

WLGA Executive Board

Minutes Friday 28th May 2021

11:00 to 13:15 via Teams



Present:

Chair: WLGA Deputy Presiding Officer, Cllr Jane Mudd (Newport)

Blaenau Gwent – Cllr Nigel Daniels
Cardiff – Cllr Susan Elsmore
Ceredigion – Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn
Conwy – Cllr Charlie McCoubrey
Denbighshire – Cllr Hugh Evans
Gwynedd – Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn
Isle of Anglesey – Cllr Llinos Medi
Merthyr Tydfil – Cllr Lisa Mytton
Monmouthshire – Cllr Richard John
Neath Port Talbot – Cllr Edward Latham
Newport – Cllr Jane Mudd
Powys – Cllr Rosemarie Harris
Rhondda Cynon Taf – Cllr Andrew Morgan
Torfaen – Cllr Anthony Hunt
Vale of Glamorgan – Cllr Neil Moore
Wrexham – Cllr Mark Pritchard

Other Members in attendance

Cllr Susan Elsmore (Swansea), LGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty

Apologies

Bridgend – Cllr Huw David
Caerphilly – Cllr Philippa Marsden
Cardiff – Cllr Huw Thomas
Carmarthenshire – Cllr Emlyn Dole
Flintshire – Cllr Ian Roberts
Pembrokeshire – Cllr David Simpson
Swansea – Cllr Rob Stewart

WLGA Officers in attendance:

Dr Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive
Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services & Housing
Jon Rae, Director of Resources
Tim Peppin, Director of Regeneration & Sustainable Development
Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy Improvement & Governance
Sharon Davies, Head of Education
Graham Jones, Associate HR Adviser
Jonathan Lloyd, Head of Employment
Lee Pitt, Democratic Services Officer
Emily Griffiths, Senior Support Officer

Item 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1. The Deputy Presiding Officer welcomed Leaders to the meeting and the apologies for absence were accepted and recorded as above.

Item 2. Minutes of WLGA Meetings

2. Members reviewed the draft minutes of the:

- 2.1 WLGA Council 27th March 2021
- 2.2 WLGA Audit Committee 15th April 2021
- 2.3 WLGA Management Sub-Committee 23rd April 2021

3. **Resolved that**

- 3.1 Members noted the draft minutes of the WLGA Council 27th March 2021**
- 3.2 Members noted the draft minutes of the WLGA Audit Committee 15th April 2021**
- 3.3 Members noted the draft minutes of the WLGA Audit Committee 15th April 2021**

Item 3. WLGA Leader and Spokespersons' Updates

- 4. The Leader emphasised the importance of building on the relationship that had been developed between local government and the Welsh Government during the pandemic going forward. He stressed it was important that authorities were aware of announcements from the Welsh Government before they are made to not be caught off guard and to be able to highlight any issues in advance.
- 5. Cllr Morgan also mentioned results of the Boundary Commission Reviews due to be published shortly and his concerns. This was also mentioned in the earlier meeting in the morning between Leaders' and the Minister for Finance and Local Government.
- 6. He also reported there had been a meeting with the new Economy Minister and WLGA Spokespersons had raised concerns in relation to the reopening of hospitality and the fact that in the Valleys there are many small pubs that do not qualify for Business Support as they have casual staff. He reported that there is some support for taxi drivers, to be delivered thorough authorities. There will be a further meeting with the Minister in a few weeks.
- 7. Cllr Morgan mentioned that some leaders had recently given evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee which was examining the *Delivery of levelling up agenda in Wales* and noted there were anomalies with what the WLGA was saying and what the Wales Office had said.
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- 8. In terms of close engagement there has not been much in relation to the Community Renewal Fund and the Levelling Up Fund with the Wales Office and

other UKGov departments. He mentioned concerns that authorities will not have CRF approvals until Autumn with funding to be spent this financial year. The Levelling Up funding has to be spent by March 2024 and some authorities are at risk of missing out completely due to the competitive nature of the funding. With no fixed allocation of funding to Wales, in a worst-case scenario no LAs in Wales might receive any funding in this competition, although UKGov has said at least 5% of the fund will come to Wales. There needs to be a triangular conversation between authorities the Welsh Government and UKGov. He noted the Committee appeared receptive to this suggestion. He added that because of timing and deadlines for submissions there is a concern that some of the bids put forward will be from other organisations and may not align with the priorities of authorities.

9. **Education Update** - Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn, Deputy Education spokesperson noted that all pupils who were due to sit exams has completed the assessment programme with results due in June. She also reported that teaching unions are not keen on moving to no face coverings in schools for pupils during lessons.
10. **Social Care** - Cllr Llinos Medi, Deputy Spokesperson Health and Social Care (Children) reported spokespersons had met with the Deputy Minister for Social Services. The Deputy Minister is keen to progress work on the real living wage and there was discussion on how local government could support this shared ambition with the offer of supporting any pilot work that might be considered. It was outlined that there will £40m will be invested into supporting the integrated care of older people with complex needs . There will be an announcement of £3m to support short-break respite schemes to help carers and the Deputy Minister was keen to encourage local authorities to consider how they can re-open day services and respite services where they have not been already, and to set out plans for re-opening, particularly as restrictions are eased . The pressures on the residential care sector were raised along with children looked after. While referrals have increased members stressed the full pressures are still unknown.

