

**Meeting of the Partnership Council for Wales
10.30-12.00pm, Thursday 1 February 2018,
Seminar Rooms 1 and 2, Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay.**

Minutes

Attendees

Members

Alun Davies AM, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services
Cllr Debbie Wilcox – Newport City Council
Cllr John W Thomas – Vale of Glamorgan
Cllr Huw Thomas – The City of Cardiff Council
Cllr Ieuan Williams – Anglesey County Council
Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn – Cyngor Sir Ceredigion
Cllr Mair Stephens – Carmarthenshire County Council
Rt. Hon Alun Michael – Police and Crime Commissioner Representative
Cllr Tudor Davies – Fire and Rescue Authorities' Representative
Cllr Mike Cuddy – Community Councils Representative
Marcus Longley – National Health Service Wales and Local Health Boards Representative

Observers

Steve Thomas – Welsh Local Government Association
Peter Davies – Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Anna Nicholl - Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Lyn Cadwallader – One Voice Wales
Jane Holownia – Auditor General Wales

Welsh Government Officials

Reg Kilpatrick
Claire Bennett
Maureen Howell
Amelia John
Debra Carter
Rob Hay
Claire Germain
Aaron Fortt
John Davies
Jason Plange

Apologies

Melanie Doel – National Park Authorities Representative
Cllr Glynog Davies - National Park Authorities Representative
Cllr Aaron Shotton – Flintshire County Council
Cllr Rob Stewart – City and Council of Swansea
Martin Mansfield – Wales TUC
Cllr Andrew Morgan – Rhondda Cynon Taf

Action Points

1. Any further proposed additions to the Partnership Council Forward Work Programme to be sent to the Partnership Council secretariat. **(Paragraph 1.3)**.
2. Local Government to ensure the process of ratifying and implementing the content of the MOU in respect of the removal of child burial fees throughout Wales is completed. **(Paragraph 1.5)**.
3. Local Government to consider how engagement can be improved between them and Welsh Government in respect of major issues that concern them. **(Paragraph 2.18)**.
4. Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys to put arrangements in place to work more closely with community and town councils. **(Paragraph 3.10)**.
5. Local Government to respond to the WCVA paper which will result in future discussions. Peter Davies to have further discussions on the issues raised when he meets with the Cabinet Secretary on 28 February. WCVA and One Voice Wales to meet to discuss a common architecture. **(Paragraph 4.5)**.

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

- 1.1. The Cabinet Secretary opened the meeting by welcoming all the members to his first Partnership Council for Wales meeting.
- 1.2. The Cabinet Secretary explained that he was very much looking forward to working with all Partnership Council members and explained that his focus would be on practical delivery and how working together would enable the communities that we serve to be more resilient and prosper. He went on to say that he believed in local government and its ability to improve people's lives for the better.
- 1.3. The Cabinet Secretary then turned to the business of the day and first of all explained that the minutes from the previous meeting on 20 July had been agreed by email. He then noted that the Forward Work Programme (FWP) had been included in the paper for the meeting and if members wanted to add any items to the FWP, they could do so by informing the Partnership Council secretariat directly. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the new Local Government Scheme was laid before the National Assembly on 27 October 2017 and thanked members for their assistance in finalising the report. He also explained that an update paper which provides a mid point report on the 10 year Wales Infrastructure Plan had been provided as a paper to note.
- 1.4. The Cabinet Secretary informed members discussions around capital funding had been completed and a road refurbishment scheme of up to £30m had been agreed with the WLGA. It was reported that a very helpful meeting of the Finance Sub Group (FSG) had taken place since the last meeting of the Partnership Council and an extra £75m would be invested over the next three years to accelerate the delivery of the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme, £30 million as an immediate injection this year. The Cabinet Secretary explained that other capital issues had been addressed or were in the process of being addressed.

