- 6 Local government has also had to deal with significant workforce pressures in recent years. Leaving the European Union has had an impact on many aspects of local government services and there are workforce pressures in every service area across every council area in Wales. The WLGA supports the principles of social partnership and works closely with partners across government, the public sector and the trade union movement. The devolution of teachers' pay and conditions to Wales has been a significant development and the WLGA works closely with all partners on all local government pay negotiations.
- 7 The Local Government Elections in May 2022 resulted in significant changes across local government in Wales with a number of new leaders and administrations but there was also an element of continuity within the WLGA's political leadership. Councillor Andrew Morgan was re-elected as the WLGA's Leader for a second term, and he continues to be supported by Councillor Rob Stewart as Deputy Leader and Councillor Huw David as Presiding Officer.

- 8 Reflecting the broad diversity of life in contemporary Wales remains a challenge for local government and the Association is working closely with all 22 authorities to increase participation and reflect diversity among elected members. Similarly, the WLGA is working with councils and other partners to ensure that those elected are treated with respect and dignity at all times and not subjected to any kind of abuse.
- 9 The WLGA looks to support elected members, their authorities and the people and communities they serve in everything we do. The challenge every year for the Association is to demonstrate that it adds value to the work of the 22 councils and that it contributes meaningfully to improving outcomes for the people of Wales.
- 10 The WLGA was formed in 1996 and its success has been based on its ability to react to changing circumstances. The WLGA predates the current devolution settlement in Wales and the advent of a Senedd with legislative powers, and the Association has adapted and evolved over that time in response. This means that today, the WLGA is able to represent local government in discussions with the Welsh Government and in delivering its current *Programme for Government* and its *Partnership Agreement* with Plaid Cymru. Despite all of the global pressures, the day-to-day work of government and service delivery continues and the WLGA represents and promotes Welsh Councils wherever and whenever possible.
- 11 The evolution and reform of the Association also continues and over the last year, the move to new accommodation at One Canal Parade has been completed successfully. Like most public sector organisations, the WLGA has adopted an agile and flexible working policy during that time and a rebranding of the organisation has been completed.
- 12 There have been significant changes and there are more to come. The WLGA recently completed an internal review of senior management and in implementing the recommendations of the review, it will ensure that the Association is resilient, fit for purpose and continues to deliver value for money into the future. That future will also entail digital transformation and the WLGA, through its Digital Team, will continue to work with councils, the Welsh Government and other partners to transform services in Wales.
- 13 The purpose of this Annual Report is to provide a summary of the work of the Association during 2022-23 and to highlight the challenges that local government has faced during that period.

Cllr Andrew Morgan OBE

WLGA Leader

Dr Chris Llewelyn

WLGA Chief Executive

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1. DIGITAL TEAM

The Digital Strategy for Wales sets out the ambitions for digital transformation of public services in Wales with the vision that digital in Wales will '*improve quality of life, sustainability and economic growth, creating user-centred public services supported by effective leadership, data and a culture of innovation and collaboration*'. This need for digital transformation has been a reality in local government for several years and can bring significant benefits for the council, its customers and the wider community when implemented effectively. Digital transformation is a journey, through which digital tools, processes, technologies, and skills are embedded across the organisation to improve the way services are delivered to customers. Councils must also address broad and complex issues on this journey, such as data security and privacy, accessibility of digital services, legacy technology, and digital inclusion. Effective digital transformation requires a clear vision, strong leadership, skilled staff, collaboration, and investment.

The WLGA Digital Team, under the direction of the Chief Digital Officer, exists to foster collaborative digital transformation and innovation across councils in Wales. The team helps councils bring together digital tools, technology, and skills, to deliver services that meet their customer expectations. It also helps them work together to achieve better outcomes for the councils and their customers.

Recent highlights include:

- **Engagement** – In early 2023, a re-engagement exercise was carried out with the strategic digital leads in each of the 22 councils. These sessions reviewed the digital strategic direction, priorities, and key challenges of each council, and discussed support required from the WLGA team. The insights and reinvigorated relationships have allowed us to develop a programme of support in partnership with the councils and tailored to their needs. With the recent appointment of an interim Chief Digital Officer, we will be further developing our engagement with senior leaders across councils in Wales.

- **Delivery** — We have continued to deliver projects across a broad digital spectrum including in digital skills, digital inclusion, data, and user-centred services. We also have a very exciting project portfolio underway this year which includes projects in service improvement, data, internet of things technology, social care, and translation. Our new suite of core support services for councils which include digital self-evaluation, knowledge sharing, and facilitated case studies is also building rapidly.
- **Partnership Working** — The CDOs for Welsh Government, Health and Social Care, and Local Government, along with the CEOs of the Centre for Digital Public Services have developed a strong partnership to collectively address cross-sector challenges and identify solutions. We are also working hard to develop partnerships with a range of organisations from across the public, private and third sectors. Across the WLGA, partnerships have been forged with improvement, transformation, social care, and education to strengthen the contribution digital can make to the wider agenda.
- **Governance** — As a result of the engagement exercise carried out in early 2023, a Digital Advisory Group has been set up to provide operational expertise and guidance to the team and identify collaborative opportunities. This group has been instrumental in identifying priorities for the year ahead. The Digital Leadership Board continues to provide strategic oversight to the work of the CDO and proposed revised terms of reference should further strengthen its strategic role in promoting digital leadership within local government in Wales. A members' network for those cabinet members who hold the digital portfolio is also currently being established to support and inform them around the digital transformation agenda (it will meet for the first time in the autumn).
- **Grant Administration** — The team continues to administer the Digital Transformation Fund (£1m) and the Skills Fund (£350k) on behalf of Welsh Government, and a collaborative council approach to project identification has been implemented for this year. This has proved extremely successful in engaging councils in project participation.

2. EDUCATION TEAM

Education in Wales is going through a period of huge reform. Local Government has a key part to play with the successful implementation of these reforms. Through ongoing discussions between WLGA and WG, additional funding has been agreed to support schools and councils with the ongoing implementation of Additional Learning Need (ALN) reforms for the next two years.

The successful roll out of the 1st phase of the Universal Free School Meals (Cooperation Agreement Commitment), in every council across Wales, demonstrates again, the importance of open, transparent discussions between the WLGA and WG. Ongoing discussions are key to overcome challenges, with the continuation of the roll out, to ensure its continued success.

The effective implementation of the Childcare Offer National Digital Service highlights the positive relationship between WLGA and WG. WLGA will continue the positive dialogue with

WG and stakeholders towards the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement commitment to expand free childcare for 2-year-olds via Flying Start.

Positive dialogue between WLGA and WG regarding the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans saw all 22 plans agreed. Members are committed to this agenda and the WLGA has responded positively to the WG Welsh in Education white paper consultation which also highlights the challenges facing some councils regarding Welsh medium workforce and resources.

Sustainable Communities for Learning continues to succeed in demonstrating the commitment from councils in developing their school communities through these challenging times. Although increased costs are seen, councils continue to invest and develop their school estates.

