

# WLGA Executive Board

Draft Minutes 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024



via Teams

## Present:

WLGA Presiding Officer, Cllr Huw David OBE (Bridgend)

Cllr Stephen Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)  
Cllr Sean Morgan (Caerphilly)  
Cllr Huw Thomas (Cardiff)  
Cllr Darren Price (Carmarthenshire)  
Cllr Bryan Davies (Ceredigion)  
Cllr Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy)  
Cllr Jason McLellan (Denbighshire)  
Cllr Ian Roberts (Flintshire)  
Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn (Gwynedd)  
Cllr Llinos Medi (Isle of Anglesey)  
Cllr Geraint Thomas (Merthyr Tydfil)  
Cllr Mary Anne Brocklesby (Monmouthshire)  
Cllr Steve Hunt (Neath Port Talbot)  
Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)  
Cllr David Simpson (Pembrokeshire)  
Cllr Andrew Morgan OBE (Rhondda Cynon Taf)  
Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)  
Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen)  
Cllr Lis Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)  
Cllr Mark Pritchard (Wrexham)

## Apologies

Cllr James Gibson-Watt (Powys) – Cllr Jackie Charlton  
Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen)

**WLGA Officers:** Chris Llewelyn, Naomi Alleyne, Jon Rae, Tim Peppin, Paula Walters, Lisa Hayward, Karen Higgins, Sharon Davies, Dilwyn Jones and Lee Pitt

## Tata Steel announcement

The meeting was dominated by the announcement that morning from steel Tata Steel is to close all of its blast furnaces in the UK and replace them with electric arc furnaces which means a potential loss of 2,800 jobs in Port Talbot and across the wider South Wales area.

Members all acknowledged the devastating impact the job losses would have, particularly on the workers, their families, and the community as a whole and noted the effects could not be overestimated.

Members were also clear that the announcement means the steel industry in the UK will be severely diminished as electric arc furnaces make steel from recycling scrap steel, rather than making so-called virgin steel from iron ore, coke and other inputs and this cannot be allowed to happen.

Cllr Steve Hunt, Leader of Neath Port Talbot, reported that the full details of the transition plan had not been shared with him yet but a formal redundancy consultation process would begin.

### **ACTIONS:**

1. WLGA to issue a [press release](#) making clear Leaders' views expressed during the meeting.
2. WLGA to write to the Prime Minister to share the views expressed by Leaders and urge the UK Gov to work with Tata, the Welsh Government and councils towards an alternative with a less devastating outcome.
3. Letter to be sent to the Welsh Government Economy Minister from the WLGA Group Leaders sharing Leaders views and urging him to continue to explore all possibilities with the UK Government and Tata.

### **Item 1. Welcome and apologies for absence.**

1. Apologies and substitutes were noted as above.

### **Item 2. Minutes of previous meeting**

2. **Resolved:**

- 2.1 **Members approved the minutes of 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2023**

### **Item 3. WLGA Leader & Spokespersons Update**

3. The Leader mentioned the Welsh Government Draft Budget and provisional LGF Settlement and the need for further representations to be made in response. He noted the cuts to grants e.g. the social care workforce grants which would have knock on effect on hospital discharges. He was frustrated at the lack of information on the lifting of the cap on social care charging – a key ask from Leaders to help mitigate the dire financial situation faced by all councils.

#### **Item 4. Welsh Government Draft Budget and Provisional LGF Settlement 2024-25**

4. The accompanying paper summarised the latest financial announcements and the draft WLGA response (Annex II of the report) and set out the forthcoming key dates in the finance calendar.
5. Members expressed disappointment and frustration with the draft budget and LGF Settlement and urged a strong response from the WLGA to Welsh Gov. While recognising the 3.1% increase (equating to £170m) the picture across the piece is of real term cuts with approximately £800m shortfall in funding.
6. Members agreed the only option for councils is to make redundancies and cut services that individuals and communities rely on and/or make large increases to council tax. The lack of funding would mean taking money out of education and members felt strongly that the current situation where the Welsh Government determines teachers' pay/pensions and then leaves councils responsible for funding any increase, with no additional resources is unfair and problematic.
7. Members highlighted that even where grants had not been cut they had not kept pace with inflation and this point should be made clear to the public, schools and the Welsh Government.
8. Members discussed the funding formula and some felt it needs to be reviewed to ensure fairness while others argued the best solution is for an increase in the quantum amount. All agreed the importance of using up to date data.
9. Jon Rae advised the Welsh Government is working on the formula which they are not sharing at the moment. Jon to circulate the proposed Council Tax rises to Treasurers – the average increase appears to be around 7.5%.
10. **Resolved:**
  - 10.1 **Members noted the contents of the report; and**
  - 10.2 **Members considered the draft WLGA response to the Settlement (Annex II) and agreed a redraft (reflecting comments made at the meeting) should be circulated to Group Leaders for approval before being sent to the Welsh Government.**
  - 10.3 **Members agreed a letter should be sent to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (UK Gov) regarding Teachers' and Fire-fighters' Pension Fund Contributions in Wales**