- 1.5. The Cabinet Secretary thanked local government representatives for the leadership they had shown around the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on child burial fees, noting it was an important step forward. He explained that he was aware that many local authorities were already in the process of ratifying and implementing the content of the (MOU), but looked to Partnership Council members to help ensure that the MOU was put into practice throughout Wales immediately. The Cabinet Secretary indicated he would be reviewing progress in July and then after a year or so, to ensure the agreement was working satisfactorily for all sides.

Matters Arising

2. Local Government Reform

- 2.1 The Cabinet Secretary asked if there were any other matters arising members wished to raise, before going into the substantive agenda items for the meeting.
- 2.2 Cllr. Wilcox thanked the Cabinet Secretary for his opening remarks but expressed her surprise that an item on Local Government Reform was not included on the agenda. Cllr Wilcox explained that councils were fully aware of the conversations that had recently taken place around this particular issue and that the situation had appeared to have changed. Cllr Wilcox noted the previous commitment that there would be no structural changes to local government for a ten year period and therefore would welcome a discussion to ensure clarity around this issue.
- 2.3 The Cabinet Secretary explained that a meeting to discuss this issue was planned for later today focussed on the proposed Local Government Bill. He clarified that the ten year period was subject to local government agreeing to mandated regional working. As he phrased it, it was a comma and not a full stop after the commitment. Given that local government was no longer supportive of mandated regional working, there was a need to work towards a different process.
- 2.4 The Cabinet Secretary explained that he had inherited the Bill and felt a conclusion was required to a debate on local government reform. The Cabinet Secretary noted that when they met in November, local government had told him its future financial position (although better than in England), was unsustainable. He pointed out increased expenditure does not in itself deliver long term sustainable services. The Cabinet Secretary said he was keen to reach consensus and have agreement on the way forward but simply saying no to all options was not sustainable. There must be change, and anyone walking away from the debate would lose the chance to shape that change.
- 2.5 Cllr. Mike Cuddy commented that he hoped the ongoing community and town council review would not be unduly affected by these latest developments.
- 2.6 The Cabinet Secretary noted he valued the role of community and town councils and would like to see them playing a bigger role. He went on to say that where there were structures in place, they should be maximised, strengthened and valued. He reported he has met with the Review Panel and has asked for any proposals for change which required legislation to

be brought forward early so they could be taken into account in the preparation of the Bill, as things move further forward.

- 2.7 The Cabinet Secretary drew attention to the invitation to suggest additional flexibilities and noted that all responses in respect of the exercise will be published. The Cabinet Secretary went on to say that one of his main objectives was to empower local government and that he wanted to move power significantly towards those delivering services, so they could be leaders of change in their communities. The Cabinet Secretary explained that he will look at this positively and monitor the approach to enable more power for the civic centre.
- 2.8 Cllr. Ieuan Williams expressed his concerns about 'top down' reform and stated councils should be left alone to deliver; he was also keen to stress what had been achieved during these austere times. He was very disappointed with proposals for further change as he felt councils were succeeding with less money.
- 2.9 The Cabinet Secretary agreed he had seen good work across Wales but that cuts were challenging services and it was not possible to argue that there wasn't a need for change. The response couldn't be to do nothing.
- 2.10 Cllr Elin ap Gwynn raised the cuts in funding, and pointed out they were working regionally. She also noted the contrast between health and local government in terms of being able to manage within the budget available.
- 2.11 The Cabinet Secretary responded that he was not saying that local authorities were providing poor services but he was aware that services in Ceredigion, as everywhere else in Wales, were suffering because of the financial constraints. The impact of the financial pressures on services was an issue raised with him constantly. The previous proposal was to mandate regional working but that was not wanted. It is not possible to say that there is no need for change and change will happen.
- 2.12 Alun Michael agreed on the importance of partnership from a police perspective. He explained that police and crime commissioners and chief constables felt like spectators in this debate, though they were a key partner. He welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's statement on community safety, and noted the links to Public Services Boards. He noted the challenge of different footprints for different purposes and called for more partnerships and fewer meetings. He also requested as much cohesion and as simple an approach from Welsh Government as was practicably possible. He welcomed the consultation on the transfer of healthcare services for people in the Bridgend Council area to Cwm Taf University Health Board (UHB) from Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board which he strongly supported. All concerned were keen for the issue to be resolved quickly so that planning and financial implications could be addressed by partners as well as by the two Health Boards. He asked the Cabinet Secretary to seek an early decision – mostly there was support for the proposed change and a long period of further deliberation would be unhelpful”
- 2.13 The Cabinet Secretary agreed he was in support of simple robust arrangements. Accountability was vital and how we organise our selves is critical. He went on to say that

