

**Extraordinary meeting of the Partnership Council for Wales**  
**10:00 – 12:00, 10 January 2019**  
**Conference Room C, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay**  
**Minutes of meeting**

**Attendees**

**Members**

Julie James AM – Minister for Housing and Local Government (Chair)  
Hannah Blythyn AM – Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Mark Drakeford AM, First Minister  
Jeremy Miles AM, Counsel General & Brexit Minister  
Cllr Debbie Wilcox – Leader of Welsh Local Government Association and Leader of Newport City Council  
Cllr Andrew Morgan – Presiding Officer for Welsh Local Government Association and Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council  
Cllr Huw Thomas – Leader of Cardiff Council  
Cllr Rob Stewart - Leader of City and County of Swansea Council  
Cllr Mair Stephens – Elected Member of Carmarthenshire County Council  
Cllr John W Thomas - Leader of Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council  
Cllr. Linda Evans, Elected Member of Carmarthenshire County Council  
Rt. Hon Alun Michael – Police and Crime Commissioner Representative  
Cllr Michael Cuddy – Community Councils Representative  
Maria Battle – National Health Service Wales and Local Health Boards Representative  
Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC

**Observers**

Chris Llewellyn, Chief Executive, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)  
Tim Peppin, Welsh Local Government Association  
Ruth Marks, Chief Executive, Wales Council for Voluntary Action  
Lyn Cadwallader, Chief Executive, One Voice Wales

**Welsh Government Officials**

Reg Kilpatrick, Director, Local Government  
Simon Brindle, Director, Brexit Strategy

**Secretariat**

Paula James

**Apologies**

Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn - Ceredigion  
Cllr Aaron Shotton – Flintshire County Council  
Cllr Ieuan Williams – Elected Member of Isle of Anglesey County Council  
Cllr Tudor Davies - Fire and Rescue Authorities representative  
Adrian Crompton - Wales Audit Office (Observer)  
Peter Davies, Chair - Wales Council for Voluntary Action (Observer)

## **Action Points**

- Consideration to be given to council tax mail shots being used for Welsh Government to get messages out to citizens about the Brexit portal and any other relevant sources of information.
  - Action – Brexit & communications teams
- Brexit to be a standing item for Partnership Council and Workforce Partnership Council meetings
  - Action – Partnership Council secretariat
- Welsh Government to continue to follow up on opportunity to submit a Welsh bid to the UK contingency fund to support some of the areas identified. All members to share any information or intelligence with members as it arises.
  - Action – Welsh Government & all members
- Welsh Government to share work it had done with the Home Office on the settled status scheme
  - Action – Brexit team, Welsh Government

## **Item 1 – welcome and introductions**

1. The Chair, Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government, opened the meeting by welcoming members and thanking them all for attending this extraordinary meeting of the Partnership Council.
2. The Chair outlined the agenda and purpose of the meeting, and noted that discussion on a ‘no deal’ Brexit was not what she had hoped for her first meeting as Chair of the Partnership Council. The Chair stated that she looked forward to being able to work together on other more positive areas in the future. The Chair stated that this meeting was to be a conversation between all parties and that we would hear from the First Minister, the Counsel General and Reg Kilpatrick, but that it was very important that this was a conversation with all parties engaged.
3. The Chair then introduced the First Minister to the meeting and invited him to speak to the first item – Preparing for a ‘no deal’ Brexit scenario.

## **Item 2 - Preparing for a ‘no deal’ Brexit scenario: Context setting**

4. The First Minister (FM) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained he would outline what the Welsh Government is doing to prepare for Brexit and the work being undertaken with the UK Government on Brexit and Brexit preparedness.
5. The First Minister noted that the risk of no deal had increased at the start of the Autumn 2018 term, and grown since then. As a result, despite the Welsh

Government being clear that the imperative must be to avoid a no deal exit, action had been underway through the autumn to prepare for a no deal Brexit. The 'meaningful vote' in the UK Parliament was going to happen on 15 January and it was highly likely the Government is going to lose the vote. In light of this, and while still being clear that a no deal exit was not an acceptable outcome, we have to focus on making sure that we are as prepared as possible for a new deal.

6. The First Minister confirmed that the Welsh Government is looking at all possibilities resulting from a no deal and looking to mitigate the impacts. He stressed however that, no matter what we do, we will not be able to avoid the impacts of a no deal Brexit. It is possible there will be impacts across the economy which will impact Wales in areas such as tax income meaning that we will have less money to spend on public services.
7. The First Minister outlined what Welsh Government is doing on Brexit, including:
  - making time on the assembly floor to deal with legislation issues arising from leaving the EU
  - clearing much of the Government's business agenda to make time for 'no deal' Brexit business in the Assembly, including making a statement on 'no deal' if the Prime Minister loses the vote
  - Ministers continuing to engage with the UK government and other devolved administrations where opportunities present themselves and through the regular JMC meetings, the next one of which is scheduled to take place in Cardiff in January
  - engaging at a UK level on civil contingency work
  - working across the public sector to pool information and make sure efforts are focussed and that the sum of all our efforts can have more impact
  - finding additional modest sums of funding to help voluntary sector, NHS Confederation, WLGA, Police forces etc to prepare for Brexit
  - taking all opportunities to share information about necessary preparations with stakeholders and partners
8. The First Minister stressed Brexit will have a significant impact on the Welsh economy and we will face significant issues on recruitment, trade and trade barriers and so on. The First Minister then invited comments or questions.