Recent highlights include:

- **Engagement:** Regularly discussions raising concerns regarding the ALNET Act 2018 funding and implementation issues with Welsh Government at political and officer level leading to additional funding of £12m for councils and schools in 2023-24 and 2024-25 and extension of the period for children and young people to transfer the new system by a year to 2025.
- **Grant Administration:** Collaboration with WG and stakeholders on guidance for councils on claiming grant funding from WG for post-16 specialist placements, with ongoing dialogue about the future funding of these placements.
- **Collaboration:** All 22 Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPS) agreed. Ongoing discussions with WG on the challenges facing some councils regarding difficulty in recruiting and retaining Welsh medium workforce.
- **Collaboration** - Significant investment continues from councils regarding the Sustainable Communities for Learning rolling programme which has seen a £30 million investment from councils and WG.
- **Delivery** - Successful roll out of the 1st phase of the Universal Free School Meals to all Reception year learners in every council. Ongoing discussions with WG continue with the next phase of the roll out, especially regarding some of the challenges facing councils surrounding increased costs and resources. WG has committed £35 million to date.

3. FINANCE TEAM

The Welsh Government set their budget for the 2022-23 financial year back in December 2021, prior to the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. This meant local authority budgets were set with no idea of the turmoil which was to follow in the energy markets and the significant rise in inflation. Local authorities were affected large rises in utility bills in their property portfolio, increases in fuel bills for their fleet vehicles and pay awards which were more than budgeted for to assist staff with the cost of living crisis being experienced. All of this interacted to make 2022-23 one of the most challenging years financially.

Inevitably, as inflation soared, this led to less disposable income across the population and therefore ever greater demand on the services local authorities offered. As ever, authorities adapted to the financial realities and assisted the most vulnerable with a myriad of support schemes, including warm hubs for people struggling to pay for heating their own homes, alongside cost of living support for those in lower council tax bands. The true picture of the impact is yet to be fully seen. Against this background the finance team achieved notable successes including:

- **Settlement:** The WLGA worked with Treasurers, leaders and Welsh Government to build a robust evidence based case for local government service pressures through the Finance Subgroup (FSG). The FSG Report received national media exposure and a specific report about the financial pressures in social services was also produced and submitted to Welsh Government as part of their budget deliberations. A good settlement outcome was secured, with an additional £403m, which is a 7.9% uplift in Aggregate External Finance for 2023-24 and while this is welcome, concerns have already been expressed for the financial situation for forthcoming years.
- **Cost of living crisis:** The WLGA has worked closely with Welsh Government and councils to deliver a financial package of support in excess of £260m to communities as the cost-of-living crisis unfolded. These included Welsh Government Fuel Support Scheme, payments to support unpaid carers, cost of living support for those in lower council tax bands or receiving a reduction in their Council Tax bill alongside discretionary funding to mitigate cost of living pressures for particularly vulnerable taxpayers. Officers assisted with securing an additional £6m in Discretionary Homeless Prevention funding to support measures that prevent homelessness and reduce dependence on temporary accommodation and have worked collaboratively with Welsh councils and BEIS to commence delivery of financial support to over 55,000 off grid and alternative fuel users falling outside of the support provided by UKG (through the Energy Bills Support Scheme and Alternative Fuel Funding).
- **Reducing bureaucracy:** Following lobbying by the WLGA, the Minister for Finance and Local Government made a statement in May 2023 which included a programme of work to reduce the number of separate grants paid to local authorities from 2024-25 and to consider temporary de-hypothecation, if appropriate. The timeliness of grants continues to improve, and many were recently announced with 3 year profiles. This is welcomed and follows many years of discussion on reducing the complexity and bureaucracy of grants, a key priority for councils.
- **Influencing reform:** The WLGA, Treasurers and Revenues teams have continued to support the Welsh Government on both the reform of council tax and non-domestic rates, responding to both consultations on local tax reform and attended a Senedd scrutiny session to provide evidence.
- **Tourism levy:** The WLGA and finance practitioners have been working with the Welsh Government to develop proposals for a tourism levy and responded to the WG consultation at the end of the 2022. Additional work on the costs of administering such a system have also been supported.

4. **IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

The delivery plan for the WLGA's Improvement Programme was approved at the Executive Board meeting on 28th January 2022 to secure £800,000 grant funding from Welsh Government. The programme benefits from a positive, and ongoing, working relationship with key council officers to ensure the programme remains relevant to new and emerging local council needs. The core workstreams within the programme are: Local Democracy, Induction & Member Development; Supporting Corporate Capacity & Development; Corporate Governance & Performance; and Targeted Improvement Support.

The [Improvement Programme](#) reflects the shared ethos of sector led improvement that is evident within the Local Government and Elections Act (2021) and demonstrates the commitment of the WLGA and Welsh Government to promote, support, and resource a positive culture of improvement across Welsh local government.

- **Local Democracy, Induction & Member Development:** The Improvement Team worked closely with local authorities and other relevant stakeholders to update and create new training and guidance resources to support councillors post-election. These took account of both any legislative changes that had occurred since the previous election, and practical changes that would impact the role of the councillor, such as the broad shift to remote working. Following the elections the improvement team has supported elected members in their roles, as frontline councillors, committee members or as members of the executive, either through their inductions or other indirect support and development opportunities. This included 31 induction workshops delivered by the WLGA and training materials have also been made available to councils to support their own local delivery. In addition, 14 political mentoring arrangements have been established across 4 councils, and 2 further professional development sessions have been delivered by the Improvement Team. 15 coaching sessions have also been provided to Cabinet members and Cabinet and Top Team development sessions have also been delivered in 8 councils.
- **Supporting improved performance:** The Improvement Team commissioned Data Cymru to develop two new data focused training courses aimed specifically at members (Data 101). Training with one local authority was piloted and then a further two free-to-attend sessions were held of both training courses for members from across Wales. Working in partnership with Academi Wales, the Improvement Team has relaunched [Leadership Programme for Councillors in Wales](#) (formerly the Leadership Academy). Over the course of the financial year, this ILM accredited programme hosted 49 councillors from 22 councils. The team also facilitated the Wales Standards Committee Chairs Forum to enable Chairs of Standards Committees to network, share good practice and seek solutions to problems.
- **Supporting Corporate Capacity & Development:** The Improvement team works closely with officers at a range of levels within local councils, supporting professional development and corporate capacity building. This includes continuing to offer senior management coaching and mentoring support programme delivered via Solace UK; an offer of workforce planning support, delivered by the LGA, has been taken up by 19 councils. In response to Welsh Government's recently published Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, the improvement offer has been expanded to include workshops on Positive Action. This will be rolled out to more councils in 2023/24. There has been a launch of Welsh Councils' Transformation & Innovation Network to share knowledge, insight and experience, developing and testing business collaboration in

key priority areas: 21st century public servant, User-centred design and digital innovation, Commercial and Entrepreneurial minded councils and Citizen and Community resilience. The programme also support sharing good practice across the sector through ongoing coordination of a number of professional networks and dedicated shared learning events. A range of council good practice and case studies is hosted on our website and can be accessed here; [Good Council Practice - WLGA](#). The team has also provided ongoing facilitation of a number of networks including: Heads of Democratic services; Risk Management Network; Heads of Policy and Equality Officers. A further working group comprising of colleagues from the Performance and Policy Network and the Engagement Officers Network has also been established.

