



Scrutiny Inquiry into Regional Partnership Working

Pre-Inquiry Planning 2nd October 2017

1.0 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 This report aims to inform and support the Scrutiny Inquiry into Partnership Working, which starts with a pre-inquiry planning session on the 2 October 2017. Emerging questions have been included at section 6.0 to inform the planning session.
- 1.2 Analysis has been undertaken of current collaborations to inform the inquiry, which is in section 3.0 of the report.
- 1.3 Significant change is underway at Regional level following the announcements and subsequent Welsh Government meetings around Local Government Reform (LGR) in Wales. These ideas are still changing and developing however, current thinking is included in section 4.0.

2.0 The Council's Previously Agreed response to the White Paper

- 2.1 A reminder on the background and context: The previous Welsh Government's reform proposals were contained in the 'Draft Local Government (Wales) Bill' published for consultation in November 2015. There was a greater focus on mandatory mergers of local authorities in these early reform proposals, which were subsequently softened to voluntary mergers, then finally dropped in favour of greater regional frameworks. One area that has maintained support throughout - starting from the early draft Bill - includes the General Power of Competence. On the wider issue of powers for local government, according to a subsequent White Paper¹, the Welsh Government would be "prepared to consider the appropriateness of further devolution of powers".

A White Paper² was issued for consultation by Mark Drakeford, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, on the 31 January 2017. This consultation exercise closed in April 2017 and sought views on:

- Regional Working
- Voluntary Mergers
- A Framework for Local Leadership
- Leading Localities
- Community Councils

¹ Welsh Government's White Paper: Reforming Local Government, Power to Local People, Welsh Government, February 2015

² Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed, July 2017

- Elections and Voting

2.2 Appendix A provides a summary list of the key points agreed by Council for the consultation response. Areas that are now proposed by Welsh Government but were not fully supported by the Council in the response include the following:

- A mandatory framework for financing JGC expenditure
- Regional Land Use Planning
- Regional Building Control
- Regional licensing, specifically Taxi licensing, street trading, entertainment and sex establishments
- Management and development of Housing stock.

Areas of the Swansea response where the impact of future arrangements are still unclear include:

- Scrutiny arrangements
- Impact on capital and revenue budgets of Local Authorities
- Capital and asset ownership
- Public Services Boards.

2.3 The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government made a statement on the way forward on 18 July 2017. A further consultation document on 'Local Government Electoral Reform' was published on 18 July. On 27 June 2017, the First Minister announced that a Local Government Bill, to give effect to the Welsh Government's proposals, would be included in the legislative programme for the second year of the current National Assembly term.

3.0 Current Regional Partnerships

3.1 A review of current partnerships highlights:

- The Council is currently involved in around **one hundred partnership / collaboration areas**. The 'big three' being ERW, City Region, and Western Bay
- Excluding the major contributions to ERW, the City Region, and Western Bay, the Council also makes an **annual cash contribution of around £150,000** to partnerships
- **Swansea Council Officer time on partnerships equates to just under 600 days per year**. This excludes those posts which are specifically grant funded for regional work in order to understand Swansea Council's commitment
- **A need to understand what is working well in the current arrangements, what needs improvement and which collaborations add no value.**

3.2 The key benefits / disadvantages of partnership / collaborative working include:

- Benefits:
 - Sharing of good practice, ideas and innovation
 - Pooling of resources to enable greater capacity
 - Sharing of information and business intelligence

- In some cases joint planning and performance management of a service at a regional level
- Joint management of a major / high risk project or programme
- Receiving training and development
- Networking opportunities.
- Disadvantages:
 - Often meetings are in Llandrindod Wells, which involves significant travel for all partners. Use of new technology for some meetings would help
 - Staff time
 - Diverse groups with different priorities and drivers can make decision-making / progress slow
 - Little formal financial contribution so may operate with existing stretched resources
 - Some groups meet rarely so it is difficult to drive a meaningful agenda.