#### **Item 5. A Fairer Council Tax: Phase 2 IFS Presentation and Draft WLGA Consultation Response**

11. David Phillips of the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), who has been working with the Welsh Government on the consultation proposals, joined the meeting and gave a presentation on the proposed options in the consultation.

12. The IFS was clear in its presentation and the following discussion, that those on low/middle incomes (and most affected by the cost-of living crisis) would benefit most from the changes and pointed out that if the intention is to support those most in need, the sooner the changes were implemented the better.

**ACTION: IFS presentation slides to be shared with Leaders**

13. The accompanying paper to this item included a draft response to the Welsh Government consultation in respect of a Fairer Council Tax which summarised the options and provided a general response for members to consider.

**14. Resolved:**

**14.1 Members agreed Group Leaders should approve the final WLGA response to the consultation.**

## **Item 6: Local Government Finance Bill – Written Evidence Submission**

15. Members were invited to review the proposed WLGA written evidence submission in response to the recently laid [Local Government Finance \(Wales\) Bill](#). The WLGA views on the proposals are stated after each objective in the accompanying report.

16. It was reported and evidence session with the committee is scheduled for Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

**17. Resolved:**

**17.1 Members considered the proposed submission and agreed it should be submitted on behalf of the WLGA to the Local Government and Housing Committee.**

## **Item 7: Bus Funding 2024-25 – Regional Allocations**

18. Members were asked to review and agreed the proposed financial allocation for each 'Bus Region' for 2024-25 detailed in Table 1 of the accompanying report.

19. The Leader explained it was important a decision was made ASAP to enable the Minister to write to councils so that the tendering process(es) can begin, and the allocated funding released.

20. The Leader reported he had been appointed as an observer on the Transport for Wales Board by the Welsh Government

**Resolved:**

**20.1 Members agreed the proposed Bus Funding Regional Allocations for 2024-25 subject to the caveat that if it is found during the tendering process that the funds currently allocated are not sufficient, the Welsh Government will be approached for additional funding to cover.**

## **Item 8: Post March 2025 Regional Development Funding: Councils' Views**

21. The purpose of this item was to seek Members' views on Post March 2025 Regional Development Funding for Wales following the end of the current UK Government's Levelling Up Funds – Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and the Levelling Up Fund (LUF).
22. Members were clear that it's the size and scale of funds that are needed respond to the demonstrable level of need which is the most important point to be made.

### **23. Resolved:**

- 23.1 Members noted the proposed key principles to inform the development of the post March 2025 regional development funding landscape.**
- 23.2 Members noted the proposed actions and next steps as outlined in the report; and**
- 23.3 Members noted there will be further opportunities to input into the lobbying and planning for the post March 2025 regional development funding landscape as the work progresses.**

## **Item 9: Department of Education Consultation on Minimum Service Levels in Education**

24. Members were asked to consider and agree a response, on behalf of the WLGA, to the UK Government's consultation on minimum service levels in education, brought forward under the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023.

### **25. Resolved:**

- 25.1 Members considered and agreed the WLGA's response to the UK Government's consultation on the Minimum Service Levels in Education, as part of the Strikes Act 2023.**

## **Item 10: WLGA Budget 2024-25**

26. The WLGA Executive Board was asked to approve the Draft WLGA Budget 2024-25, the assumptions underpinning it and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to 2028-29.

### **27. Resolved:**

- 27.1 WLGA Executive Board agreed the WLGA Budget which is subject to approval by the WLGA Council in March 2024.**

## **Item 11: Supply Teacher Platform Hosting**

28. Members were asked to consider the findings of a due diligence exercise undertaken in response to a request from the Welsh Government for the WLGA to establish a Public Sector Employing Entity and host the central functions required to support a new Supply Teacher Booking Platform.
29. Members were asked to agree a WLGA position and response to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language.
30. It was reported that the proposal had been discussed with Education Directors and HR professional groups.

### **31. Resolved:**

- 31.1 Members noted and commented on the content of the report and findings; and
- 31.2 Members agreed the WLGA should write to the Minister to decline the request to host the central functions of the supply teacher platform but commit to working with the Welsh Government to explore and find an alternative way forward.