

WLGA MANIFESTO

Purpose

1. To agree the WLGA Manifesto for the 2021 Senedd elections.

Background

2. The WLGA has produced manifestos ahead of previous Assembly elections. 'Localism 2016-21: A plan for public services in Wales' was published in November 2015 and outlined 40 specific priorities across 6 broad themes¹.
3. COVID 19 has meant the WLGA has redirected much of its capacity since the Spring and focusing resources on supporting authorities' and public services' response to the COVID 19 pandemic.
4. Although this re-prioritisation of resources has meant planned work on the development of a WLGA manifesto was delayed, much of the work to shape party manifesto priorities occurs through earlier, informal engagement with key political stakeholders.
5. The WLGA has therefore continued to influence policy development through its ongoing policy and representative work through and with the Welsh Government and the Senedd.
6. The WLGA Chief Executive and senior leaders have engaged in future policy discussions with several Members of the Senedd and leaders and senior members have also been engaged in manifesto discussions within their parties.

Senedd Elections and Engagement

7. The WLGA Manifesto document seeks to inform and influence understanding of the WLGA's core principles of localism and subsidiarity and the role of local government, as well as championing specific policy proposals. It will also form a key part of early dialogue and engagement with candidates, the incoming Welsh Government and newly elected Members of the Senedd.
8. An 'Elections Engagement Strategy' is being developed which will include:

¹ <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&fileid=402&mid=665>

- WLGA Briefings for Candidates on core issues during the Spring 2021 (highlighting local government priorities, promoting good practice and councils' profile and role, and informing candidates how core aspects of council funding and services work: e.g. education, housing, social care, finance etc.)
- Early communications with new/returning Members of the Senedd, including bilateral meetings and briefings between:
 - Welsh Ministers and WLGA Spokespersons
 - Senedd Group Leaders and Spokespersons & WLGA Group Leaders
 - Committee Chairs and WLGA Spokespersons & WLGA officials

9. The Manifesto will therefore be a key element of an engagement strategy to develop constructive relations with new and returning Members of the Senedd, to promote local government's reputation and role and encourage a good understanding of local government from May 2021.

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10. The WLGA produced a Policy Briefing note for members attending party conferences earlier in the Spring (although all conferences other than the Welsh Conservative Party Conference were postponed). This briefing note was based on the WLGA's core aims, principles and priorities outlined in the WLGA's corporate strategy and business plan.

11. The WLGA's core principles and priorities, outlined in the Policy Briefing, have shaped the development of the WLGA Manifesto. The Manifesto inevitably reflects the experiences, innovation and learning of COVID 19 and has incorporated members' proposals from Recovery Roundtable discussions and the WLGA's 'Shovel Ready' Economic Stimulus proposal.

12. The WLGA Manifesto has been further developed through discussions with WLGA Group Leaders and the 22 Leaders and views have been sought subsequently from Leaders and Spokespersons.

Recommendation

13. WLGA Council endorses the WLGA Manifesto for 2021.

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Senedd 2021-26

A localist framework for recovery:

Why the Welsh Government and the Senedd should empower councils to reinvigorate and rebuild public services, communities and the economy post COVID-19

COVID-19 has redefined how we all think about where and how we live. The impact of the crisis has been felt in all parts of Wales, and councils have been at the sharp end of urgently helping to respond locally to the needs of communities.

Although the country, our communities and public services are still responding to the pandemic and preparing for potential future local or national outbreaks, planning has begun for a post-COVID 19 future to rebuild and renew our communities and economy, building on the strengths evidenced during this crisis.

Wales needs bold national leadership and vision. Ensuring a recovery is sustainable and reaches all communities will be the focus of party manifestos ahead of the 2021 Senedd elections.