- **Corporate Governance:** The Improvement Team has worked closely with local councils to support the implementation of the performance and governance duties set out in the Local Government and Elections Act (2021). This included establishing a new framework methodology to support the implementation of new council performance duties and delivery of a self-assessment workshop held with council practitioners to reflect on the successes and challenges of applying the new performance duty. The Team are supporting implementation of corporate duties associated with newly established Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) to map out and embed new corporate duties. The team is also working with councils on data management issues to further develop useful datasets, benchmarking and dashboards.
- **Targeted Improvement Support:** as well as the broad support outlined above, the Improvement Team was also worked with councils and external specialists from a range of fields to meet specific and local improvement needs, such as planning and equalities.
- **Supporting Citizen and Community Resilience:** The challenges of the pandemic, and the previous floods, affected many Welsh communities just and highlighted the community power and potential which lies in voluntary action and community spirit. Councils and their partners are now moving in the direction of supporting resilient citizens and communities to empower them in future challenges. This work has included supporting councils in sharing and learning new models of co-produced and co-delivered citizen centred services; working with agencies such as the multi-agency practitioner network on joint working projects such as: evidence review of "*the role of multi-sectoral collaboration in supporting community action to support wellbeing*"; shared learning events to promote models of empowering citizens and communities, cost of living practices and effective engagement. This work also includes working with council leads for tackling poverty, engagement and supporting communities, use of data, behavioural insight, practice exchange to support those impacted on by the cost-of-living crisis.

5. PUBLIC PROTECTION AND FRONTLINE SERVICES

The WLGA continues to work closely with Directors of Public Protection, Emergency Planning and other key frontline teams including Registration, Burials and Crematoria who provide services to our communities. Crucially each of these relatively small and often unseen teams have played critical and essential roles during the last period. As the Covid Public Inquiry evidence and recommendations begin to be published, it will document just

how important it is for these preventative, protective and supportive services to be fully recognised as integral to the fabric of local government.

- **Building the workforce:** WLGA is committed to working with Directors of Public Protection Wales (DPPW) and Emergency Planning managers, who have highlighted workforce resilience issues affecting the ability of teams to recruit and retain professional and competent officers. The lack of new entrants into these services is now at a tipping point for local authorities. New opportunities are being explored for example, in creating a new Regulatory Compliance Officer apprenticeship scheme, which, if successful, will provide new grass roots capacity into the public protection framework.
- **Influencing policy:** WLGA and Public Protection teams continue to offer their expertise to assist and shape the Welsh Governments Programme for Government including in taxi reform and modernisation; new measures to improve the air that we breathe; reductions in food waste and fouling of the public sewerage systems; the new phenomenon of vaping amongst the population and especially young people who may never have smoked previously is of great concern. The safety of these new products is currently a high priority for trading Standards with hundreds of thousands being seized across Wales. There are littering and environmental concerns with these products too which are being experienced. The WLGA and DPPW are engaged in shaping new policy in Wales, and working with colleagues across the UK to ensuring vaping is controlled adequately.
- **Protecting the public:** WLGA engages with Environmental Health and Trading Standards teams via DPPW, who protect communities by ensuring food is safe and legal for humans and animals; ensuring houses meet standards and are maintained appropriately, improving quality of life for some of our most vulnerable; tackle businesses who profiteer and cut corners, endangering life and robbing people of personal savings; prevent illnesses and injury by inspecting, examining and helping businesses to comply with their legal obligations, and investigating and prosecuting those who endanger others or who seek an unfair advantage or to profit unfairly by illegal and or detrimental practices.
- **Cost of living:** The current cost of living crisis means that public protection services are needed now more than ever. Consumers require the protection of local eyes and ears in the form of environmental health, licensing and trading standards officers, whose role in market surveillance, intelligence gathering, and use of legal powers seek to prevent the cost of living crisis biting even harder for our local communities.
- **UK Covid19 Inquiry:** The WLGA is playing an active role in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, which seeks to examine the Covid-19 response and the impact of the pandemic in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, identifying lessons to be learned and informing preparations for future pandemics across the UK. The WLGA is working closely with the LGA to provide help and support to local authorities in preparation for the Inquiry and will be representing the views of Welsh local authorities throughout, advocating the essential role played by councils in preparing for and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - **Resilience and preparedness (Module 1)** – The WLGA has ‘core participant’ status for Module 1 of the Covid-19 Inquiry, which will examine the resilience and preparedness of the UK for the coronavirus pandemic. Public hearings for the inquiry commenced on 13th June 2023. In its opening statement the WLGA

emphasised the major role Local Government played in bringing Wales through the pandemic, publicly acknowledging the dedication and flexibility of local authority officers with a very high proportion designated as key workers.

- **Core UK decision-making and political governance – Wales (Module 2b)**
 - The WLGA also has ‘core participant status for Module 2b of the Covid-19 Inquiry, which will examine core political and administrative governance and decision-making from the perspective of Wales. Separate modules will cover UK government, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Public hearings for Module 2b are proposed to commence on 26 February 2024 and a session will be held within Wales.

6. REGENERATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Promoting a decarbonised and resilient environment for future generations

WLGA is supporting councils’ work towards the ambitious target of a net zero public sector in Wales by 2030. Our Climate Change Support Programme has been funded by Welsh Government. Good progress was made during 2022/23. We have established a number of task and finish groups, led by council Chief Executives to progress work against commitments in ‘Net Zero Wales’. The support programme also focuses on support for adaptation. In the face of changes we know are already happening, services and communities need to become more resilient. I have held a series of meetings with Leaders and Climate Change lead Cabinet Members in each council to ensure we are working in an integrated and strategic way, to tackle the enormous challenges ahead.

Achievements 2022-23:

- developed the Climate Change ‘*Transition and Recovery Support Programme*’, commissioning advice and sharing best practice on mitigation and adaptation, with progress reported to each meeting of the Partnership Council for Wales and to Senedd committee inquiries (*more details in the Climate Change section in the Appendix*)
- worked on a significant shift in councils’ focus away from ‘waste’ toward a ‘circular economy’ approach, including the Ministerial Programme Board (*more details in the Waste Improvement section in the Appendix*)
- supported councils in their preparations for important new legislation on 20mph default speed limits, helping to secure funding, technical and communications input and arranging sessions and briefings for Leaders and Transport Cabinet Members. WLGA also secured WG funding for a small number of pilot projects to enable adoption of previously unadopted highways (*more details under grant-funded ‘Transport work’ section in the Appendix*)
- input to WG legislative proposals on bus services and worked with all stakeholders on funding arrangements for services once the Bus Emergency Scheme finishes
- continued to support councils in their responses to risk of flooding and coastal erosion, including reviewing and providing briefings on Sustainable Drainage

legislation and contributing to work on coal tip safety (*more details under the 'Resilience and Safety' section in the Appendix*).