he wanted local government to be political leaders in their area, with the authority to say what is best for their area, a mandate to deliver and held accountable locally.

- 2.14 Cllr Wilcox welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's strong statement on this issue. She stated she was on record as not supporting 22 councils and was keen for dialogue and discussion.
- 2.15 The Cabinet Secretary promised to invest as much time as possible out and about meeting people. He also explained that he wanted to move forward with a vision that was agreed collectively. He pointed out no one had argued for 22 local authorities in Wales. He wished to move forward on the principle of consent, but there will be a Bill and the Bill will contain additional powers, but will also contain proposals for change.
- 2.16 Cllr Huw Thomas raised the ongoing issue of the funding of activities previously funded through the Minority Ethnic Achievement element of the Education Improvement Grant. He stated that local government were of the view that the current offer of £5 million was not acceptable. Local government felt there were strong grounds for a judicial review. The legal action being considered was in relation to the process rather than the decision. This was not ideal and was being considered as a last resort.
- 2.17 The Cabinet Secretary was hopeful that a solution could be found which would avoid the need for legal proceedings. He was keen for an interim solution now that allowed time to resolve this issue for the longer term. He indicated this was something which sat with the First Minister to resolve.
- 2.18 For the future, the Cabinet Secretary offered invited local government to provide any thoughts on how informal lines of communication could be improved so if there is a problem on the horizon we can seek to address it before it becomes a more serious issue.

3. Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys

- 3.1 The Cabinet Secretary explained that the Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys was established by the Welsh Government in July 2016 after the National Assembly for Wales election and the EU Referendum in response to the Welsh Labour manifesto commitment.
- 3.2 He went onto explain that the Taskforce was established to build on the strengths and assets of the valleys communities to develop a new approach to investing in the future of the most economically deprived areas of the South Wales valleys ensuring every individual has opportunity to fulfil their potential. The purpose of the Taskforce was to shape and bring the full weight of Welsh Government resources to bear on issues facing the Valleys. The Cabinet Secretary then asked Maureen Howell to introduce the paper.
- 3.3 Maureen explained that on 20 July 2017, Our Valleys, Our Future, the high level plan for the Valleys was launched. Maureen explained the plan outlined three priorities: good quality jobs and the right skills to do them; better public services and; local communities. The plan was developed following feedback from people living and working in the Valleys and it set out a range of aims and actions in each of the three priority areas.
- 3.4 Maureen then briefly walked members through the paper explaining next steps and outlining the action that would be taken forward. Maureen explained that an engagement plan would

be published in the next few months which would set out how the taskforce will engage and empower people in communities throughout the South Wales Valleys to ensure these plans met peoples' needs and expectations. Maureen then welcomed comments from members.