The pandemic has seen councils provide bold local leadership and vision:

- Councils have worked with the NHS and local partners, leading and coordinating the local response and have contributed to the national response to pandemic;
- Councils have shown what is possible when leadership is rooted in local communities. When rapid action was needed, councils delivered it for their communities;
- Councils have created new services, worked with partners and protected the most vulnerable in their communities; and
- The Welsh Government, the NHS and local and national partners have relied on councils, turning to them when challenges have been faced and urgent solutions have been required.

The pandemic has demonstrated that with freedom and flexibility and a relationship based on trust and mutual respect, councils can innovate and can deliver under the most challenging of circumstances.

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

Councils have shown that they are uniquely placed at the heart of their communities and public service delivery and are the first port of call for the most vulnerable or those in need of support or assurance.

Councils have played a critical enabling role for the wider easing of lock-down of the economy and society and supporting and enabling other public services.

Councils are playing a key role in the recovery, but can do more if given the freedom and resources to deliver. Given the immediacy of the severe economic challenges facing Wales and its communities, councils have called for an ambitious programme of investment in several programmes which could help rebuild Wales' communities and economy. These co-ordinated programmes would:

- help meet a range of existing economic, social and environmental policy priorities;
- create rapid demand for local contractors and their workforces, generating income and jobs in local economies;
- help Wales in working towards statutory decarbonisation targets; and
- increase resilience, making communities across the country, rural and urban, less susceptible to external shocks in future.

Councils are key to delivering any future Welsh Government ambitions and outcomes

Wales' councils are the foundations of our communities. They provide vital everyday local services, from schools, to housing, to social care, to local transport. They provide a local democratic voice to Wales' diverse communities.

In doing so, councils and their services:

- protect and support the most vulnerable in our communities
- tackle inequalities within and across Wales' communities
- are the economic bedrock of Wales:
 - employing over 10% of the Welsh workforce and educating our future workforce
 - spending £3.5bn on goods and services in national and local economies
 - promoting ambitious economic growth and regional regeneration across Wales.

Local services create opportunities for every citizen which help sustain and strengthen our communities.

Councillors share an equal democratic mandate with Members of the Senedd

Councillors, Members of the Senedd and MPs serve the same communities and the same constituents, a vote for a councillor is equal to a vote for an Member of the Senedd or a Member of Parliament, all have democratic legitimacy, and each play vital but different representative roles.

It is important therefore that there is equal recognition and mutual respect between senior councillors and Members of the Senedd for their respective contribution, roles and responsibilities.

Councillors are trusted and the most visible of all elected representatives. Councillors and local leaders know their local communities, they know the challenges faced and how to best address them through local service delivery and prioritisation.

Councils are committed to reform, continuous improvement and partnership:

- councils lead and support collaborative local public service reform;
- councils are involved in several hundred collaborations or shared services across Wales;
- Councils do not support mandated regionalisation or reorganisation;
- Collaboration is a means to an end not an end in itself – collaborative ventures need to be underpinned by a clear business case, shared priorities and deliver positive outcomes.

The WLGA believes a localist framework, based on principles of partnership, mutual respect and subsidiarity with councils empowered and trusted, fairly funded and free to respond locally, will lead to better outcomes for our diverse communities' and the delivery of the Senedd's ambitions for Wales.

- **Councils seek a commitment from the Welsh Government and the Senedd to the principle of local democracy and subsidiarity**
 - a future Welsh Government and 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;
 - A commitment to provide councils with maximum local freedom and flexibility and minimal direction or prescription.
 - A commitment to strengthen local accountability and local democratic oversight in local, regional and national public bodies,

