Easy Read

Making local government stronger

Choices for stronger and larger councils

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

www.gov.wales

Easy read version of **'Strengthening local government: delivering for people.'**

April 2018

How to use this document

This is an easy read version. The words and their meaning are easy to read and understand.

You may need support to read and understand this document. Ask someone you know to help you.

Some words may be difficult to understand. These are in **bold blue writing** and have been explained in a box beneath the word.

If any of the words are used later in the booklet they are shown in normal blue writing. If you see words in normal blue writing, you can look up what they mean in a list of the hard words on page x.

Where the document says ‘we’, this means the **Welsh Government**.

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1. What is this about?

We need stronger **local government** in Wales that can do more.

Local councils, also known as local authorities, are your **local government**.

We need more **councillors** from the local area who can work hard to make your life better.

You vote **councillors** onto your local council. They decide what your local area needs and how to spend the money the council has.

The councils we talk about here are the big county and Borough councils, not your town or community council.

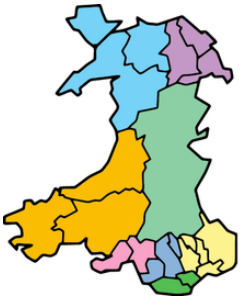
We all need to talk about how we can have good, strong local government.

We need modern councils that will work with other councils and organisations.

We need to change how our councils work. The cuts from the UK government mean we do not have many choices.

This paper tells you the possible changes we can make. There are questions for each chapter in a separate booklet. Please answer these either by yourself or with a group.

2. Why do we need to change local government?

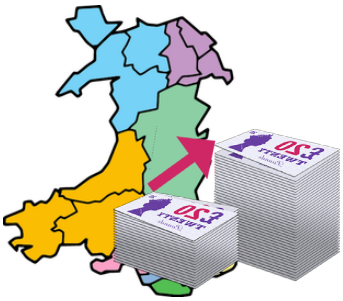


At the moment there are 22 councils in Wales. They all do the same thing but in different ways.

Councils play a very important role in their local area. They deliver many of the services that you use and need.

But there is more demand for services and they have not got enough money to provide them all.

People pay council tax for the services the council provides. Sometimes police and health have to work with several authorities on the same matter. This takes time and money.



Having 22 councils costs more to run.

Having so many councils can make it hard to get all the good people they need. They have to pay for all the offices they need.

We cannot carry on like this. We need to change how councils work.

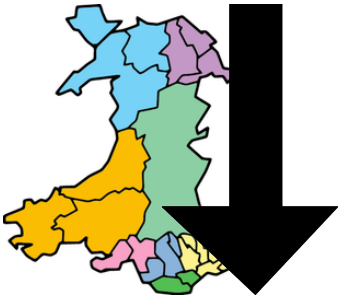
Trying to make any changes is very difficult. There are so many things that need thinking about. We must look at what we need for the future, not just at the money. We must look at:

- what local government does

- how it works

- what you want local government to do.

A report looked at what we can do. The report said the best way forward is to have larger areas for local government.



This would mean there would be fewer of them. Then you can still vote for someone from your local area, save money and have stronger local government.

Many councils agree that changes are needed but they do not want to be told to join up or who to join up with. Each one wants to talk with the Welsh Government about what is best for them.

So we need to change and we want you to be part of deciding how.

Stronger and larger councils

We have thought about many different changes we can make. We have talked with councils about the possible changes.

We think there are now 3 choices we can look at:

1. Local councils choosing whether to join up with other councils.

2. Going slowly, with councils who are ready to join together first then others joining together later.

3. Everyone will join together at the same time and doing so soon.

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We will give you more information about these 3 choices in this document.

We need to make sure that councils' borders work better with the police and health borders. This will make planning and working together easier.

It will cost us money at first to have councils join together. So we also want to look at what support there is to help with this.

We are also looking at:

- What local government needs to be able to do.

- How to make sure you think well of councillors doing an important job.

- How to get more people to be interested in being councillors.

3. Choices for local government

Whatever choice we make we need to:

- Know exactly what areas the new councils will be in. We look at this in **Chapter 4**.