- worked on a Memorandum of Understanding with NRW to ensure joint work on shared goals and effective Member engagement.

Local councils supporting inclusive growth locally, regionally and nationally

In the post-EU environment WLGA has performed a crucial role over the last year bringing together the different tiers of government, to ensure grant-funded economic development activity is aligned and does not result in duplication or gaps in provision. That work has covered town centre and place-based regeneration, skills and employability and business support. WLGA has worked closely with the four lead authorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), shared good practice, lobbied in response to a wide range of issues raised by councils and maintained ongoing dialogue with UK and Welsh Governments. Attention will now turn increasingly to lobbying on post-April 2025 funding arrangements and regional partnership working in the context of the emerging Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs).

Achievements 2022-23:

- engaged with councils, UKG and WG Ministers on post-Brexit funding arrangements, often acting as a broker between governments and giving evidence to Welsh Affairs Committee and Senedd inquiries
- organised sessions for councils/lead authorities with Business Wales and with the WG Regeneration and Employability teams to achieve effective alignment between UKG and WG-funded initiatives
- explained to a wide range of partners at the national level the approach required in relation to SPF funding, acting on behalf of all councils
- lobbied successfully for changes to be made to WG's Technical Advice Note 15 (on development, flooding and coastal erosion) to ensure that regeneration opportunities can be pursued where appropriate
- engaged with WG, NRW and other partners to find ways of managing phosphate discharges to limit the impact on development proposals in affected areas across Wales.

Work on issues affecting rural areas

An important part of inclusive growth is ensuring we consider rural issues and opportunities as well as urban. The WLGA Rural Forum has fought for the needs of rural areas to be recognised explicitly and has developed a clear and evidence-based Manifesto which the Forum has sought to take forward over the course of the year. A particular focus has been given to the issues of second homes and transport in rural areas. We extended the membership to include the Vale of Glamorgan as a tenth core member and have opened the meetings up to all councils and the three National Park Authorities to ensure we are representing the views of all rural areas.

Achievements 2022-23:

- Worked with Welsh Government on a range of legal, planning and tax measures to address the issue of second homes and their impact on local affordable housing
- Lobbied (ultimately unsuccessfully) for rural development funding following the ending of EU support
- Fed into WG consultations on the Sustainable Farming Scheme, which will be the replacement for EU agricultural support
- Highlighted the difficulties faced in rural areas in responding to a range of transport policies and lobbied for rural proofing to be undertaken more effectively.

7. SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING TEAM

Social Services and Health

Recent experiences in social services and health have been unprecedented and the challenges councils face in the delivery of high-quality social care services are now well known: inadequate funding; an undervalued workforce; a provider sector battling with increasing pressures; and an agenda for integration in which the needs of the NHS tends to dominate. Throughout the last 12 months the WLGA has continued to support local government in its responses to these challenges, championing its work to Government.

We have continued to campaign on behalf of our membership, taking every opportunity to highlight the issues and concerns of councils and make the case for the need to secure the funding and powers that councils need to best serve their local communities and improve residents' lives. Through our work with our members, Ministers and their departments and officials, and by working closely with key partners and professional groups we have helped realise a number of key achievements over the past year. Highlights include:

Partnership Working - Working closely and further developing our relationships with our key social care partners and professional groups (Solace Cymru, ADSS Cymru and Social Care Wales) with the aim to strengthen the voice of local government, identifying and highlighting common issues of concern and/or improved ways of working. This includes the submission of a social services financial pressures paper to Ministers to help inform budgetary discussions which set out a shared view of the pressures facing councils in the delivery of social care services and the development of a draft Statement of Intent setting out key priorities for reform of social services to help influence Welsh Government's direction of travel.

- **Building Capacity in the Community** – The WLGA was a key partner in supporting, shaping and enabling the work undertaken by councils, in partnership with Health Boards, Regional Partnership Boards and with support from Welsh Government to increase the number and availability of community beds or equivalent as part of last year's Winter planning. This included membership of the Minister's Care Action Committee and relevant Steering Boards.

- **Engagement with Ministers and Officials** – Through the WLGA regular bilaterals and cabinet member, a number of meetings have been held with the Minister for Health and Social Services, the Deputy Minister for Social Services and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. Key issues have been around the pressures facing local authorities and the development and implementation of Ministerial priorities for social services. This has included engagement on 'Further Faster', examining ways to build greater community capacity as well as the Children's Services Transformation Agenda with Spokespersons and officers representing WLGA on key groups established. In November WLGA also responded to the consultation on proposals for primary legislation in relation to children's social care, Continuing Health Care, mandatory reporting and regulation and inspection.
- **Publication of Social Care Priorities Research** – During 2022-23 WLGA published its own research examining the challenges facing the social care sector and local government's priorities for social care. Workforce issues topped the list of key concerns, alongside a lack of sustainable funding, and challenges associated with meeting more complex needs due to demographic changes. WLGA have also now started work to consider the feasibility of how a more consistent, national approach to pay and career development for social workers within local authorities could be developed.

Housing and Homelessness

Throughout the last 12 months numbers of people presenting as homeless to Councils continue to be very high, and the challenges of providing appropriate levels of suitable temporary accommodation, along with difficulties in securing long term homes for people, means that the numbers of people in emergency accommodation continue to increase with no sign of reducing. As well as increased household costs for everyone, including rising energy costs, there have been significant increases in rents in most areas, with an increasing gap over Local Housing Allowance support means that the Private Rented Sector is increasingly difficult for many households to access and afford. A sustained period of rising consumer costs and increased interest rates has also had an impact on owner-occupiers, many of whom now find their mortgage payments more difficult to meet. All leading to increased demand for homelessness services and the use of temporary accommodation.

Part of the response to dealing with increased homelessness, and to meet housing need more generally, is the building of more social rented homes. Councils are making significant efforts to meet the Programme for Government target of 20,000 new low carbon homes for social rent. Councils with housing stock are playing an increasingly important role directly developing a growing number of these much-needed new homes, and all Councils continue to work with their RSL partners to ensure that new homes meet strategic housing needs.

- **Engagement with Minister and officials:** Through regular bilaterals and the WLGA Housing Cabinet Member Network, a number of meetings have been held with the Minister for Climate Change and senior officials. Key issues have been around the pressures facing local authorities and the development and implementation of Ministerial and Programme for Government priorities for housing, homelessness and building safety.

