

WLGA Annual Report

2023-2024

July 2024



Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh

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Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

Introduction

Another hectic year in local government has been and gone. A sincere thank you to all colleagues across local government - elected members and officers alike. They all work tirelessly to make a difference to communities, businesses, and residents' lives every single day.

The ongoing war in Ukraine, cost-of-living crisis, and successive UK government changes have all significantly affected Wales. Ever-growing financial challenges, along with the impact of high inflation and increased energy prices, are hitting councils hard at a time of increasing demand on services. Balancing budgets to meet statutory duties is becoming tougher to achieve, especially in the wake of over a decade of austerity.

Day in day out, residents, communities and businesses rely on their local councils. The WLGA continues to lobby for the best possible local government settlement, recognising the scale of demand and costs in local services.

The value of local government was perhaps most clearly shown during the pandemic. Welsh councils were integral to the response efforts. Through written submissions and verbal testimony, the WLGA continues to represent Welsh local government at the UK Covid Inquiry. Councils' efforts during this time must be fully recognised, and lessons will be learnt to help prepare for future crises.

Many of Welsh councils' concerns and priorities are shared across the UK. That is why the WLGA continues to work closely with our sister organisations in England (LGA), Scotland (COSLA), and Northern Ireland (NILGA), to amplify the collective voice of local government on issues such as climate change, fair funding, and the evolution of post EU arrangements. Further afield, local government in Wales is also represented at a European level; the WLGA works with counterparts across the continent to promote the interests of local government, devolution, and subsidiarity through the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

Despite the challenging economic context, a positive working relationship between local and Welsh Government was maintained this year. We used data and evidence to make the case for local services to Welsh Government and Senedd Members, which was supported by our valued partner organisations. This contributed to securing a core funding settlement which, although still challenging, was better than expected following significant re-alignment of the Welsh Government Budget during the year.

As the national employer organisation for local government in Wales, the WLGA sits on the newly established Social Partnership Council. It brings together employers, Trade Unions, and the Welsh Government to implement the Social Partnership Duty and Socially Responsible Procurement Duties. The WLGA has continued to represent councils as a part of national negotiations to resolve pay and workforce issues.

In this Annual Report, you will see the breadth of the work undertaken by the Association on behalf of local government – both at strategic and operational levels.

Following an independent review, the WLGA has been reviewing and modernising the way in which it operates. Minor structural changes have been made, including the introduction of two corporate directors, and we continue to support and promote the work of WLGA hosted grant funded teams. Based on engagement with councils, the Corporate Strategy 2024-27 has been agreed with resources being aligned to ensure its delivery. These changes will help ensure that the Association can continue to deliver for its elected leadership and make improvements for the future.

As we look ahead, we have welcomed early, positive engagement with the new First Minister and Cabinet. The WLGA has paid tribute to the previous incumbent, Mark Drakeford MS, for his significant contribution and role in strengthening local-central relations, through the WLGA, during his time in office.

The Association is also preparing for the outcome of the General Election. Welsh local government's key asks of a new UK Government will be laid out, with the need for increased funding for local government and public services at the forefront. Joint lobbying is planned with our sister bodies.

We hope that this report gives you a flavour of the work undertaken by the WLGA to represent, promote and defend the interests of local government. As its elected membership, the WLGA is **your** organisation; it is led by **you**, works for **you**, delivering for the benefit of **your** councils. Working together, we can help to influence and set the agenda on the issues that matter most to local government. Looking ahead to the challenges of the next year, we look forward to continuing to deliver for and support Welsh councils.

Cllr Andrew Morgan OBE

Leader

Dr Chris Llewelyn

Chief Executive

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Corporate Policy Team

The Corporate Policy Team supports the political leadership and senior officers of the Association in their efforts to represent the interests of Welsh local government. By working towards objectives in the Corporate Plan, the Corporate Policy Team fulfils several key functions for the Association, including providing democratic services to the WLGA.

The Team undertakes the Association's strategic communications and public affairs work, conveying the positions of our leadership and spokespeople on national issues, and ensuring that Welsh local government has a strong collective voice in the national, local and UK-wide media. Through policy development, research and insight, the Team also progresses the Association's cross-cutting policy work across a range of key partnerships.

Key achievements include:

- **Communications:** The WLGA's audience on social media has grown and has been used to communicate WLGA positions nationally. Coverage was achieved on a range of matters including social services pressures, bus services, the Welsh budget/local government settlement and funding gap, civility in public life, council tax, and Tata Steel with a number of national outlets reached including *BBC* (online and TV), *Nation.Cymru* and *WalesOnline*, as well as local newspaper websites across Wales and UK. The team also led the delivery of the 2023 WLGA Conference, the largest ever held by the Association as measured both by attendees and by sponsors, representing an event of national importance in the Welsh public sector calendar.
- **Policy:** Building on a plenary debate in our annual conference and research work undertaken by the Jo Cox foundation, the team worked with Welsh Government to deliver a stakeholder event that was convened and hosted by the Minister for Finance and Local Government, seeking to explore ways to tackle Abuse in Politics. The team will continue this work in 2024-25.
- **Senedd Finance Engagement Sessions:** Four regional Senedd Finance Engagement sessions were organised, working with the Finance & Resources Team to share our key lines on the local government funding settlement with Senedd Members. These sessions allowed our members and leaders to directly lobby Senedd Members and information shared was shared by several Members at the Finance Committee and in the Senedd debate on the settlement. The WLGA also supports the Cross-Party Group on North Wales, which acts as a forum for local authority engagement with Senedd Members in the region. This year the Group achieved joint lobbying positions on issues including rail improvements, marine resources, and economic development.
- **Supporting Transformation and Innovation practices in councils:** The team coordinated the Welsh Councils' Transformation & Innovation Network. During the year the Network's four priorities were launched, with further engagement which has

enabled the Network to gain a richer understanding of councils' needs on transformation and innovation.

- **Shared Learning Opportunities and Partnerships:** With a focus on developing and sharing good practice locally, the team represent the Association on the Resourceful Communities Partnership and at the Audit Wales Good Practice Exchange, providing and sharing case studies on the work of councils. The team worked in partnership with the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) on their work around community action and lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring that local government voices were included and contributed to the national framework produced for public and voluntary sector organisations.

Digital Team

Digital has significant potential to support solutions to several of the key challenges councils face, including increased demand, regulatory pressures and financial constraints. But the lack of cross-council understanding (or fear) of digital, workforce skills challenges and the levels of up-front investment often required to implement digital solutions continue to constrain the extent of the impact and change. There are however, a wide range of good practice examples across Wales and the Team will continue to encourage and support an improved focus on identifying good practice and scaling/sharing solutions to key service challenges.