### **Item 3 – Local government specific context**

9. Cllr Debbie Wilcox thanked the First Minister for his observations. She noted that she had represented Local Government at a meeting with the Secretary of State for Wales on Monday and that the tone of that meeting was very sombre and few questions were asked. Local government had asked for more money from the UK government because there is insufficient capacity within local government to

respond to the issues associated with Brexit. She believed the cities would be hardest hit by Brexit.

10. Cllr Andrew Morgan agreed that additional resource was needed and that Local government were struggling to add Brexit work to the day job. He believed each Local authority would benefit from a dedicated full time equivalent to do this work. He believed £1m a year for two years would help support all 22 local authorities to respond. He cited food supplies as an area they would need to focus on, particularly for school meals. They were looking at the resilience of supply, particularly for raw ingredients and the impact right through the supply chain not just the final produce supplied to schools. He noted that it was hard to judge the potential impact until we knew what type of Brexit we were going to get.
11. Cllr Morgan also raised the issues of the settled status scheme. Local government are attempting to calculate the impact of this and the potential for local authorities to fund applications in order to address staff concerns. He believed that this might have a significant impact on areas of social care as an example. (Cllr Wilcox noted that in Newport this would likely effect 5000 individuals). Cllr Morgan said that local authorities would want to meet with Welsh Government to discuss these additional costs.
12. The Chair noted that Welsh Government has funded a Preparedness Toolkit, which had been developed by Grant Thornton, and asked whether local authorities were finding it useful?
13. Tim Peppin, WLGA, confirmed that many local authorities were finding the toolkit useful.
14. Cllr Huw Thomas said that Cardiff Council had written to the Brexit Secretary in the UK government for further details, but the response had been cursory with little information. He noted that there was a lack of detail being provided from UK government to local government on Brexit. He also agreed that the EU settled status scheme was an issue for staff. The Scottish Government had announced that it will look to fund the scheme for all public sector workers in Scotland and asked whether the Welsh Government could do the same. He also noted they would need to establish advice centres for their citizens (approximately 20,000 EU residents, including up to 5000 complex cases). Cllr Thomas stated the Home Office expectation is that councils provide the advice through centres, but asked where the resources would come from to do this? There is a desire to help citizens, but need resources to do so.
15. Cllr Rob Stewart echoed the issues on the settlement scheme stating approximately 550 EU nationals in his local authority would be affected. He believed, given the complexity and range of services local government provide, it was difficult to prepare for all scenarios. Local government needed assistance with resilience planning and meeting associated costs.

16. The Chair believed that it would be helpful given the members comments to hear from Jeremy Miles AM (Counsel General and Brexit Minister) and Reg Kilpatrick (Director of Local Government, Welsh Government) at this point.

#### **Item 4 – Preparedness and civil contingencies response**

17. The Counsel General echoed the First Minister's points on the challenge of a no deal scenario and the need to increase preparedness to mitigate the damage. He stressed that we need to be purposeful and proactive but not to panic. The key benefit of the meeting today is to be able to talk openly and bring ideas to the table. He outlined four broad categories of activity:

- Civil contingencies
- Engagement with a range of projects at the UK level – there is a challenge of transparency of information across these
- Issues with particular relevance to Wales – Spatial issues, poverty and economic sectors
- legislation – working on the statute book to make sure on day one we can continue to deliver what needs to be done – noting that we were half way through this process and will be ready on time

18. The Counsel General noted one of the key benefits of this meeting was to talk openly. Meeting this challenge will require creativity, insight and shared experiences.

19. Reg Kilpatrick thanked the chair and went on to present issues on civil contingencies. He agreed that there were significant challenges due to a lack of information from the UK government and therefore lack of information on what to plan for. He believed, however, that we do have a good set of tried and tested civil contingencies frameworks which can help deal with any issues.

20. Reg noted, however, that the civil contingencies response came into effect at the end of the line. It was not a replacement for preparedness activity and should not be seen as the primary response to issues around Brexit. He noted that there was a lot of work preparing for business as usual and the new normal post-Brexit, a civil contingencies response should only be needed if this fails. He thanked the WLGA for their efforts so far on this and on bringing local authorities together to address the Brexit issues.

21. Reg informed members that he had asked the Local Resilience Fora to undertake a risk analysis for their areas. They had delivered high quality risk analysis which can inform local planning. Their analysis has been aggregated into a national assessment, which should inform work at Wales level. Local authority leaders should ask their Emergency Planning Co-ordinators for sight of these.