- Provision of evidence to **Senedd Committee inquiries** and developing **consultation responses**. Local Government and Housing Committee inquiries have included the Private Rented Sector, the Right To Adequate Housing, and Housing Ukrainian refugees. In addition, evidence was provided to the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into Decarbonisation of housing: decarbonising the private housing sector. Consultation responses have included those on Welsh Government's Building Safety proposals, Wales Housing Quality Standards, and Post Pandemic Interim Homelessness Measures.
- **Representation:** Continued to support and contribute to Ministerial advisory boards, key groups and networks helping to develop and implement effective housing and homelessness policy and practices in Wales including the Homelessness Expert Review Panel, Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board, Decarbonisation of Homes: Implementation Group, 20,000 Homes Programme Board, and the Net Zero Carbon Homes Hub Steering Group.
- **Social Rent settlement:** the WLGA, working with Community Housing Cymru, negotiated a voluntary agreement as part of the rent settlement that demonstrates that Council landlords are dedicated to ensuring that tenants are effectively supported and protected through the cost of living crisis (along with the wider packages of support being implemented by Councils and partners) and provides the Minister with assurance which was a material consideration in her decision-making around the rent settlement.
- **Asylum dispersal and support for Ukraine guests:** working closely with councils, the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, Home Office, Welsh Government, councils and others to meet the changing requirements of a full asylum dispersal policy and practice in Wales, including the development of the Wales Asylum Dispersal Plan. The WLGA also played a key role in working with councils and Welsh Government in supporting the arrival of guests from Ukraine in Wales as a result of the war, influencing policy and operations and facilitating regular communication and engagement and encouraging a partnership approach.

Community Safety

This year, the WLGA has worked closely with Local authorities, Fire and Rescue authorities and members of the Police and Crime Panels in Wales to seek to ensure that their voices are heard by both Welsh Government and the UK Government on a range of policy matters and proposals including a Home Office Review of Community Safety Partnerships; proposals around broadening the role of Fire Fighters; and the introduction of a new Armed Forces duty of due regard.

- **Engagement and representation:** The WLGA continues to support and participate in key groups and networks arranged by Welsh Government and UK Government, helping to develop, influence and enable implement effective community safety policy and practices in Wales. The Association was also a key partner in the establishment of the Wales Safer Communities Network and the Safer Communities Board for

Wales, which will help in ensuring there is appropriate support and shared leadership in delivering safer communities across Wales.

- **Work with Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs):** The WLGA Fire and Rescue Panel has continued to meet and provides an opportunity to discuss a range of challenges facing FRAs. The Association has worked with FRAs and liaised with WG Ministers in relation to the work around Broadening the Role of Fire Fighters and the associated workforce and funding implications and are represented on the Fire and Rescue Social Partnership Forum that has been established by Welsh Government.
- **Armed Forces:** Through the Armed Forces Champions Network, facilitated by the WLGA, discussions have centred on how to improve services that meet the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales, including hearing from the Welsh Veterans Commissioner. Work has also been undertaken with the MOD and other partners in the drafting of Statutory Guidance to accompany the new Armed Forces Due Regard Duty on local authorities and other responsible authorities.
- **Supporting Police and Crime Panels:** The WLGA continue to engage regularly with Police and Crime Panels across Wales, facilitating sharing of information and experience and advocating on their behalf. This has included liaison with Welsh Government and UK Government Ministers to seek to highlight and address issues of concern such as hybrid meeting arrangements; appointments of Panel members; dealing with complaints; and funding. The potential implications for PCPs from proposed changes to the role and responsibility of Police and Crime Commissioners has also been highlighted.
- **Home Office review of community safety:** Engagement with the Home Office review of Community Safety Partnerships continues, ensuring that the review takes account of the different partnership and community safety landscape in Wales and that the role of elected members and local authorities are given appropriate consideration.

8. WORKFORCE AND EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

The WLGA is the employers' organisation for Local Government in Wales, supporting local authorities on workforce related matters and representing local government employers in Wales in national negotiations on pay, terms and conditions. Managing strategic relationships and working in partnership with key stakeholders including Government and our recognised trade unions to influence workforce related policy and initiatives to deliver better outcomes for local government and the communities they serve.

- **National negotiations on pay, terms and conditions:** Representing local government in Wales in both national negotiations and independent pay review arrangements on pay, terms and conditions for the workforce in local government, fire and rescue, coroners, schools, youth and community services. Responding to industrial disputes and contributing to negotiations regarding pay across all local government interests and on wider terms and conditions issues, including the

updating of the Burgundy Book, the IWPRB strategic review of teachers terms and conditions and a Welsh Government led workload agreement for teachers.

- **Industrial Relations:** Managing the strategic relationship with recognised trade unions at the national (Wales) level through the Joint Council for Wales and Schools Social Partnership Forum, working with trade unions through social partnership to address matters affecting the workforce and working collaboratively on issues of mutual interest, including the development of an interim agreement regarding mileage rates in response to volatile fuel rates and wider cost of living pressures.
- **Policy development:** Influencing and shaping policy and practice that impacts the workforce and workplace for the benefit of local government, most recently contributing to the development of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act. Developing strong working relationships between WLGA representatives, the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership and Welsh Government officials, including the introduction of bilateral meetings on workforce matters.
- **Professional practice:** Providing support for professional officer networks such as the HR Directors Network, annual work programme and its subgroups to enable dialogue, share knowledge, promote collaboration and improve practice in service areas such as education and social services and on topics such as workforce data and benchmarking, attraction and retention. The WLGA is also part of the National Association of Regional Employers (NARE) as one of a number of regional employers organisations from across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Which provides a voice at the UK level and a mechanism to collaborate with the other regions and share information and practice.
- **Engagement and representation:** Working with local authorities and social partners in Government and our trade unions to strengthen social partnership and promote fair work for the benefit of local government employers, the workforce and our workplaces including a seminar on the Real Living Wage, in collaboration with Cynnal Cymru. Representing local government in Wales and contributing to the work programmes of a number of national and sectoral social partnership and fair work fora such as the Social Partnership Forum, Social Partnership Council, Workforce Partnership Council, Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services and Social Care Fair Work Forum.

GRANT FUNDED WORK

The WLGA host a wide range of grant funded teams that undertake a variety of work aimed at supporting and enabling councils across a number of services. This Appendix highlights the role and key achievements of grant funded teams within the WLGA, adding value and reach in terms of the work undertaken on behalf of local government.

Funded national events: The WLGA's long standing partnership with the National Eisteddfod, the Urdd Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society continued through 2022-23. This arrangement is funded through a top slice of the local government revenue settlement. Successful face-to-face Eisteddfodau were held in Ceredigion and Denbigshire in 2022 for the first time since Covid.