The appointment of an interim Chief Digital Officer (CDO) and Head of Digital during the year, coupled with a team restructure, has increased the team's capacity to deliver on its ambition to address some of the challenges outlined above and to help councils bring together digital tools, technology, and skills to deliver services that meet their customer expectations. From January 2024, the CDO has also been able to focus on developing a more strategic approach to supporting digital in councils.

Key Achievements include:

- **Engagement:** During the winter of 2023, the CDO visited all 22 council chief executives to discuss and explore their digital priorities and canvas opinions on the development of a national vision for digital in local government. In parallel, the digital team held one to one engagement meetings with 17 councils to continue to identify their key priorities, and how the WLGA can support them.

The Chief Digital Officer and team continued to support and participate in a range of key national and UK groups across a breadth of areas including social care, education, AI, cyber, digital standards, and health to ensure the voice of local

government is adequately represented in digital forums. The Cabinet Members' Network has now been established and has met several times during the year, with key sessions on data, cyber and understanding digital.

- **Partnership Working and National Priorities:** The public sector CDOs and the Centre for Digital Public Services continue to work in close partnership to identify key national joint priorities in Wales and are currently jointly supporting several programmes of work including in planning, digital standards, streamlining Welsh benefits and AI. In social care, the CDOs for Local Government and Health & Social Care have committed to developing a joint action plan for digital in social care. To date this has included a range of workshops, presentations and meetings with key organisations, including Social Care Wales, Welsh Government and WLGA social care team, to identify priorities and activities. The WLGA has also been supporting councils with the Connecting Care programme, which includes the procurement of new social care case management systems across 18 councils. Support has been provided both on an operational basis, and in political and senior leadership engagement to raise the profile of the challenges associated with the programme, and ensure concerns are addressed.
- **Project Delivery:** Through a combination of core and grant funding (the team administers £1.3m of grant funding on behalf of Welsh Government), a broad range of projects have been supported and delivered. These include projects in service improvement, data, internet of things technology, schools' management information system, social care, cyber, a shared learning management platform for councils, and a very exciting translation and interpretation project with Amazon Web Services and Bangor University.

Education Team

Education in Wales continues 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 Welsh Government, 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.

There was extensive negotiation between the WLGA, Teacher Trade Unions and Welsh Government on the resolution of the teachers' pay dispute which resulted in a new enhanced pay offer for teachers and headteachers. In addition to the 5% pay rise, the new revised pay offer comprised of an additional 3%, of which 1.5% was consolidated and 1.5% was non-consolidated.

The roll-out of Universal Primary Free School Meals (a Cooperation Agreement Commitment) to all year groups in almost all councils across Wales, demonstrates again the importance of open, transparent discussions between the WLGA and Welsh Government. Ongoing discussions are key to overcome challenges, with the continuation of the roll out to all years in three councils, to ensure its continued success.

Positive dialogue continues between WLGA and Welsh Government regarding the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, with best practice highlighted, and challenges raised appropriately. Members are committed to this agenda and the WLGA continues to highlight 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.

Key achievements include:

- **Engagement:** Continuation of regular discussions raising concerns regarding the ALNET Act 2018 funding, resourcing and implementation issues with Welsh Government at political and officer level.
- **Grant Rationalisation:** Collaboration with Welsh Government on rationalising and simplifying the education grant landscape and providing more flexibility in the use of grants by schools and councils. This has included the changes to reporting and monitoring required in relation to specified grants.
- **Collaboration:** Ongoing discussions with Welsh Government on the challenges facing some councils regarding difficulty in recruiting and retaining Welsh medium workforce.
- **Partnership:** Ongoing discussions with Welsh Government regarding the middle tier review and the school improvement agenda, reinforcing the need for clarity for councils and schools. Extensive negotiation between the WLGA, Teacher Trade Unions and Welsh Government on the resolution of the teachers' pay dispute which resulted in a new enhanced pay offer for teachers and headteachers. In addition to the 5% pay rise, the new revised pay offer comprised of an additional 3%, of which 1.5% was consolidated and 1.5% was non-consolidated.
- **Delivery:** Roll-out of Universal Primary Free School Meals (Cooperation Agreement Commitment) to all year groups in 19 councils by April 2024, ahead of agreed milestones. Roll-out to all year groups in the remaining councils is on course to meet the milestone of September 2024. Over 15 million additional FSMs have been serviced across Wales since the roll-out began in September 2022.

Finance & Resources Team

The 2023-24 Budget was the first to be set after the invasion of Ukraine and was worked up in a period of soaring inflation already exacerbated by the heightened demand for local services, especially social care.

Key achievements include:

- **A Sustainable Funding System:** The final settlement uplift of 3.3% was increased from the provisional figure and some of the grant reductions were reversed by the time of the final announcement. There was agreement from WG to review the domiciliary care cap. Work continues on the administrative review following a statement by the Minister for Finance and Local Government made in May 2023.

Work to reform the funding formula has picked up, with the Distribution Sub-Group (DSG) receiving clearer direction to update those parts of the formula that are well past their sell-by date. This includes tackling the sparsity indicators and the Census-based deprivation indicators that are widely deployed in the education and the social care formulae.

- **Fairer Local Taxes:** The WLGA has worked with the Institute of Fiscal Studies to better understand the impact of reforms and responded to the Phase II consultation in January 2024. This work will continue until 2028 and we remain committed to supporting our members throughout this process by being included in all the necessary sub-groups associated with local taxes and new sources of income such as the tourist levy.
- **Better Value for Local Spending:** Joint working by the WLGA with all stakeholders continued on a programme for procurement improvement and reform in relation to £5.5bn of spend. This supported multiple policies including those of Net Zero Wales, The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, The Social Partnership & Public Procurement Act, The Procurement Act and the Healthcare Procurement Act. Other related policy such as the Environment (Wales) Act, which places a duty on public authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity was also supported.
- **A Fairer Wales:** The Benefits Charter was launched by the then Minister for Social Justice in February 2024, to create a more joined up system for people, minimising duplication and increasing financial entitlements. We have been involved at all stages of this process which stretches back to 2019 and are viewed as key stakeholders. The WLGA is sitting on both the External Steering Group which is involved with developing and overseeing the implementation of an action plan and the associated workstreams needed to turn the charter commitments into action.
- **Sound Financial Management of WLGA:** During the period we improved our approach to financial planning, moving to a five-year planning horizon. Alongside this,

more frequent outturn reports are now provided to the Strategic Management Team with the intention being to put this on a formal footing when the Treasury Management Policy is reviewed. The financial regulations were reviewed and a new approach to risk developed and endorsed by the WLGA Audit Committee. We continue to offer members value for money and subscriptions during the period were kept at previous levels despite obvious inflationary pressures.