- Have good plans for how the changes will happen. This needs to make sure the existing services carry on without any problems. People who work for the councils must know what is happening with their jobs and be involved. We look at this in **Chapter 5**.

- Give support and help to bring the councils together. The new larger councils must be able to do more. We look at this in **Chapter 6**.

- Have ways to deal with a council that is not doing its job properly, which might mean joining it with other councils.

Choice 1 - local councils choosing whether to join up

With this choice, a group of local councils in a particular area say they want to join up to become one new council.

The councils will only be able to choose who they join with from a list of choices agreed by the Welsh Government.

Good things

Local councils can decide what they want to do. They can make the changes in their own time.

The changes might be smoother because the councils choose for themselves. No-one will be forced to do it if they do not want to.

In time, the larger council will be able to do more and save money.

The larger council will be able to do more as we say in **Chapter 6**.

Not so good things

Some parts of Wales may change quickly but some councils may not want to change.

The changes may drag on over time as there is no end date. Nothing will be certain and definite.

With no change there will be no savings so services may suffer.

One council may decide it just does not want to join up with others nearby. That may stop others joining together into a larger council for the area.

Choice 2 - going slowly, with councils who are ready joining together first then others following on

All new larger local councils will be ready to start in 2026. Some who are ready can go quickly and be ready to start in 2022.

Good things

Everyone knows when the changes will end.

Councils know they have to make decisions about when to join together.

By 2026 all councils will be able to do more and be saving money.

Everyone will know the changes will happen and be able to plan for that.

Not so good things

Change will happen at different times in Wales. Not all councils will change at the same time.

One council may decide it just does not want to join up with others nearby. But it knows it must by 2026.

Change will happen over a longer time so we will need to give support for longer. This may mean we cannot get on with other things that need doing.

Choice 3 - everyone will join together at the same time

The new larger councils will start in 2022.

Good things

It is clear what will happen and when it will happen for everyone.

The changes do not go on for too long.

We will be able to start doing more and making better use of our money.

All new councils will start at the same time.

Not so good things

No choice for present councils on how quickly the changes happen.

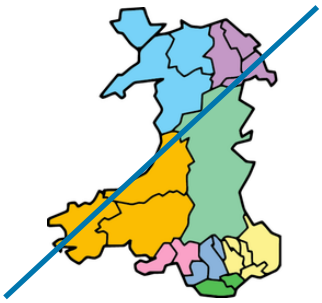
Some places will not like being told what to do. This will make the changes more difficult.

In places where the changes are difficult the services may be affected.

How much will all this cost?

We had a report to look at the costs.

It will cost money to make any of these changes. But making the changes means we will save money. In 10 years we will save much more than we spend on the changes.

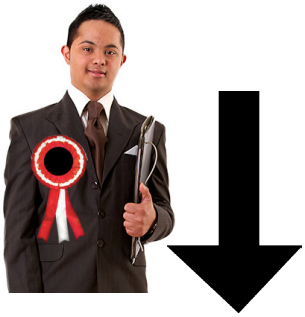


Now we have 22 local councils. We are looking at having 10.

We will save money by:

- having fewer large offices

- having fewer top managers



- having fewer councillors in Wales as a whole

- everything being simpler.

Having fewer councils will mean:

- councils can spend more on delivering services

- councils can change how they do things

- we make working with other services easier

- councils can get the people they need for all the jobs in the council.

We will work out how much the different choices cost. This will help us decide which choice would be best.

Please go to page 5 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 1.

4. Where will the new councils be?

It is important to have an idea of what areas the new larger councils will cover. This will:

- make sure the new councils will have borders which fit better with the police and health borders

- make it easier to plan for years ahead

- stop everyone wasting time talking about joining up.

We asked you about this before. We listened to what everyone said then. There were some good ideas that we used.

There are many things we have to think about when councils join together:

- Staff – their pay, pensions and rules they have for working.

- How the different councils work including their different computers.

- Changing how services work.