- 3.5 Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn asked when would there be something similar to the Valleys Taskforce coming forward for rural communities. Cllr ap Gwyn explained that the economy within rural Wales had been weakened over the years and younger people within the areas of South Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Powys had moved away from the area to seek jobs and a better standard of living. Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn, sought more support for rural communities.
- 3.6 The Cabinet Secretary explained that he was fully aware of the situation within rural areas and the issue was indeed on his radar. He went onto say that he wanted to move away from rhetoric and that it was very important to recognise the different needs of different areas within Wales, and the need to address these issues differently. He said that statistics show very, very, deep problems within the valleys and that poverty there was on an international scale and therefore unique and this is why things need to be addressed.
- 3.7 Cllr Huw Thomas was of the opinion that the role of the cities in terms of their contribution to the Valleys economy was missing from the Valleys delivery plan. He pointed out that many people from the valleys travel to Cardiff to work and the jobs created in the cities would make a significant contribution to the target of getting 7,000 unemployed or economically inactive people living in the Valleys into work.
- 3.8 The Cabinet Secretary agreed with Cllr Thomas and explained that perhaps there was a need to do more. He went onto explain that it was imperative to have a regional economy which included the cities; and to ensure that proposals were relevant to the people of the area. There was a need to think about how this is made a success, particularly for the north of the Valleys and there was also a need to recreate the link between the Valleys and the cities. There was a requirement on Welsh Government to shape the policy and to look to bring together the power and expertise of the people.
- 3.9 Alun Michael suggested there were strong links to the priority of addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences and the projects the police were involved in. He asked how strong the links were between PSBs and the Taskforce. He stressed the need to address social issues as well as jobs. In response, the Cabinet Secretary explained that this was the ethos behind the Valleys Landscape Park.
- 3.10 Cllr Mike Cuddy was of the opinion that community and town councils could play a major role within this initiative. Maureen Howell agreed that there was a need for better join up with the Taskforce as community and town councils had lots to offer in terms of understanding their communities and facilitating engagement.
- 3.11 Further discussion took place around the poor perception of the Valleys which was often portrayed by the media and Partnership Council members were of the opinion that there was a need to sell the positives; and that it was within the Taskforce' gift to challenge this. Maureen agreed, and explained that a PR company had already been engaged to help with this particular issue.

4. The Third Sector Perspective

- 4.1 Peter Davies introduced the agenda item with a brief summary of the paper WCVA presented to the group. He touched on the varied nature of the third sector, its role in local economies, and the role of community anchor organisations. He also highlighted vagaries in the application of the Funding Code of Practice and third sector representation on Public Services Boards and some of the difficulties this causes the sector. However, he went on to stress that these issues are a shared responsibility and that the third sector has a role in tackling (especially around governance, accountability and demonstrating added value) if we are to create strategic relationships that maximise the third sector's potential locally. He also noted that he would welcome a strategic review to recognise where we are in the relationship between the third sector and local government and how they can connect more effectively.
- 4.2 Amelia John noted that there are examples of good practice, but there are some areas that are not working well, stating as an example that commissioning and contracting processes can sometimes disadvantage smaller third sector organisations. She went on to highlight some of the good cross-sector work being done around co-developing meaningful compacts between local government and the third sector, as well as work around community asset transfer where all sectors are working together to see how we can create sustainable local solutions. She commented that the continued involvement of local government in these processes was essential and very welcome.
- 4.3 In response to WCVA's paper Cllr Debbie Wilcox commented that there is a desire for, and examples of good shared endeavour and that WLGA and local government want to build on good practice and make it sector wide. Cllr Wilcox also noted that the WLGA want to see earlier, timely dialogue with the third sector but budgeting issues and timelines can often hamper this desire and that it has to be understood that the public service environment is a complex one and the third sector are one of a number of possible partners in trying to deliver value for money.
- 4.4 Cllr Mike Cuddy commented that there was a lack of common architecture between Town and Community Councils and the Third Sector, and that a conversation was needed about how they conduct activities locally to best effect. Peter Davies agreed.
- 4.5 WLGA will organise a response to WCVA's paper which will steer further discussions; Peter Davies will have further discussions on the issues raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services when they meet on the 28th of February; WCVA and One Voice Wales will meet to discuss a common architecture.

5. Any Other Business

- 5.1 The Cabinet Secretary thanked all members for their contributions and asked if anyone had any other business that they wished to raise.

- 5.2 In response to a further request from Cllr Debbie Wilcox for an update on obtaining passes to access the Assembly building, the Cabinet Secretary explained that he was sympathetic but it was the Assembly Commission's building it was their responsibility; the issue had been raised with them.
- 5.3 Finally, the Cabinet Secretary informed members that the next meeting of the Partnership Council for Wales was scheduled to take place on **Thursday 10 May 2018**.