Improvement Team

The objective for 2023-24 (as agreed in the business case 2019-20) was 'further developing and enabling support around public engagement, participation and data and digital capabilities to ensure all councils engage and involve their citizens, who have confidence in their performance'. The delivery plan was expanded to include current demand and improvement priorities, including recruitment and retention and financial sustainability. The following is a summary of key achievements across the workstreams.

Key achievements include:

- **Local Democracy and Member Development:** A new programme was launched to support Progressive Community Leadership. This filled a void for councillors looking for direction on how they fulfil their community role. Delegates from 22 councils participated in the training, which was received by 87 councillors, with excellent feedback on how the good practice has been implemented, as highlighted in the following quotes from delegates:

"I definitely have changed my leadership style. When I first was elected, I was more of a doer and going forward I now tend to look at how community groups/individuals could be more involved and have an active role in turn"

"This course has helped enormously in the way I view engagement with my community. It has also helped me 'convince' other councillors that this is the way forward. Definitely more of an enabler now!"

"I have allocated roles within the community such as litter picking coordinators and therefore relieving myself of these tasks. I have also managed to incorporate residents into our Neighbourhood Watch schemes covering most of my ward, along with traffic surveys"

- **Supporting Corporate Capacity & Development:** In response to the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, positive action training in recruitment was commissioned and delivered to 20 councils. Feedback highlighted that this has led to a full review of

recruitment policy and process in some councils, with greater emphasis on equality data collection and monitoring, to ensure the best talent is attracted and retained. In other councils it has provided assurance and highlighted areas to strengthen, including monitoring data.

- **Workforce planning:** support was commissioned and delivered to 19 councils to help address the recruitment and retention crisis. Feedback from councils was very positive and key takeaways highlighted the value of data and how it is presented; keeping the approach simple; focus on retention and planning for the skills needed for the future organisation. HR teams commented that they felt motivated and better equipped to progress this within their organisations.

Webinars were also delivered on the importance of the employer brand, which included some analysis of barriers to recruitment in local government in Wales. In response to the specific challenge within Planning, the team worked with colleagues in the WLGA and LGA on a pilot to access the Pathways to Planning graduate scheme operated by the LGA.

- **Corporate Governance & Performance:** Working with the sector on the challenges around public engagement and consultation, and commissioning the expertise of Data Cymru, the team have supported the development of a National Residents Survey, which will be launched in 2024-25, and will be taken up by at least 17 councils, with more expected to sign up. In response to concerns regarding financial resilience, a Financial Sustainability peer challenge and support offer was developed, with 7 councils taking up the offer of support. Feedback between councils has generated interest from others.

Continuing to establish the framework for delivering Panel Performance Assessments and other sector-led improvement support, through continued recruitment and training of peers and developing the culture of self and sector-led support.

Public Protection and Regulatory 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 important 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 hopefully 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.

Key achievements include:

- **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 Government's 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 also littering and environmental concerns with these products. 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; tackling businesses who profiteer and cut corners, endangering life and robbing people of personal savings; preventing 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 continuing 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 Covid 19 Inquiry

The WLGA continues to play an active role in the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, which is examining the Covid-19 response and the impact of the pandemic across the UK, identifying lessons to be learned and informing cross sector preparations for future pandemics. The WLGA is

working closely with the LGA to provide help and support to local authorities in preparation for the Inquiry, in responding to information requests issued to local authorities, and representing the experiences and 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):** Hearings for this module took place during Summer 2023, and the WLGA Chief Executive gave evidence alongside the LGA and NILGA Chief Executives. The central role of local government in planning for and responding to the pandemic was highlighted, and it was stressed that for future pandemic preparedness the national response must be co-designed and regularly tested with local authorities, with local government treated as a trusted and equal partner.
- **Core UK decision-making and political governance Wales (Module 2b):** Hearings for this module took place in February 2024. Again, the WLGA Chief Executive gave evidence at the public hearings, emphasising that had local government been fuller, earlier and more consistently involved then national preparedness would have been more resilient. It was also stressed that, if local government is required to lead on activities such as the enforcement of non-pharmaceutical interventions, and the protection of the vulnerable, it must be adequately resourced to do so.

Reports for Modules 1 and 2B of the inquiry are due to be published in the summer and the WLGA will provide support in responding to any recommendations that are directed at local government.

The WLGA will continue to represent local authorities in the ongoing Covid-19 Inquiry, with three modules due for completion in 2024/25 (Module 3 – healthcare systems, Module 4 – Vaccines and Therapeutics and Module 5 – Procurement).

Regeneration & Sustainable Development Team

Economic Development and Regeneration, including Planning

Ensuring Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) develop in ways that reflect councils' views is one of Leaders' top three priorities for WLGA. As well as Regional Transport Plans (see ii below) CJCs have duties to produce Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) and the power to promote economic well-being, concurrently with councils. Advocating for an integrated

approach to regional development has been crucial to WLGA's approach, to achieve a 'well-being economy'. The Corporate Plan recognised that success is dependent on councils having the necessary resources (funding, staff with right skills and knowledge).

Key achievements include:

- **Maximising benefits of UK and WG economic programmes and initiatives:** Worked with lead authorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund and established good relations with UK Government, co-ordinating queries (on the Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund) and achieving flexibility in the use of funds. Lobbied for an extension of SPF until future funding position is clarified and worked with other UK LGAs to promote councils' key role.
- **Ensuring needs of rural areas are understood/supported:** Pursued Rural Manifesto objectives through support for the ARFOR Programme and input to the work of the Commission on Welsh Speaking Communities. Arranged for a variety of WG officials to attend the Rural Forum and discuss areas of concern/opportunity and influenced policy development. Secured a role for WLGA as a strategic partner in the *Rural Wales Local Policy and Innovation Partnership* funded by UKRI
- **Supporting economic well-being role of CJsCs:** Worked with lead officers of the four CJsCs including helping develop WG's Regional Investment Framework and OECD's multi-level governance proposals. Pressed to enhance councils' role through devolution of powers/funding to regional/local levels. Represented local government on Strategic Forum for Regional Investment / Business Wales Task & Finish Group.
- **Supporting SDP development:** Called for a more integrated approach and more realistic timescales. Funding has restricted progress (managed only to negotiate some flexibility to allow WG funding given to CJsCs for RTP purposes to be used to support some related SDP work). Worked with LGA to offer up to 5 funded placements on its Pathways to Prosperity Planning Programme, encouraging graduates into Planning and supported RTPI-accredited Master's degrees.
- **Reviving our European engagement work:** Supported a visit by one of WLGA's representatives on the Committee of the Regions Contact Group to its January meeting in Brussels (on improving regional and local authority engagement in the UK-EU relationship). Input to UK-FR Local Government Steering Committee planning for a two-day forum in Leeds/Bradford in December.