EDUCATION TEAM

ETS Cymru Wales - www.ets.wales / www.ets.cymru

The main purpose of ETS is to professionally endorse programmes of training for youth workers and youth support workers to ensure they are of a suitably high quality, relevant to the needs of employers, the workers themselves and the young people with whom they work. It undertakes this work on behalf of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth & Community Workers (JNC) and is supported financially by WG. ETS work closely with the Youth Work sector in Wales through the ETS membership, which comprises voluntary and maintained youth work organisations, specifically the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services, the Principal Youth Officers' Group, training providers from both HE and FE, trade unions, and other key stakeholders including Welsh Government, the Education Workforce Council, and Estyn. Significant pieces of work have included:

- **Support and development:** WG has identified the need for support and development of the youth work profession, a career structure offering progression, and a workforce development strategy and plan for the youth work sector. On their behalf, ETS facilitates the Workforce Development Implementation Participation Group to address recruitment and retention issues, what is available currently for youth workers and youth support workers in training and professional learning, how it is funded, and addressing the gaps.
- **Increased capacity:** In support of this, WG has provided additional funding to ETS to appoint a full-time Workforce Development Officer on a two-year basis.
- **Funding:** ETS has also received funding to provide the second round of Leadership and Management training for senior leaders in youth work.

Food and Fun - Foodandfun@wlga.gov.uk

Food and Fun is the Welsh Government's school holiday enrichment programme running in all 22 local authorities at schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, providing learning and enrichment opportunities for children to become engaged, enthused and nourished over the summer. The ethos of the programme is: 'Working together to promote healthy living, support positive well-being and improve engagement with education and the school during the summer holidays'.

Significant pieces of work have included:

- **Delivery of scheme:** Food and Fun was successfully delivered to 200 cohorts in 139 schools in 21 local authorities which provided 8000 spaces per operating day. Following feedback on evaluation methods used in previous years, The Food and Fun team introduced a 'graffiti wall' to better capture the voice of the child in pictures and words. Support for ALN children increased by over 150% from the previous year.
- **Evaluation:** ARAD research conducted an impact evaluation, resulting in an Impact Report which strengthens the evidence that Food and Fun achieves its intended outcomes.
- **Creation of the National Partners Toolkit:** The programme relies heavily on cross-partnership working at a local level which the Toolkit is designed to support by networking council leads and schools with national partners that can deliver sessions locally. The Toolkit itself is a virtual catalogue that can be accessed by council leads and school coordinators, and includes partners such as WRU, Cadw and STEM Cymru.

Food in Schools

The Food in Schools Team includes a Manager, Programme Coordinator and Dietitian. The team are continuing to support the Welsh Government, councils and schools in relation to healthy eating, special diets and food in school programmes. The demand for such support will continue to be high over the next three years with the roll-out of universal primary free school meals, the review of healthy eating in schools' legislation and the further development of food in schools' programmes to help mitigate the cost-of-living crisis.

The Food in Schools Team have been supporting the Welsh Government, councils and schools in relation to healthy eating, special diets and food in school programmes. Significant pieces of work have included:

- **Free school meals:** Checking and feeding back on primary school menus for the roll-out of Universal Primary Free School Meals, providing support and training to achieve a Certificate of Compliance in relation to healthy eating.
- **Guidance:** Developing guidance for managing medically prescribed diets in primary schools.
- **Policy review:** Coordinating and undertaking a policy review of the Welsh Government's additional breakfast allowance in secondary schools (piloted as the Year 7 breakfast programme).

National Music Service - www.musicservice.wales

The National Music Service was established in May 2022 and comprised of key partners and organisations, working together as a 'hub'. The WLGA is the lead body responsible for governance arrangements and allocating funding to deliver the priorities in the National Music Plan. The WLGA ensures the programmes of work are diverse and accessible to children and young people, and, in doing so, follow the principles of the WG's guidance on foundational economy, where possible to do so.

Significant pieces of work have included:

- **Funding:** Significant additional funding allocates to all 22 Councils in Wales to support the implementation of the National Music Plan and every child and young person in Wales have free access to a new bilingual digital music platform to help them discover their first musical notes – Charanga Wales.
- **Capacity:** Successful recruitment of the National Music Co-ordinator.
- **Recognition:** Commercial procurement success at GOAwards Wales - WG win top prize for their work in collaboration with the Welsh Local Government Association on its musical instruments dynamic purchasing system.

Supporting Service Children in Education Wales www.SSCECymru.co.uk

Supporting Service Children in Education Wales (SSCE Cymru) has a mission to provide the best possible educational support to Service children in Wales. SSCE Cymru is a Welsh Government funded programme, managed by the WLGA.

Established in 2014, SSCE Cymru works with all 22 local authorities across Wales to provide schools and other educational settings with a better understanding of how they can offer support to the children of Armed Forces personnel living in Wales. SSCE Cymru has one mission with three separate outcome areas: Knowledge and evidence; activities and resources; and supporting policy and systems.

Significant pieces of work have included:

- Many schools have been working towards their Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru status. 12 have achieved Bronze, two have achieved Silver and one has achieved Gold.
- **Month of the Military Child**, in April, saw a number of schools and local authorities across Wales get involved in celebrating their Service children through events and activities such as Armed Forces Festival days, Dandelion themed artwork, celebratory assemblies, Wheelchair rugby with veterans and 'Purple up' day
- **Funding** for the full SSCE Cymru programme has been secured for 2023/24, which now includes the full team (Project Manager, Participation Lead Officer and four Regional School Liaison Officers) and grant funding for schools and local authorities.

REGENERATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Climate Change - The Transition and Recovery Support Programme (TaRSP)

The WLGA's TaRSP is funded by Welsh Government (£330,000 in 2022/23). The purpose is to provide support to councils working towards commitments in [Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 \(2021 to 2025\) | GOV.WALES](#) and on adaptation.

During 2022/23 key achievements were as follows:

- **Development of tools and guidance:** In March 2023, the programme launched a Sustainable Procurement Report and Toolkit to help local authority officers embed sustainable and low carbon requirements into their tender exercises (see WLGA website - [Resources – Procurement - WLGA](#)). A training session was attended by 80 officers from across the councils and national parks.
- **Good practice sharing:** five Climate Change Leadership Seminars were held for 199 council officers and elected members to share views on topics such as service leadership on climate change, whole organisation leadership and territorial leadership. A 'Teams' Channel has been established for attendees to revisit the training materials and recordings. Seven masterclasses were organised to highlight best practice, share knowledge and experiences and provide a valuable forum for discussion. In these, 13 different LAs have presented case studies and there has been a total of over 400 attendees.
- **Networking and communications:** The Team convenes the All-Wales Local Government Climate Change Officers Group, facilitating expert feedback on the challenges and opportunities facing local authority officers on the journey to net zero by 2030. A Stakeholder Engagement Officer has been appointed, with updates/information regularly circulated to networks via email, meetings, a quarterly Climate Strategy Panel newsletter and an expanding, freely available online TaRSP Resource Bank. A Communication & Engagement Strategy, which includes detailed network mapping, has been developed to correlate and focus the TaRSP work on this.