4.0 Headlines of the New LGR proposals

A meeting of the Welsh Government Local Government Reform Task and Finish Group was held w/c 11 September 2017, attended by the Chief Executive. This is made up of officials from Welsh Government and senior officers from local government, chaired by Jack Straw. The Welsh Government set out its proposals for mandatory regional working and Joint Governance Committees (JGC) emerging from the White Paper consultation process.

4.1 Mandated Service Areas for Regional Working include:

- Economic Development
- Transport
- Strategic land use planning and building control
- Social Services
- Education improvement and Additional learning Needs
- Public protection

4.2 Joint Governance Committees and Accountability

- JGCs would be responsible for the effective planning and delivery of the regional services listed above, at both regional and sub-regional level
- There would be two types of JGC: Governance and Service
- It is proposed there are three large regions: North Wales, Mid and West Wales, and South East Wales. Swansea would be part of Mid and West Wales with Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot
- There will be a governance JGC for each region made up of elected Members. They will be decision-making bodies, with consistent levels of delegation from each Local Authority. New legislation will set out their duties and powers
- Existing local partnership clusters will be recognised and maintained within the new framework and will co-exist

- There are likely to be many service JGCs under these proposals on both regional and sub-regional footprints. These will oversee planning, budgeting, funding and any other specific function deemed appropriate.

4.3 The Arrangement for Scrutiny

Firm proposals around scrutiny arrangements have not been discussed yet by the Task and Finish Group. However, the White Paper summary of response³ highlighted the JGC approach should be coupled with a joint regional scrutiny committee. Work should not be duplicated between regional and local authority scrutiny committees and one authority should be the lead for an individual scrutiny committee.

It was also suggested that scrutiny functions should be based on good practice at regional and national level, but with the ability to deliver local accountability on key issues. Locally elected Members must have a voice and be able to hold regional bodies to account on behalf of local citizens. There was also the suggestion of public and stakeholder groups being part of the scrutiny process, in order to represent citizens and properly scrutinise decisions and direction at regional level.

4.4 Challenges of Harmonisation

- The co-existence of JGCs and Public Services Board will need analysis to ensure there is consistency and alignment
- Harmonisation will be important across the different regional clusters already in place, e.g. City Region
- There is a risk that Welsh Government may introduce a new framework which is either not aligned to, or has a detrimental effect on those current partnerships which are proving highly beneficial. WLGA is urging Welsh Government to:
 - Work with Local Authorities to review current arrangements, making improvements where needed
 - Review current binding agreements between Councils, as additional legislation may be unnecessary
 - Consider regional variations and not take a 'one size fits all' approach
 - Consider regional framework agreements early in the process before everything is formalised.
- There is also a risk that regional decisions will need to be taken through each Local Authorities' decision-making process which could take time and make change slow to implement.

5.0 Lessons Learned from Previous Local Government Re-organisations / Regional Partnerships and attempts at Shared Services

- Without a guiding coalition and shared vision it has been difficult to progress conversations quickly, leading to ideas often losing momentum and fading away. The Political priorities of each organisation are often different or not closely aligned

³ White Paper – Summary of Response, Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed, July 2017

- Often other partners have been unable to commit time and resources so ideas have not progressed
- Service integration is complex and needs clear leadership, time, priority and focus which has not always been possible from all partners in the past, again leading to ideas dropping off the priority list
- Where services have come together the training and skills of staff have needed harmonisation
- Equally terms and conditions and other workforce related policies vary significantly, so harmonisation takes time
- The culture of each organisation is also very different, so harmonisation between different teams can take time and requires deliberate focus.

6.0 Questions

Two questions which have been consistently raised during development of this report relate to the following two areas of partnership working, and which the inquiry might want to consider during the pre-inquiry planning meeting:

- What is working well in the existing partnerships and what needs improvement as we move forward? Which collaborations add no value?
- What would regional scrutiny look like and how will it work in the new regional arrangements? What proposals can Swansea make with regards to scrutiny at a regional, sub-regional and local level?