Sustainable development, including circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation and reversing nature loss

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 again during 2023/24. Task and finish groups, led by

council Chief Executives, have continued to progress work against commitments in 'Net Zero Wales'. The support programme also focuses on support for adaptation, with the creation of a new adaptation sub-group.

Key achievements include:

- **Progressing emissions reduction and adaptation:** Tools, guidance and strategic interventions developed by four Chief Executive led task and finish groups to help councils meet commitments in NetZero Wales Cabon budget 2. A fifth group is supporting adaptation efforts, responding to recommendations of the UK Climate Change Committee and contributing to Welsh Government's new adaption strategy. *Further details under Climate Change in appendix.*
- **Developing the circular economy:** Represented local government on the UK steering group to establish the 'Scheme Administrator' for Extended Producer Responsibility (including modelling work for Defra/Welsh Government to ensure Welsh Councils receive a share of fees levied from producers to meet full costs of dealing with packaging). *Further details under 'Waste Improvement Team' in appendix.*
- **Supporting transport modal shift:** Brokered agreement between regions on the allocation of funds to protect bus services when transitioning from the Public Service Obligation (Bus Transition Fund) to the Bus Network Grant, as a stepping stone towards franchised services. Also supported councils with the introduction of the 20mph default limit aimed at making highways safer and encouraging active travel. *Further details under 'Transport interventions' in appendix.*
- **Increasing resilience to flood and coastal risk:** Worked with Welsh Government towards a mutually acceptable approach to TAN 15 (development, flooding and coastal erosion). Also ensured councils were briefed prior to public release of sensitive coal tip safety information. *Further details under Resilience and Safety programme in Appendix.*
- **Placing environmental protection at the heart of land use planning and decision-making:** Agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with Natural Resources Wales, enabling greater Member engagement in environmental decision making at regional and national levels. First round of meetings covered new Workplace Recycling regulations, flood risk prioritisation, the proposed new National Park in North East Wales and permitting issues.

Social Services and Housing Team

Social Services and Health

Over the past 12 months, councils across Wales have continued to grapple with a range of critical social care issues, underscored by workforce shortages, financial constraints, and increasing demand and complexity being experienced across both Children's and Adult services. The WLGA has continued to advocate for fair funding from the Welsh Government and has worked collaboratively with key stakeholders to identify and develop sustainable solutions, championing the work of local government.

This has included engaging and influencing a number of ambitious policy areas being taken forward by Welsh Government. In children's services the transformation of children's services work has continued at pace, of which the removal of profit from the care of looked after children is one key element. In adult's services there has continued to be a focus on the integration of health and social care services, with Welsh Government's "Further, Faster" programme, a strategic initiative aimed at accelerating the transformation and integration of health and social care services.

Key achievements include:

- **Development of a long-term vision for social care in Wales:** The WLGA, in conjunction with ADSS Cymru and other key local government representatives and professional groups and with Social Care Wales, came together to identify and consider long-term solutions for the future delivery of social care. Local government's long-term vision for social care emphasises the need for increased investment in home and community support that will keep individuals safe and independent, with access to rapid treatment or crisis support when required. By focusing on providing care in the right place at the right time, the aim is to create more efficient and effective services. For children and families, the vision advocates investing in preventative, universal, and early help services to prevent problems from escalating.
- **Partnership Working:** Over the past year, WLGA has focused on strengthening the representation of local government by building closer ties with our key social care partners and professional groups. Together, we've worked closely to identify and respond to shared concerns while seeking better operational strategies. This effort has involved addressing challenges surrounding the operation of unregistered children's care home services and advancing initiatives aimed at addressing barriers in recruitment and retention of the social care workforce. This has included the commissioning of research that considers the potential for the development of national terms and conditions for qualified social workers.
- **Engagement with Ministers and Officials:** Through the WLGA, bi-laterals and cabinet member network meetings have been held enabling WLGA spokespeople and local authority cabinet members to engage with key Ministers, including the

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Minister for Social Services. Key issues discussed have been around the development and implementation of Ministerial priorities for social services, as well as highlighting and evidencing the pressures facing local authorities. To support these discussions, a Social Services Financial Outlook paper was developed and shared with Ministers, aiding in budgetary talks by outlining councils' collective perspective on the challenges in delivering social care services. This included calls for the need to review the current maximum weekly charge for non-residential care and support, which is currently being consulted upon.

Housing

Housing pressures remain a key feature for communities in all parts of Wales, and housing and homeless issues are increasingly being identified by Councils as areas of increased risk. The last 12 months have continued to see very high numbers of people presenting as homeless to councils across Wales. 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 have continued to rise with more than 11,500 people now in emergency accommodation including more than 3,000 children.

Housing affordability is now a major issue for many, with significant increases in rents in most areas, with a widening gap over Local Housing Allowance support meaning that the Private Rented Sector is increasingly difficult for many households to access and afford.

Part of the response to dealing with increased homelessness, and to meeting 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. However, even with record levels of investment support and borrowing by Councils and RSLs, there are many growing challenges to developing enough new homes including the availability of land, rising cost of materials and associated build-costs, constraints on the supply of materials, contractor availability, shortages in necessary key skills and capacity within utility companies.

Key achievements include:

- **Engagement:** Regular engagement with Ministers and officials through bi-laterals 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 implementation of Ministerial and Programme for Government priorities for housing, homelessness and building safety.
- **Influencing legislation and policy:** As members of the Homelessness Expert

Review Panel convened to consider how legislative change could help to end homelessness in Wales, we have contributed to the development and delivery of a report, shaped by wide engagement with experts by experience, as well as experts from the housing sector and beyond, which presented Welsh Ministers with a package of proposed reforms which could play a significant role in ending homelessness across Wales. Many of these proposals have subsequently been included in the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

- **Partnership working:** Worked with LABC (Local Authority Building Control), Welsh Government and others to respond to the recommendations set out in Audit Wales's report 'Cracks in the Foundations – Building Safety in Wales' looking at the current and future challenges for the local authority Building Control function.
- **Tackling climate change:** As part of the Decarbonisation of Homes Implementation Group we have contributed to the development and delivery of a 'Route map for residential decarbonisation in Wales', setting out a range of measures for consideration by Welsh Ministers for the creation of an enabling environment, which is one in which homeowners will choose to decarbonise their homes and find it easy to do so well.