Resilience and Safety programme

The WLGA is supporting councils' work towards managing the increasing risks of impacts of flooding and coastal erosion through the Resilience & Safety programme which has been funded by Welsh Government for the last 10 years (£120,000 in 2022/23). The programme is pivotal in supporting service improvement and upskilling the workforce as well as driving integration of local policies and services to better manage flood and coastal risks. This work is being developed in close association with the Transition & Recovery Support Programme, focussing on adaptation to overcome increasing risks, sea level rise and a lack of funding to protect all communities in Wales.

During 2022/23 key achievements were as follows:

- **Lobbying for funding:** Continued to work with Welsh Government calling for adequate funding allocations to support the delivery of statutory functions and duties. This work has been successful and led to an 110% increase in revenue funding and a positive forecast for 2023-24. This increase has led to better

resourcing within councils and much needed investment in maintenance and upgrading of flood assets.

- **Strategy support:** Steered the updating of Local Flood Risk Management Strategies with the 22 councils by developing and providing a standard template and delivering a series of training sessions to share good practice.
- **Coal tip safety:** Working closely with councils and Welsh Government throughout the development of the Coal Tip Safety White Paper and related new policy and legislation which includes a Protocol between WG, WLGA, NRW and the Coal Authority aimed at streamlining responses in cases of emergency.

Transport interventions

Welsh Government is funding work in WLGA (£80,000 in 2022/23) to support councils in relation to the introduction of the 20mph default speed limit, input to proposals on pavement parking obstructions, road safety strategy and piloting work on the adoption of unadopted roads.

During 2022/23 key achievements were as follows:

- **20mph:** Supported councils in their preparation for legislation coming into force in September 2023 changing the default speed limit on restricted roads from 30mph to 20mph. Helped shape and publish Guidance on Exceptions (roads to remain at 30mph), ensuring a consistent approach across Wales and drafting Technical and Procedural Guidance to assist with the road sign changes. Continued political engagement with briefing sessions and information packs for Leaders and local Members, also supporting Local Authorities with communication and marketing material.
- **Road safety:** Procured road safety specialists in early 2023 to assist in the drafting of a new road safety strategy. Initial preparatory work has been undertaken to better understand the current policy context and make sure the new strategy will complement existing legislation and policies. Initial engagement work through interviews and workshops has taken place in spring 2023 and a public consultation will be launched in summer 2023, with the aim of publishing a new strategy in early 2024.
- **Unadopted roads:** a successful Pilot Improvement Programme was delivered in 2021-23 involving seven projects across Wales. A lessons learned report was submitted to the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, highlighting good practice. That has been used to lobby (successfully) for further funding in 2023/24. Also in 2022/23, a suite of documents setting out Common Standards for Local Highway Authorities and House Builders was updated, following work to improve alignment with Active Travel legislation and guidance.

The Waste Improvement Team

The development of the Circular Economy is vital to the future of a sustainable Wales. It contributes significantly to wider efforts on climate change, decarbonisation and adaptation. To support this, the team (funded by Welsh Government - £338,000 in 2022/23) has continued to collect analyse and disseminate key data and information to support local

decision makers. Working closely with Welsh Government and councils enables local government's priorities to be reflected in policy development, grant programmes and Welsh/UK policy.

During 2022/23 key achievements were as follows:

- **Data analysis:** Delivered detailed finance and benchmark reports to all 22 councils helping drive service change/improvement to meet national recycling targets and local priorities.
- **Informing policy development:** Participated in Welsh/UK government led groups developing Extended Producer Responsibility and Deposit Return Scheme approaches ensuring that Welsh local government views/issues are reflected in the final approach and that Welsh councils maximise the financial benefit.
- **Cabinet member engagement:** Supported regional and national Circular economy political networks allowing cabinet leads direct access to the Minister for Climate Change and influencing the design of regional infrastructure, grant programmes and future policy direction. National level meetings bring the regions together and involve the Minister and WLGA Leader/Spokesperson on Climate Change.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING TEAM

Joint Inspection Team

The Joint Inspection Team (JIT) has been established as a commitment from Welsh Government to help and support those charged with enforcing powers, ensuring residential buildings above 11 meters are safe from fire risk and meet building regulations, with the aim of improving building safety following the tragic fire in Grenfell. This work will be delivered through detailed inspections undertaken by specialists in the field of building safety and compliance within the JIT. Achievements made in progressing this work include:

- **Set up:** The Head of JIT was appointed in August 2022 and WLGA have agreed Articles of Association for a company limited by guarantee to be established to host the JIT. Detailed job description and person specifications have been developed for the posts within the team and a full recruitment drive is due to commence.
- **Funding:** Calculating the operating costs for the service covering the years the JIT is to be operational, 2023/24, and 2024/25, have been submitted and now been formally approved by the Welsh Government.
- **Partnership approach:** A Steering Group involving councils, Fire and Rescue colleagues and Welsh Government is arranged and supported to ensure a partnership approach is taken in identifying and prioritising actions for the JIT and a range of KPIs have been identified and agreed in principle with the steering group.

The National Autism Team (recently renamed as the National Neurodivergent Team)

The National Autism Team is funded by Welsh Government and is hosted by the WLGA. The team was established to assist the Welsh Government in implementing improvement to Autism services across Wales and the foundation to all the work is 'to help improve the lives of autism people and their families in Wales.' More recently the remit of the team has

expanded to also cover other neurodivergent conditions. 2022-23 was a very busy year for the team with many notable achievements:

- **Training and development:** The development of a rolling programme of information and advice sessions for local authorities and health boards to assist them in meeting their new statutory duties under the Code of Practice for Autism Services in Wales has been developed and effective links have been established between the team and workforce managers across Wales. The National Autism Training Framework was updated and shared with a wide range of agencies and to compliment this work a series of model roles and JDs were matched at each training level to assist in organisations mapping training needs to staff roles. A series of co-produced CPD accredited E-learning modules have also been developed and uploaded on ESR (the NHS learning platform) and most LA's learning platforms. The implementation has proved to be extremely successful, and this has led to the training being uploaded on other training platforms including the police and leisure services. A primary health training package was also developed and delivered to several GP clusters. The Team has also trained PIP (Personal Independence Payments) assessors and Capita staff on how to adapt their practice and how to better identify and assess need with regard to ND (Neuro Divergence).
- **Advice and Support:** The NAT continue to further develop and refine their online offer. The website 'AutismWales' is regarded as a reliable and effective information source for professionals, individuals, and families. The website continued to develop in 2022-23 with additions such as an interactive case study compendium and the development of a Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service toolkit. The team also worked with Welsh Government colleagues to commission a specific ND listening line from the CALL (Community Advice and Listening Line) helpline service and trained CALL staff on ND and how to adapt their practice and communication style to better meet the need. The virtual communities of practice were rolled out successfully with such items as gender dysphoria, autism, and family dynamics, fabricated and induced illness and assessment, autism and eating, the joint Royal College of Psychiatry session on Missed and Misdiagnosis in females. These were all recorded and are available as resources on the Autism Wales website. Membership had increased to over 250 at the end of March 2023. The team continued to oversee the further development and implementation of the IASs (Integrated Autism Services) across Wales.
- **Involvement and engagement:** Coproduction underpins the work of the team, and several advisory groups of autistic people were established in 2022-23 to inform the work of the team. The NAT also continue to facilitate a number of national forums and networks including the Autism Lead's forum, the Practice Exchange and the ND Mental Health working group.