- A recognition that the Welsh Government has a clear national strategic role and set national outcomes, but councils are best placed to determine what services are prioritised locally and how they are best delivered;
- A recommitment to the Collaboration Principles², whereby collaboration is locally-led to improve outcomes and is a means to an end not an end in itself
- **Councils seek fair and flexible funding** – councils need greater fiscal autonomy and flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities.
 - Councils need powers to explore other sources of income from fees and charges;
 - Discretionary powers to raise new taxes to tackle specific local issues;
 - A new Welsh Government should:
 - Commit to ending all specific grants within 12 months and channelling all monies released direct to Councils via the Revenue Support Grant – councils need maximum discretion over funding to meet local needs and priorities work with local government to satisfy itself that funding is sustainable, and its distribution is equitable and fit for purpose
 - must fully cost and fund all new national initiatives, legislation and pay pressures;
 - commit to multiyear financial settlements, so councils can plan more effectively.
 - have a renewed focus on welfare rights and work with local government on a fully integrated benefits system that is suited to the needs of Wales
- **To improve outcomes for children and young people and learners – councils need the Welsh Government to**
 - Ensure that learners are at the heart of all decisions taken within the education system, in reviewing arrangements and making COVID-19 contingency planning for exams in 2021 and beyond.
 - provide additional and continued support for capital investment in school buildings and facilities;
 - provide support to councils in securing full flexibility and local determination for their own and schools' budgets;
 - work with authorities and unions in determining and fully funding teacher's pay and conditions in Wales;
 - Ensure that any future ALN duties are fully funded;
 - continue to support a Wales-wide public sector apprenticeship programme, providing opportunities for young people to develop new

² <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=2406>

skills, a route into good jobs and ensuring councils and the wider-public sector can sustainably address emerging capacity or skills gaps

- **To deliver good quality and sustainable social care services for the future – the Welsh Government should**

- provide long-term sustainable funding for social care services; investment in social and primary care facilities is badly needed in order to enable a new generation of integrated Community Health and Care Centres to be developed, helping to move the balance away from acute towards preventative and community services and respond to the position of many private providers in the sector, bringing homes back into the public realm.
- Support implementation of *A Healthier Wales* and *Building a Healthier Wales* and the transformation and integration required across social care and health, including other relevant local government services such as housing;
- Work with Public Health Wales to address the wider determinants of health and continue to highlight the importance of preventative services;
- Support councils in responding to current 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 councils.

- **To create good quality homes and safer communities for people to live and work – the Welsh Government should:**

- 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
- Support delivery of increased plans for building council houses across Wales; A cross Government approach to new-build, improvement and retro-fit housing projects can provide simultaneous action on: meeting housing need and tackling homelessness; energy efficiency, fuel poverty and climate change; inclusive local economic growth; and improving health, well-being and general social cohesion
- Support work focused on the decarbonisation of existing homes, including identifying resource implications;
- Continue to contribute to on-going work to improve building safety following the findings of the Hackitt Review; Work closely with local authorities and policing in Wales to support and enhance the coherence and planning of community safety work at local and regional levels and in addressing national strategies and priorities through their local arrangements

- **In supporting sustainable, inclusive growth and a green post-COVID recovery:**

- The Welsh Government should fund local government borrowing commitments prioritising the local, 'shovel-ready' and sustainable capital investments outlined in the WLGA's COVID-19 Recovery Economic Stimulus Package.
- Regional development plans must be taken forward collaboratively, with Welsh Government and councils as equal partners, sharing capacity to achieve joint aims;
- Wales must receive its fair share of UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help implement the plans and provide local economic resilience (including the foundational economy) following the EU transition period;
- Needs of rural areas must be fully considered with a 'rural recovery plan' to complement regional recovery plans linked to City and Growth Deal work;
- To contribute fully to the circular economy councils must be able to influence proposals for Extended Producer Responsibility to ensure services are fully funded and Deposit Return Schemes, supported by behaviour change campaigns;
- Longer term funding commitments are needed for highways, public and active transport as part of a clear national, strategic approach; Achieving modal switch in transport requires public sector investment in services and facilities. Development of more, safe, active travel routes that reflect community 'desire lines' will be fundamentally important in encouraging more walking and cycling (with all the attendant health benefits)
- Continued financial and technical support is needed to enable actions necessary for climate, flood and ecosystems resilience and decarbonisation efforts;
- local planning authorities need local powers and discretion around development plans and fees to create sustainable places that reflect needs of their communities.