Community Safety

The WLGA continues to support councils and work across the local government family in their key roles in keeping people and communities safe.

Key achievements include:

- **Fire and Rescue:** The WLGA continues to support Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales through its Fire and Rescue Panel meetings and attending Welsh Government meetings including its Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services. Following the removal by Welsh Government of the Fire and Rescue Authority in South Wales and the appointment of Commissioners, the WLGA has been working with the Leaders of the 10 constituent authorities to seek clarity from Welsh Government around the impact of its decision on the role of authorities as the funding body of the Fire and Rescue Service and any wider implications on the future of FRS governance across Wales. The Association also facilitated discussions between the WLGA's Social Justice and Workforce Spokespersons and Commissioners, and together with Leaders with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss the situation and the concerns of authorities. The WLGA will continue to work in social partnership on the recommendations coming out of culture review into South Wales FRS and other

relevant reports in relation to the future role of and support to FRAs in Wales.

- **Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs):** The Association has been working closely with local authorities, CSPs, the Safer Communities Network and Welsh Government, seeking to ensure that the Home Office's plans for CSP reform, including proposals contained in the former Criminal Justice Bill, reflect the devolved context and partnership landscape in Wales and also that there remains parity between the role and responsibilities of partners, particularly between local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners.
- **Armed Forces:** The WLGA has continued to facilitate regular and topical strategic discussions between authorities on issues affecting the Armed Forces Community through the Armed Forces Network. This has included updates on the implementation of the Armed Forces Duty; the work of Pride in Veterans; and there are plans to consider Women Veterans and associated issues at its next meeting. The WLGA has also contributed to the Welsh Government's evaluation of Armed Forces Liaison Officers based in councils supporting work at the local and regional levels.
- **Police and Crime Panels:** Through the WLGA Police and Crime Panels Group, the WLGA has been engaging with Panels in Wales in relation to the Home Office's reform programme. The Association has been representing the interests and views of Panels in Wales, seeking to ensure that any changes are reflective of the different ways in which Panels exist and operate in Wales, whilst also advocating for increased funding and support.
- **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, enable and implement effective community safety policy and practices in Wales. The Association also hosts a Community Safety Cabinet Members Network where Ministers have been able to engage on shared agendas to keep Wales safe.

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 to influence workforce related policy and initiatives to deliver better outcomes for local government, our workforce and the communities they serve.

Key achievements include:

- **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, Soulbury 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 development of a model national pay policy for teachers.
- **Industrial Relations:** Managing the strategic relationship with recognised trade unions at the national 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 initiating an independent review of the Joint Council for Wales and connecting trade unions to workforce related projects and programmes in social services and education, securing trade union representation on working groups where appropriate.
- **Policy Development and Partnership:** Influencing and shaping policy and practice that impacts the workforce and workplace for the benefit of local government, working proactively with social partners to support the implementation of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act. 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 Council, Workforce Partnership Council, Social Partnership Forum for Fire and Rescue Services and Social Care Fair Work Forum.
- **Supporting Improvement and Best 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. Providing connections and support in service areas such as education and social services. Delivering a strategic planning event in collaboration with the LGA and CIPD on topics such as the future of HR, the future of work and workplaces, digitalisation and AI, attraction and retention to inform future priorities and implications for practice. Supporting councils with the implementation of equalities action plans and the implications for employment practice. The WLGA is also part of, and during 23/24 Chaired, the National Association of Regional Employers (NARE), working collaboratively as one of a number of regional employers organisations from across England, Northern Ireland and Wales to share information and practice.
- **Effective People Management and Information Governance:** Delivering improvements to the provision of human resources support in the WLGA to enable managers to recruit, develop and retain a resilient, agile and skilled workforce focused on the delivery of member priorities. Initiated a pay and grading review including job evaluation, HR policies review and implementation, digitised pre-employment checks and introduced a new corporate induction programme. Independent information governance audit undertaken, and action plan developed. Targeted staff training and new staff resources to improve data management and

GDPR compliance introduced.

Appendix 1

Grant Funded Work

The WLGA hosts 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.

Corporate Policy Team

Wales Electoral Co-ordinating Board

The WLGA began hosting the WECB in October 2023, during the transition to the establishment of a new Elections Management Board for Wales (EMB) under the provisions of the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill. The board has been in existence since 2017 under a voluntary agreement but is now in transition to becoming the Electoral Management Board. There is a dedicated staff member to ensure that the WECB continues to operate effectively and has commenced a new work programme. Through this the Team reinforces the Association's commitment to local democracy and elections.

Education Team

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

- ETS Cymru Wales has launched another addition to the programme of work, which is focusing on Workforce Development within the Youth Work sector in Wales, covering both the maintained local authorities and the voluntary sector. As part of the developments, ETS host the Workforce Development Implementation Participation Group, which is a branch from the Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board and as part of the pilot, has been successful in appointing a Workforce Development Officer for the sector. To date, the sector has received an uplift in Professional Learning opportunities on topics effecting young people with a concerted effort of delivering the Level 3 Certificate in Youth Work Practice qualification. This will enable practitioners to register with the EWC and has facilitated a Skills and Training needs audit for the sector, which will form the basis of training and professional learning for 24/25.

National Music Service - www.musicservice.wales

- Implementation of the National Music Service started in September 2022 and they have just completed their 5th academic term. The National Music Plan asked for all primary schools in Wales to encounter the first experiences once, before the end of the initial three-year funding. A very high percentage of schools were reached just in year 1 of the plan with many schools in year two receiving an additional second round to new year groups; on average, one year group per school receive the programme. In many cases, especially in smaller schools, year groups have been combined. The National Music Service collaborate closely with local, regional and national partners, working together with a range of community groups, local youth organisations, brass bands and choirs – as well as national organisations, councils, social partnerships and much more. Through partnership working the National Music Service has developed bespoke training ‘modules’ to empower and raise confidence of music teachers in Wales. In partnership with Music Services and special schools, within the councils, the training programme makes learning an instrument and playing with others independently, expressively and in real time accessible to all 8-18 year-old disabled students.

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

- Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru successfully worked with schools and local authorities across Wales to assist them in embedding supporting for Service children. 26 schools in Wales have now achieved their *Armed Forces Friendly Schools Cymru* Bronze, Silver or Gold status. The SSCE Cymru team administered the Supporting Service Children in Education Wales Fund (SSCE-WF) on behalf of Welsh Government, awarding £131,000 in small grants to over 59 schools or LAs from 14 local authorities across Wales. In November 2023, SSCE Cymru worked with the Veterans Awards team to deliver the first ever Service Children Awards event in Wales in Wales. Month of the Military Child in April saw schools and local authorities across Wales celebrating Service children and thanking them for their sacrifices.