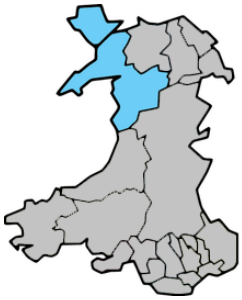
- Finding and keeping new staff.

We have thought a lot about how to change into new larger councils:

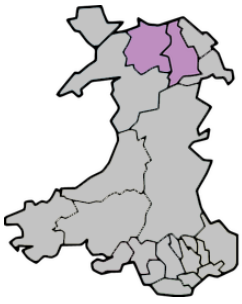
- making sure they are not too big to still involve you

- big enough to save money and be stronger.

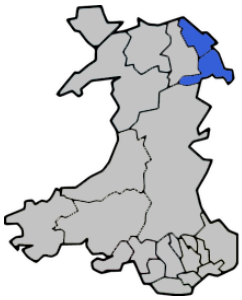
So this is how we see the new larger councils but we want to listen to other ideas too:



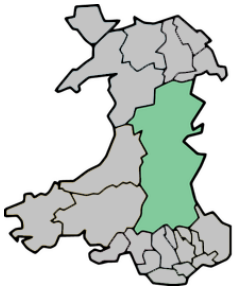
1. Isle of Anglesey and Gwynedd together.



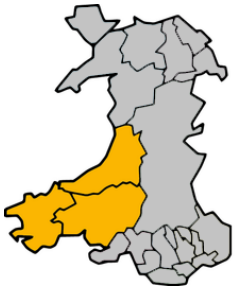
2. Conwy and Denbighshire together.



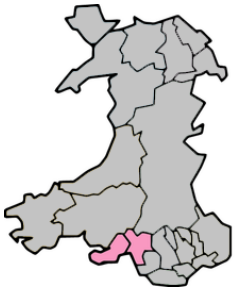
3. Flintshire and Wrexham together.



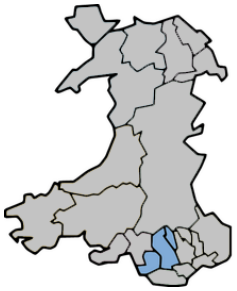
4. Powys stays by itself.



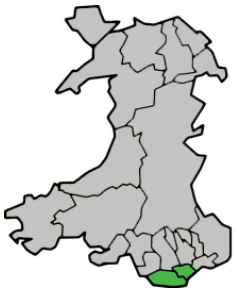
5. Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire together.



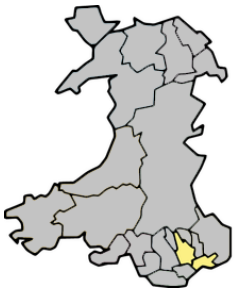
6. Swansea and Neath Port Talbot together.



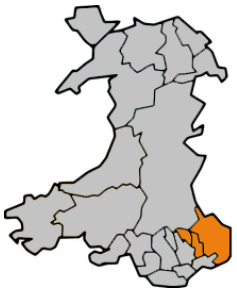
7. Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil together.



8. Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff together.



9. Newport and Caerphilly together.



10. Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire together.

These groups have the same borders as health except Bridgend. There may be changes in the future to Bridgend health borders.

Working together

Councils work together in different parts of Wales.

There is already some work happening across some regions. We are pleased with this and want it to carry on.

We think it will be easier to work across a region when there are fewer councils.

There will not be as many of the same meetings for police and health. They can work together in less time costing less money.

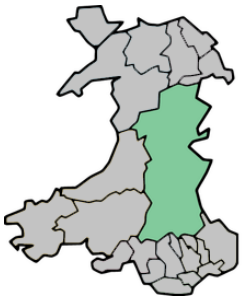
The new councils

There is no perfect size for the new councils.

Rural areas will have fewer people than towns and cities. It can be difficult to give good services when people live a long way apart.

All the new councils have about the same number of children at school.

Towns and cities have more adults under 65. Rural areas have more people over 65.



Powys is unusual. It has fewer people than anywhere else. But it is the largest area. We kept Powys as one council but we will listen to any other ideas.

Please go to page 7 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 2.