National Commissioning Board

The Welsh Government grant funded [**National Commissioning Board**](#) (NCB) is a collaboration of representatives across Local Authorities, NHS, National Provider Forum, Third Sector (WCVA), Citizens Wales, Social Care Wales, CIW, WLGA and Welsh Government. The Board has links with a range of local, regional and national programmes and its own annual [work programme](#), focussed on improving the quality of commissioning practice in Wales and developing effective integrated commissioning between local authorities and local health boards. Recent key achievements of the Board, include:

- **Piloting a new qualification** (which will be evaluated by Social Care Wales for potential inclusion within the national management training framework for Wales). 25 learners from across Health Boards and Local Authorities are being supported to achieve a level 5 certificate in the [Principles of Commissioning for Wellbeing](#). The Board is working with Directors of Planning within the NHS and Welsh Government to explore opportunities for joint training for NHS planners and commissioners alongside social care practitioners. 3 places within the 2-year NHS postgraduate planning diploma have been offered to social care planners.
- **Drafting consistent national principles and standards for commissioning**, for Local Authorities and Health organisations in Wales, that have been included in the [consultation draft National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support](#). The final standards will form part of a statutory Code of Practice and are intended to
 -) support the rebalancing of care and support; b) set national benchmarks to stimulate the continuous improvement of commissioning and delivery of care and support in Wales; c) catalyse the transformation of commissioning and delivery of care and support in Wales, working closely with the National Office to affect positive changes; d) improve consistency of commissioning practices; e) promote local and hyper-local integration, joint commissioning and shared decision-making; f) tackle inequalities and promote human rights
- **Developing a range of guidance, tools, templates and networks** to support the commissioning, planning, contracting and procurement practice community. These include guidance and tools for calculating fair price for quality, sustainable care services, based on Fair Work principles. These can be found in the NCB [webpages](#).

Wales Safer Communities Network

Established in January 2021, the Wales Safer Communities Network is hosted by the WLGA, with funding in 2022/23 from Welsh Government, Policing in Wales and WLGA. The role of the Network is to support and facilitate improvements to community safety work across Wales. A key priority for the year ahead is to deliver on the Network's plans to increase membership and develop a sustainable funding model. The Network also provides secretariat support to the Safer Communities Board for Wales, which the relevant WLGA Spokesperson Chairs, alongside a Police and Crime Commissioner on behalf of Policing in Wales.

Notable achievements during the year include:

- **Training and events:** An official launch of the Network took place in the Senedd sponsored by Sarah Murphy MS on 27 October 2022. The Launch was attended by 90 colleagues, with a further 15 joining online via Zoom, and Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice, was the keynote speaker. The Network has organised and hosted 12 virtual [workshops and seminars](#), which were attended by 710 colleagues (average attendance approx. 60 per event), addressing issues such as: New Communities: A trauma informed approach to welcoming refugees and asylum seekers; Child Devolution Pilot; the Serious Violence Duty; and Home Safety. In addition, the Network published Series 2 of the bilingual podcast series, [Safer Communities Podcast](#), in November – December 2022, which focused on the safety of women and girls in Wales.

- **Influencing policy:** Consultation responses were provided to seven consultations from Welsh Government, the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Network continues to represent partners views at a range of policy, guidance and legislative meetings with the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government as well as with regional and local partnerships across Wales.
- **Supporting Community Safety Partnerships and officers:** The network provides support to Community Safety Officers through regular updates on community safety related issues and provides additional support to the Wales Association of Community Safety Officers, Wales Data Analysis Innovation and Improvement Network and the All Wales Anti-Social Behaviour Network. A Training Needs Analysis has been undertaken of the development needs of community safety officers and the Network will be commissioning training and other support to enhance and develop skills in working towards a Safer Wales.

Wales Strategic Migration Partnership

The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership ([WSMP](#)) is hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association to reflect the Partnerships' all Wales role around migration and to help foster closer working with public services and the 22 councils in Wales, linking with local government's political structures and local priorities.

Established in 2001, WSMP is funded by the Home Office and Department for Levelling Up and Communities and works with partner In the statutory, voluntary, private and community sectors to provide strategic leadership, advisory and coordination function on migration in Wales.

- **Team Wales Approach to Operation Pitting:** Operation Pitting saw 25,000 people evacuated from Afghanistan in Autumn 2021. Thousands of people were placed in bridging hotels across the UK due to the lack of accommodation available. A 'Team Wales' approach was developed with WSMP coordinating a dynamic cross public service response with a range of partners, including the MoD, which resulted in 40 families with a Welsh connection being brought to Welsh bridging hotels for resettlement across Wales. WSMP has supported councils and partners in their ongoing work with families in Wales, supporting and coordinating move on to accommodation across Wales and other nations in the UK. Currently, the team continue to provide support and coordinate the exercise to move families out of bridging sites by the end of August 2023, following the Prime Minister's announcement on ending the use of bridging sites.
- **Coordination and support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children arriving in Wales under the National Transfer Scheme:** The WSMP has supported a pan-Wales approach to the implementation of the National Transfer Scheme of unaccompanied children to local authorities across Wales and continues to facilitate discussions with Heads of Children's Services, gathering evidence on the key issues for children within this process. Information reflecting these experiences has been submitted to the Home Office and Welsh Government on how the NTS is operating in Wales. The WSMP is also advocating for better collation of data across the UK on

children placed out of county and country and those who have gone missing, and raising concerns, on behalf of Children's Services about the extent to which the NTS operates in the Best Interests of vulnerable children. More recently an Options Paper has been commissioned to explore the feasibility of developing a Reception Centre for Unaccompanied Children and work with key partners and stakeholders will now commence in further discussions in taking this work forward.

- **Meeting the mental health needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants:** The WSMP has instigated work with a range of partners to identify and address mental health issues in the refugee, asylum seeker and migrant population. With [Traumatic Stress Wales](#), the team co-chair a Mental Health Task & Finish Group to develop a proposal for an effective cross-sector and inter-disciplinary approach which seeks to address the unmet mental health needs of this population. The proposal aims to result in a whole system approach that is integrated into current structures and initiatives, facilitates access to existing services and helps services to operate in a fully trauma-informed manner, including a Training and Capacity-building function to provide a rolling programme that focuses on the particular needs of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Migrants, as well as the development of webpages that describe the system, facilitate navigation, and provide easy access to a range of resources in multiple languages. Welsh Government have committed to funding this part of the proposal (May 2023) and the task and finish group will continue the work to articulate and develop the wider systems changes identified as part of the proposal.