Food and Fun -www.wlga.wales/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme

- The programme ran in all 22 local authorities in 2023, for the first time since its inception. Strong progress was made to extend the reach and impact of Food and Fun with growth of 40% in the number of cohorts on the previous year. A focus on improving children and families’ health and well-being, as well as engagement with school and learning during the school summer holidays continued.
- The addition of a Bag Bwyd to participants in a wider response to the cost-of-living crisis provided over 7,000 bags to children and families to support their household with pantry staples to help with meals over the holidays.
- Food and Fun 2023 provided employment opportunities with use of a broader mix of staff where possible to support delivery. Focus on collaboration and cross

partnership working continued with the programme also providing a platform for young volunteers to develop their skills and experience.

- In addition, funding for children with additional learning needs ALN was extended to incorporate those with sensory, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Progress has been made on the recommendations from the ARAD 2022 external evaluation in so far as the barriers to participation have been identified and measures introduced to address these so that both the process of onboarding as a new scheme and the overarching procedures support growth. The WLGA internal evaluation indicated a strong positive response to Food and Fun from both children and parents which highlighted the broad range of foods tasted and the variety of activities taken part in.

Regeneration & Sustainable Development Team

Climate Change Support Programme

- Produced a sustainable procurement toolkit (with training sessions) to assist councils in managing carbon emissions associated with purchased goods and services
- Developed a land use sequestration toolkit and guidance to inform decisions involving changes in land use - half a day's training each for technical officers and for key decision makers being rolled out.
- Commissioned two studies on buildings – to gather information on councils' estate rationalisation plans and to develop a scenario planner to help councils weigh costs of building interventions against the scale of their carbon benefits. WG's Low Carbon Heat Grant (£20m p.a.) to date has seen 98 council properties moving to low carbon operation (grant over-subscribed).
- Commissioned work on a process map for grey fleet transition and a package of measures to support efforts to shift commuting and in-work travel to more sustainable modes.
- Worked with WGES and Society of Welsh Treasurers on the collaborative procurement of electric vehicles, involving 12 councils, 236 vehicles and achieving faster delivery and savings of £660,000.

Resilience and Safety programme

- Successfully encouraged councils to protect their flood and coastal capacity when grant funding was transferred into the Revenue Support Grant, and successfully lobbied Welsh Government to reduce the administrative burden linked with the capital

programme quarterly reporting.

- Developed a series of short videos in partnership with Caerphilly Council to improve understanding and buy-in of sustainable drainage amongst SMEs. Also produced guidance to support councils with the adaptation process for sustainable drainage features and delivered a series of masterclasses to help councils with the updating of the local FCERM strategies.
- Continued to promote adaptation amongst councils and elected members and produced a video to raise the profile of climate change adaptation on the coast in partnership with the Wales Coastal Groups Forum. We are also upskilling workforce and delivered a 2-day flood and coastal risk management course for new starters in partnership with DCWW and NRW.
- Worked closely with Planning Officers Wales Society and Leaders on TAN15 to lobby Welsh Government for a revised and balanced version of the document which fully considers present and future flood and coastal erosion risks while also supporting sustainable planning decisions and projects of national interest.
- Worked closely with Welsh Government to prepare councils for the publication of disused coal tip data and continue to be involved in several groups supporting the development of the legislation, a protocol between WG, NRW, and councils as well as discussion around future funding needs to support remediation works.

Transport interventions

- During 2023/24, the 'Common Standards' set of documents produced for **Unadopted Roads** was updated to better align with emerging Welsh Government Active Travel Guidance
- A significant second round of Unadopted Roads Improvement Pilot Schemes was delivered despite Welsh Government funding only being released during the second part of the year.
- A third round of Unadopted Roads Improvement Schemes has just been approved and committed by Welsh Government for 2024/25. It is pleasing to note that 17 out of 22 local authorities have now shown interest in securing Welsh Government funding, demonstrating a good level of interest and buy-in to the principle of improving and adopting infrastructure previously not owned or the responsibility of Local Authorities.

The Waste Improvement Team

Since 2007 the Waste Improvement Programme (WIP) within WLGA, funded by Welsh Government, has worked with local authorities to help improve the performance and

efficiency of their waste services, following four key objectives in the process: evidence, efficiency, improving performance and delivery of wider sustainable principles.

Key achievements include:

- collection, validation and analysis of key performance data, responding to the needs of Welsh Government and partner local authorities
- publication of that data in a way that ensures ease of use and maximises potential for service improvement
- informing effective and efficient service design and decisions across all 22 local authorities through the active dissemination of the data in regional events, networks and web-based portals
- development of tools and resources which make a difference to front line services
- support for joint procurement including collaboration; and
- support for Collaborative Change Programme activity.

As a result, Welsh councils have been far better placed to provide data to Defra to inform their modelling on EPR costs. [Waste Improvement Programme - WLGA](#)

Case study: Workplace Recycling Regulations

Project summary – Prohibition on Disposal of Food Waste to Sewer

The main objectives of the project were:

- To develop and publish a bilingual guidance document aimed at Environmental Health Officers within councils
- To deliver two training events looking at the sanctions provided

The project commenced with a procurement exercise. An inception meeting, followed by a series of regular planning meetings took place between the WLGA and RHE Global to progress the project and help ensure that the short timescales were successfully met prior to the new regulations coming into force from April 6, 2024.

A drafted final guidance document was developed by the consultants and sent out to interested parties for comment between February 20 and March 8, 2024. The online draft guidance document was opened 273 times. Comments received were assessed by the consultants, in conjunction with the WLGA and any resulting changes made prior to it being translated and sent out to those attending the two arranged training events. The finalised document, together with supporting template notices and a webinar recording of the training event held on April 9 2024 can be viewed from the WLGA website:

[WLGA guidance document for councils](#)

[Supporting template notices](#)

[Webinar recording](#)

The recording has been distributed via RIAMS as well (Regulatory Information and Management System), used by councils across the UK and provides thousands of regularly updated procedures, enforcement templates, guidance and best practice across all areas of environmental health. It will also be a useful resource for new staff members joining the environmental health service within councils and act as a reminder for existing staff members.

Two training events were held online on March 21 and April 9, 2024 which looked at the use of the sanctions provided by the prohibition on disposal of food waste to sewer (Civil Sanctions) (Wales) Order 2023 and were delivered by the appointed consultants. 147 attendees in total joined both events, with all 22 Welsh councils represented.