5. A clear and fair way forward

It is important the change to the new councils is well planned.

We will have a **transition** group for each new council. There will be at least 5 councillors from each small council in this group.

Transition is changing from one way of doing things to another.

The transition group must make sure the changes go easily and well. They must make sure money spent on the changes is well spent.

We will have a new law later this year on local government. This will include rules for the transition groups.

We will need to know what dates everything changes for the new law.

For choice 1

Do we give the councils a date to change by? This is important because we need elections for the new council a year before it starts.

The councillors for the new council need to sort out the money and how to work.

For choice 2

There are local government elections in 2021. So councils who want to change first will need to tell us before those elections.

Councillors for the new larger councils can be voted in the 2021 local government elections. Those councillors will start to decide how they will work in the new councils.

The next local government elections will be in 2025. So the new councillors for the rest of the councils will be elected in 2025.

The transition groups for both sets of councils will have enough time to work. We will make sure they have enough time.

For choice 3

All elections for the new councils will be in 2021. The councillors will start to decide how they will work in the new council.

The new councils would start 1 April 2022.

The transition group would start this year in 2018.

We prefer the election date in June 2021 to be the first elections for the new councils. We will look at other dates where there are good reasons.

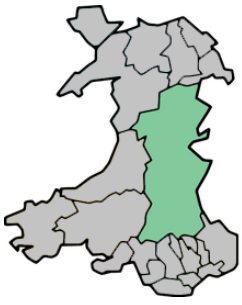
Councillors for the new councils will have to get things ready before the new councils start. They will need to:

- decide how the money is spent

- get top managers for the new council

- begin to decide rules for working.

From 2025 councillors for all the new councils will be for 5 years.



Powys will not be joining with anyone. Elections in Powys will happen at the same time as everywhere else.

Please go to page 10 in the questions booklet and answer all of questions 3, 4 and 5.

Wards for elections

Wards are areas split into smaller parts for voting. One or more councillors are voted in for each ward. There are about 5 thousand people in each ward.

With having new larger councils we need new wards decided on as well. A special group will work on this.

They need time to look at everything properly.

We hope they will let us know by August 2020 what the wards are. This will give the political parties time to get ready.

Please go to page 12 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 6.

Budgets

We have to make some legal changes to how the new councils get the money they need and what they spend it on.

Transition groups and councillors for the new councils will work together on the budgets. They will plan for a few years.

They will decide how much council tax you will pay. They must look at all the information there is before deciding how much the tax will be. They must also think carefully how the council tax will affect you.

We have looked at council tax now across Wales. People in the same sort of houses pay almost the same in council tax. This means there should not be big changes in council tax for you to cope with.

In a few places the gap is a bit bigger and we might need to do things to help with this.

6. Making local government stronger and giving support through the changes

With the changes we want local government to be stronger and be able to do more.

The importance of councillors

Councillors work hard to improve the lives of people in their community.

A councillor is someone who is elected by local people to represent them on the council. Each council has between 30 and 75 councillors, depending on how many people live in each area.

Councillors have a lot of pressure and stress to deal with:

- a lot of difficult decisions to make with cuts to services

- more work than ever

- deal with comments on the internet, social media and newspapers.

These pressures and the money they are paid mean not many people want to be councillors.

We want our councillors to be the same as all the people in Wales. We need councillors with:

- **diverse** education, families and lives

Diverse is different people with different ways of living and culture.

- different interests and thoughts

- different ideas for what is important.

We think the amount they do needs understanding by everyone. We must pay them well for a job well done and respect them for their work.

Councillors need support and good information to do their job well.

Starting new councils may give us a chance to think more about the support councillors need.

We know it is sometimes hard to see and understand what our politicians do.

We hope the changes will begin to change this. We all need to talk about how to have councils open to checks on what they are doing and how we can all become involved with their work.

Please go to page 13 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 7.

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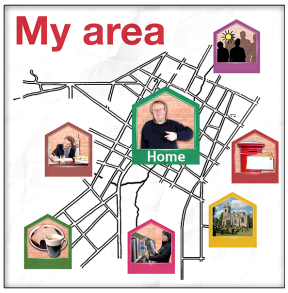
Welsh Government

More power

We must be clear what the Welsh Government does and what councils do.