Item 4. Senedd Elections Update (Oral)

11. The Chief Executive reported that welcome letters have been sent to all Senedd members, with positive responses and many keen to work with local government. He reported that there had been contact between all Spokespersons and new Ministers and meetings would be arranged shortly. He noted that relationships with SPADs were close and they have been advised to build on the experience of the pandemic and the close working relationships between Ministers and WLGA that have been developed.
12. Chris stressed the importance of keeping up the momentum and impetus to 'get things done' and noted that the First Minister will be standing down before the next Senedd election. Once Senedd Committee Chairs are announced

introductory meetings will be arranged. Similarly, when the Programme for Government is published it will be useful in targeting discussions.

13. He noted that number of new Senedd members were former leaders with a good understanding of local government and the importance of building on those relationships in a meaningful way. It was noted that Peter Fox MS was the Shadow Finance Minister and Sam Rowlands MS Shadow Local Government Minister.
14. Chris also reported he recently had met with Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd, to discuss developing more effective relations between local government and the Senedd as an institution
15. Chris noted that following the recent meeting of the UK Forum, it was clear that engagement between the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales is closer than anywhere else in the UK. He noted too that the relationship between the UKGov and local authorities in Wales was also closer than in England, Chris also mentioned the forthcoming meetings with Leaders and Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Simon Hart, Secretary of State for Wales.

Item 5. Local Government Finance Formula (presentation)

16. The presentation was given by the Director of Resources and Chris Barton an Independent Member of the Distribution Sub Group.
17. Jon explained the presentation is the first in a two-step process to inform and engage Leaders in relation to the Local Government Finance Formula.
18. Some members feel there is a widening gap between the worst and best funded authorities and that rural areas are affected worse as there is limited scope for efficiency savings or economies of scale. The absence of a floor in the Settlement was also highlighted as a concern.

19. ACTIONS:

- **Presentation to be circulated to Leaders.**
- **Arrange a meeting of WLGA members of the Finance Sub-Group**
- **Paper reflecting discussions at this meeting to be brought to the next Executive Board.**

Item 6. Expenditure Pressures and Budgets 2022-23

20. Cllr Hunt, Finance and Resources Spokesperson, introduced the paper and explained it prepares the ground for further work to feed into finance discussions going into the next budget round. He noted the paper summarises the early assessment of local government spending pressures recently published by Wales Fiscal Analysis and the next steps needed to fully understand expenditure pressures to 2024-25 and align these with authorities' own medium-term financial plans.
21. The meeting earlier in the morning with the Minister for Finance and Local Government was referenced where Leaders were clear with the Minister that multi-year settlements are vital for effective financial planning for authorities. He also noted the opportunity to work with new Senedd members who have a local government background.
22. The Director of Resources reported that work was moving at pace. He noted that the core pressures do not vary much year on year and the model will be refreshed over the summer. The work of the Wales Fiscal Analysis Team would also be useful in providing useful independent voice.
23. Members asked whether about the Hardship Fund and the Leader reported that the fund is in place to September with a current underspend but that conversations are ongoing with the Welsh Government. He added it is difficult to lobby to far into the future when claims are still to be made and processed. He also noted the fund has been topped up three times in 2020-21.

24. Resolved that

**24.1 Members noted the contents of the paper; and
Members agreed to commission two surveys from
Treasurers: one of COVID pressures for the latter half of
21-22 and another on medium-term pressures up to 24-
25.**

Item 7. Welsh Government Race Equality Action Plan

25. Cllr Susan Elsmore, WLGA Spokesperson for Equalities, Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty introduced the paper summarising the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan and asked members for views to help inform the WLGA's draft consultation response.
26. Cllr Elsmore reported that the plan is challenging with the central aim of a non-racist Wales by 2020. She noted there is a lot that can be supported in the plan and that local authorities had already taken a number of initiatives in support of this aim.

27. Cllr Elsmore highlighted the issue of accountability and reported that the Welsh Government has suggested that civil servants, combined with stakeholders, be responsible for accountability but noted that local authorities, as statutory bodies, already have their own scrutiny arrangements.

28. Resolved that

- 28.1 Members considered the contents of the report;**
- 28.2 Members provided views on the draft Race Equality Action Plan's aims, goals and actions to inform the WLGA's draft consultation response;**
- 28.3 Members noted that the draft WLGA consultation response will be considered by Equality Cabinet Members' Network on 14th June and agree that the response is approved on behalf of the WLGA by the Spokesperson for Equalities in consultation with WLGA Group Leaders; (*the consultation deadline has been extended to 15th July and the Equality Cabinet Members will consider the draft response on 8th July) and**
- 28.4 All local authorities are encouraged to respond to the Race Equality Action Plan consultation.**

Item 8. Natural Resources Wales discussion

29. The Leader introduced the paper which provides background information on Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and identifies some of the key areas of interface with local authorities and provides a basis for discussion amongst Leaders. He noted the findings from Audit Wales and suggested that, given local authorities experiences of the operation of NRW, a request be made to the Minister for Climate Change for a review of the function and remit of NRW. This would enable authorities to feedback their views as part of the review process.

30. Resolved that

- 30.1 Members agreed unanimously to write to Welsh Government requesting that the role, function and purpose of Natural Resources Wales be reviewed**

Item 9. Any Other Business

31. Cllr Susan Elsmore raised the relocation of Afghan Nationals to the UK policy and Home Office letter circulated to leaders. She mentioned that grant funding will only last for four months and encouraged authorities to respond the Home Office letter.

11:30 The Deputy Presiding officer closed the meeting.