Social Services and Housing Team

Joint Inspection Team for Building Safety (Wales) Ltd

- The Joint Inspection Team (JIT) has been established by the WLGA as a company limited by guarantee to provide an additional resource for councils and fire and rescue services to improve the safety of multi-occupied residential buildings in Wales by increasing capacity in the system.
- The company was established in 2023 and is registered at Companies House with named directors and members. Prior to establishment the company consulted with members and developed a robust structure and detailed Articles of Association. The JIT has developed its own web presence, and more information will be made available to stakeholders via this platform shortly, with a detailed FAQ section, outlining the role of the team.
- Over the past twelve month the Head of JIT has developed a structure for the JIT and developed job descriptions and person specifications for the team. A period of extensive market testing and evaluation was undertaken prior to going live with a recruitment campaign. In Spring this year, this campaign concluded with the recruitment exercise having been successful. The team is multi-disciplinary, combining the skills and knowledge of building safety and fire safety professionals and consists of a Strategic Lead and four Principal Advisers covering:
 - Building Control
 - Environmental Health
 - Fire and Rescue
 - Fire Engineering
- The team is now developing close collaboration with the Welsh Local Authorities and the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services and in collaborations a programme of inspections is being agreed. The first formal property to be inspected has been identified, and the team have met with the relevant local authorities as well as the management company for the identified building and a full inspection is due to be undertaken shortly.

National Commissioning Board

The Welsh Government grant funded [National Commissioning Board \(NCB\)](#)¹ is a collaborative of representatives from across Local Authorities, NHS, the National Provider Forum, Third Sector (WCVA), Citizens Wales, Social Care Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), WLGA and Welsh Government.

The Board has links with a range of local, regional and national programmes and its own

¹ <https://www.wlga.wales/national-commissioning-board-wales>

annual work programme², focussed on improving the quality of commissioning practice in Wales and developing effective integrated commissioning between local authorities and local health boards.

Key achievements include:

- Facilitating the co-production of [national principles and standards for commissioning³](#), for Local Authorities and Health organisations in Wales. These have been included in the Code of Practice: National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support laid at the Senedd on 11th June, to come into force from 1st September 2024.
- Working with Welsh Government's National Office for Care and Support to develop a practice community for commissioners in Wales and producing a publicly accessible online toolkit to support commissioners to implement the above Code of Practice. Both of these will be hosted on the [Social Care Wales Communities](#) Platform⁴ and available from summer 2024.
- Establishing a new level 5 qualification for Wales, in the [Principles of Commissioning for Wellbeing⁵](#). Negotiation with the awarding body has resulted in the development of this as a qualification that may be completed either through the medium of [Welsh⁶](#) or [English⁷](#). 19 local authority and 3 NHS commissioning practitioners have undertaken the qualification to date and following a successful bid for additional funding, the National Commissioning Board will be making a bilingual training offer to a further 13 local authority commissioners from Autumn 2024.

Feedback from learners to date, includes:

“I appreciate much more now the influence and importance that engagement with communities to help us understand what the challenges are. I understand better what works well, what needs to change and what resources we have available and the specific needs for those living in that community.”

“I really enjoyed this training; it is helping me to be more confident in interacting with colleagues and senior people. I am really improving as a commissioner.

² <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=3268>

³ <https://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=4256>

⁴ <https://communities.socialcare.wales/group/guest/home>

⁵ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Support-for-commissioners/Level-5-Commissioning-for-Wellbeing-Qualification.aspx>

⁶

https://centres.highfieldqualifications.com/Assets/DownloadArea/QualificationDownloads/%5b02052024_0837_%5d_Qual_spec_welsh.pdf?_gl=1*s8ky1l*_ga_N0TSV5SW36*MTcxNjU2MDE4My4xLjEuMTcxNjU2MDI0OS4wLjAuMA..

⁷

https://centres.highfieldqualifications.com/Assets/DownloadArea/QualificationDownloads/%5b07022023_1347_%5d_Qual_specification_L5_Commissioning_for_Wellbeing_v3.3_Feb_2023.pdf?_gl=1*nyzhb3*_ga*MTQ2NTY1ODEyNS4xNzE2NTYwNDA1*_ga_N0TSV5SW36*MTcxNjU2MDQwNS4xLjAuMTcxNjU2MDQwNS4wLjAuMA..

Meeting the others in the group (who were incredibly friendly) has had a big impact on my understanding of the wider health and social care agenda across Wales. I was nervous about taking on learning and the work for a qualification, but I am really happy that I took this step. I am even enjoying the assignments!"

- **Co-working** with Welsh Government policy leads, and identifying good practice with local authorities, care providers and local health boards to replace 2009 guidance on escalating concerns and care home closures. The resultant draft Code of Practice will be consulted upon later in 2024/5, with a greater emphasis on positive cultures and continuous learning and quality improvement.

The work of the National Commissioning Board will be subsumed into the National Office for Care and Support within the Welsh Government from April 2025. The [National Office mandate](#)⁸ will include the oversight of implementation and ongoing management of the code of practice for the national framework for commissioning care and support; ensuring compliance with national commissioning principles and standards and supporting commissioners and providers through the provision of a toolkit.

National Neurodivergence Team (previously called the National Autism Team)

The National Neurodivergence Team is funded by Welsh Government and hosted by the WLGA. The team was established to assist Welsh Government in implementing improvement to Autism services across Wales and the foundation to all the work is 'to help improve the lives of autistic people and their families in Wales.' The remit of the team has recently expanded to also cover other neurodivergent conditions - the focus of work and new logo reflects this.

Key achievements include:

- **Training & Development:** The *Can You See Me* campaign and *Autism Aware* schemes have been combined to create an Autism Understanding and Accepting Certification scheme, giving people confidence that where they see the certificate displayed, the organisation has a good understanding of autism. A series of co-produced CPD accredited e-learning modules have also been developed and uploaded on the NHS and most Councils' learning platforms, training staff across Wales how to adapt their practice and better identify and assess need regarding neurodivergence. There has been a huge take up of this training from across Wales. During the year, Welsh Government commissioned an audit of the Autism Code of Practice – the training developed by the National Neurodivergence Team was highlighted as an area of good practice.
- **Information, advice, assistance and early help**, the provision of which is key to

⁸ <https://www.gov.wales/national-office-care-and-support#143547>

improving the lives and well-being of neurodivergent people. The Team has developed an Information, Advice & Assistance and Early Help Workshop targeted at the Information, Advice and Assistance services, front door operational managers for Children's and Adults' Services. The workshop provides an update on the Neurodivergence Improvement Programme, and an early opportunity to contribute to the new Neurodivergence Code of Practice.