Councils will be able to do more things to meet the needs of their local areas. This may be useful when they are working on things like:

- housing

- transport

- training

- the **environment**.

> The **environment** is where we live. It includes the land, the sea, the air and everything that lives on and in it. For example: plants, animals and fish.

Please go to page 14 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 8.

Changing services

Having new councils with more powers means they can look at how services work. They will be able to change services to suit where you live.

Councils can use **technology** more to improve their services.

> **Technology** means things like the internet, smartphones and tablet computers.

Usually the more you buy the less it costs. So they will be able to buy more for the money they have.

It will be possible for the new councils to join together to buy things. So they should be able to get things even cheaper.

Please go to page 15 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 9.

Getting the best from people

The staff are the best thing about councils. They have many skills and we must use them well.

Councils employ a lot of people across Wales. When jobs are cut it has a big effect in the communities.

There will be a lot of change for staff and this can be difficult.

A lot about councils is the same all over Wales but there are differences as well. We must plan for the problems staff may have.

There will be chances for people to learn new skills and find better ways to do things.

Top managers must support their staff and be positive about the changes.

The support we offer to councils

We have looked at what all the changes may mean. There will be the difficult things to sort out. It will not be easy and will need a lot of work.

When we know which choice to go with we will start giving support for the changes.

This will include:

- staff training

- help with joining services together

- help with technology.

We need to plan what will be needed and when. This will make it easier to do things step by step.

Supporting staff

We know that supporting all managers to make a new council with new services is very important. We know there are managers with skills and understanding to do this job well.

There were cuts so they might not have all the staff they need for these changes.

We will try to support the new councils to fill the gaps in staff.

Looking after people

The same staff may have different pay in different parts of Wales. We must make sure staff are treated fairly. We are looking at ideas for how to have a fair way forward.

Trade unions will be part of working out the best way to make these changes.

Changing the way we do things

We have a new way for councils to change their services called the **Future Generations Framework**. We think it will help services:

- be strong

- last well

- support people to be healthy and happy.

Services need to support people to live independently as long as possible. They may need to change to do this well.

We can use technology to help us understand how services can improve.

We will look at having one system for things every council does in the same way. Having one system will make it easier for:

- services to share information

- councils to share services the public do not use like paying staff.

This will save money and mean staff have time to do other things.

This is a time to look at what can change and be better. Not just carry on with the way things have always happened.

Councils need to know what buildings and land they own. Then they can look at how they are using them and how to use them better.

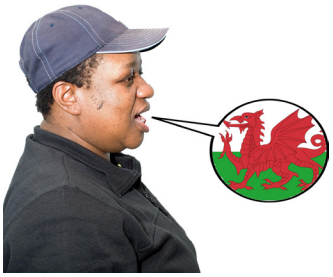
We gave money this year for councils to start this. We may give more support in the future to think about it all.

Please go to page 15 in the questions booklet and answer all of question 10.

Welsh language

A group looked at the Welsh language in local government.

They said we need more staff who speak Welsh. We agree with them.



We think changing local government will give more chances for Welsh speakers to use Welsh in services they get from their council.

Please go to page 17 in the questions booklet and answer all of questions 11 and 12.

7. Community and town councils

Community councils are an important part of local government. Often they are very close to the communities they work for. They see how services affect people.

Community councils are not all the same. They have different jobs and budgets.

We are looking at how to make them stronger. We will have a report in October 2018.

Please make sure you have answered as many questions in the separate booklet as you can.

Thank you.

Hard words

Councillors

You vote councillors onto your local council. They decide what your community needs and how to spend the money the council has.

Diverse

Diverse is different people with different ways of living and culture.

Environment

The environment is where we live. It includes the land, the sea, the air and everything that lives on and in it. For example: plants, animals and fish.

Local government

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Technology

Technology means things like the internet, smartphones and tablet computers.

Transition

Transition is changing from one way of doing things to another.

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