- **Advice & Support:** The National Neurodivergence Team has produced a series of Community of Practice sessions covering a range of neurodivergent conditions and issues impacting the neurodivergent community. These sessions are delivered by renowned Practitioners in the field of neurodivergence. Building on this success, a series of Virtual Advice Sessions has been developed for parents & carers. These cover a range of topics including Advocating for Your Child, Managing Meltdowns and Anxiety Management. The National Neurodivergence Team has also undertaken Website development to include more neurodivergent resources, for example working with Tourette's Action to translate their E-learning module into Welsh and facilitating its uploading onto LA and Health Board learning platforms. In addition, task and finish groups on family support and individual support have been established to feed into the Ministerial group.
- **Involvement and engagement:** Coproduction underpins the work of the team, and several additional advisory groups were established in 2023-2024. These include the Advisory group on ADHD, the Parents/Carers Advisory Group and the Neurodivergent Parents/Carers Advisory Group. The ongoing work of the Autistic Advisory Group continues to inform the work of the team. The National Neurodivergence Team also continue to facilitate several national forums and networks including the Autism Lead's forum, the Practice Exchange and the ND Mental Health working group.

Wales Safer Communities Network

Established in January 2021, the [Wales Safer Communities Network](#) is hosted by the WLGA, with funding in 2023/24 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. Key priorities for the year ahead are to deliver on the Network's plans to increase membership and implement a sustainable funding model and introduce the members portal. The Network continues to provide 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.

Key achievements include:

- **Training and events:** The Network has organised and hosted 19 virtual [workshops and seminars](#), which were attended by over 600 colleagues covering a variety of community safety topics including child poverty, anti-social behaviour, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and suicide prevention.

- **Influencing policy:** Between June 2023 and May 2024 the Network have responded to forty-nine public consultations from organisations including (but not limited to) Welsh Government, Home Office, ONS, DVLA and Department Science Innovation and Technology. The Network continues to represent councils and 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 on topics such as the CSP Review, Serious Violence Duty, Crime and Justice Bill and the Single Unified Safeguarding Review.
- **Supporting Community Safety Partnerships and officers:** During this period the Network meet with a number of Council Leaders and Chief Executives, Chief Fire Officers and Police leads to explain the purpose and value of the services we deliver, as well as to highlight current key issues affecting community safety. The Network provides on-going support to Community Safety Officers through regular updates on community safety related issues and provides additional facilitative support to the Wales Association of Community Safety Officers, Wales Data Analysis Innovation and Improvement Network and the All-Wales Anti-Social Behaviour Network. The Network is excited to confirm the success in securing an Impact Fellowship, working with Swansea University to create a bespoke community safety training package for Wales which will look to enhance and develop skills of community safety professionals.
- **Key events and achievements:** In September the Network launched the first Community Safety Awareness week in Wales which engaged with over a thousand people through a series of online events that focussed on a number of themes including 'She's not your rehab' and anti-social behaviour. During that same week the Network were pleased to launch a [video](#) from the First Minister for Wales highlighting the importance of partnership working to promote safe, strong and confident communities. In November, the first [Safer Community Awards](#) was organised and hosted by the Network to recognise and celebrate community safety partnership activity and successes across Wales. This very successful event provided a platform to recognise, celebrate and highlight best practice across the community safety landscape here in Wales and planning has already started for the 2024 awards!

Wales Strategic Migration Partnership

The Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) is funded by the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUC), providing strategic leadership on migration matters and overseeing delivery in Wales of asylum dispersal; resettlement (Ukraine and Afghanistan); the Hong Kong British Nationals Overseas (BN(O)) Visa Scheme; the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children; and ESOL provision. A key priority for last year was the ongoing work with the Home Office, DLUCH, WLGA and Welsh Government to revise the governance and oversight of migration to enable greater strategic, senior level and political oversight.

Key achievements include:

Coordination: the WSMP co-ordinated an online awareness raising session (attended by more than 300 people) at the height of the issues related to the opening of an asylum contingency hotel in Llanelli, engaging representatives from the Home Office, Clearsprings / Ready Homes, Dyfed Powys Police, Migrant Help and the local council to enable transparency about preparedness and site operations. The WSMP also undertook a Lessons Learned exercise, making recommendations to the Home Office and Welsh Government for improvements in the approach to future contingency sites.

- **Delivery:** The WSMP led a 'Team Wales' approach to Afghan bridging hotel closures in Wales. The Resettlement Lead worked with the Home Office, local authorities and other partners to ensure the exit of hotels, avoiding homeless presentations, incorporating Home Office and DLUHC 'Find your own accommodation' policy in the Welsh context and leveraging the experience of the specialised Move-on team from the Ukraine scheme. The WSMP Hong Kong BNO Visa Scheme lead works with DLUHC, Welsh Government and a wide range of partners to raise awareness of the needs of Hong Kongers, hosts an online [Welcome Hub](#) and funds the [Cardiff Hong Kongers Community Interest Company](#) to enable social connections and access to advice and support. The WSMP lead for the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) National Transfer Scheme has coordinated the transfer of 450 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into the care of Welsh councils over the past few years, working with Heads of Children's Services to respond to policy and strategy on the care and support of these vulnerable young people. The WSMP produced a briefing paper for the Home Office, in conjunction with ADSS Cymru and WLGA, which highlights conflicts between the operation of the NTS and the Best Interests of Children, to inform the Home Office Review of the NTS.
- **Shaping policy and strategy:** the Welsh Government Ukraine Super Sponsor Scheme has seen more 3,000 arrivals into Wales. Local authorities have worked with Welsh Government on supporting over 1,500 individuals with move-on from Initial Accommodation over the last 18 months. The WSMP has influenced the shape of the Welcome Accommodation policy post-April 2024 and continues to support local government response and feeds into policy and strategy around Ukraine. The WSMP ESOL lead has established The National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults ([NATECLA Cymru](#)) branch, which provides ongoing professional development for tutors, and supported the [Welsh Government ESOL Policy Review](#) recommendations on developing a professional and confident ESOL workforce.
- **Influencing policy.** The WSMP works across UK and devolved policy in relation to migration, feeding into policy design and delivery, influencing decision making and recommendations for action at strategic and operational level. The WSMP has responded to a number of consultations, including a joint inquiry by the APPG on

Migration and the APPG on Poverty, a Call for Evidence by the Public Accounts Committee (UK Parliament) Inquiry into Homes for Ukraine, the Welsh Government draft suicide and self-harm prevention strategy and draft Child Poverty Strategy.