22. Separately a Local Government EU Transition Advisory Panel has been established and would meet in two weeks.
23. The Welsh Government response in the event of no deal will need to be significant. Partners will have to do the work needed very quickly and Welsh Government intends to talk in detail about this with Local Resilience Fora next week.
24. Three key areas to build up understanding were highlighted:
- we all need to be aware of Civil Contingencies work and what is needed – are all Local Authorities in a good place and, if not, how do we address this?
  - the individual issues and complexities of supply chains
  - the need to avoid additional complexity – we need to use existing fora and re-prioritise work to address Brexit. We are all working within financial constraints and all face the challenge of managing within that.
25. The Chair noted on the issues of structures that, whilst the Welsh Government have an Advisory Panel, there is a need for feedback on what are the best structures to facilitate information flow.
26. Alun Michael welcomed the meeting and discussions. He noted he was not going to comment on Police operational matters because he was confident the police will do what needs doing to impartially respond to impact of Brexit. He also noted that the relationship between Welsh forces, Welsh Government and local government in Wales is very good. The important issue for him was that the EU was important for peace and security. He believed we should focus not on the short term event of Brexit but the longer term which is more difficult to plan for. We cannot tackle issues until we know what they are.
27. Alun Michael believed that the change in access to Europol will impact on practical policing issues and UK police forces will no longer be represented at these discussions. The UK will also no longer be part of the network for the European arrest warrant. He took the opportunity to request that police forces are kept informed at national and local level and welcomed the view that we should use existing structures and not create new ones.
28. He also noted that we need to ensure the citizens continue to see EU citizens as Welsh citizens and that Wales maintains the concept of an open and welcoming Wales. We need to maintain community cohesion and our plans and responses need to be for the longer term.
29. Cllr Mike Cuddy representing One Voice Wales noted that the Community and Town Council (CTC) sector may not be able to contribute immediately but they should be considered in how they can contribute for the longer term. The sector would welcome a seat at the table from the start. CTC's represent a rich network of councils across Wales which could contribute.

30. Ruth Marks welcomed the discussion and acknowledged the support of the EU transition fund in helping the third sector to prepare for Brexit. She took the opportunity to make a number of points on volunteers, the voluntary sector and engaging the sector in Wales.
- On a practical side, as raised by Cllr Wilcox, citizens need advice about their rights but voluntary agencies and citizens advice services are stretched and have concerns about the advice to give
  - There is an impact in terms of social care both voluntary and contracted charities who provide 24/7 support to those who may be most vulnerable
  - County Voluntary Councils across Wales work in civil contingencies. The Charities Commission for England and Wales are apparently doing some work on contingencies.
  - In terms of the best ways of engagement, WCVA and CVCs have significant local networks and frameworks that can be used, not forgetting specialist charities working hard to continue after March.
31. Ruth Marks also raised the importance of continuing to embed the Third Sector Scheme and its ways of working.
32. Maria Battle also welcomed the opportunity to attend the meeting. She informed members the health service has been working closely with partners to identify issues but planning to address these is very different. She believed the health service shared the same issues which have been articulated, particularly around the workforce, including with the interdependencies between social care and the NHS workforce. Future EU recruitment will be an issue, there are shortages across all Health Boards now. The NHS Confederation is assisting people on status and there is advice through advisory services but it is important the NHS continues to give the message to EU nationals within the workforce, “we still want you and we will help you”. Maria was supportive of the idea of a dedicated staff to focus on Brexit. She also suggested there might be scope to secure expert advice in partnership with legal firms based in Wales for EU Nationals seeking settled status.
33. She also noted the issues on supply chains, which health services also share and she saw value in having communication channels which could help share ideas, particularly utilising existing structures. She also noted the health board have a lot of experience in contingency planning but they are looking again at their plans.
34. The First Minister thanked everyone for their contributions, noting it was interesting to hear views from each sector. The First Minister offered five quick observations on the discussion:
- He recognised that supply chain issues were very important across all services, especially those services involving food supply for vulnerable citizens. The UK government had stated that they don't expect there to be any food shortages in shops but there will be some scarce foods. We need

to work collectively to avoid panic buying as this is more likely to drive shortages. The First Minister observed that community councils' knowledge of the most vulnerable citizens could be very valuable.

- In terms of civil contingencies, we had to recognise there is a difference between Brexit and other issues such as snow or a flu outbreak because Brexit is a longer term issue which requires months of activity. The UK government's language is starting to reflect that 'contingency' stockpiling is now a buffer for the longer term, not a short term quick fix.
- On workforce, we definitely have shared challenges. Welsh Government had recently moved 25 senior members of staff away from their day job and into Brexit planning roles – we have had to re-prioritise to address this issue. UK Government has floated the idea of a shortage occupation list for Wales. We have a strong case to argue for this so we can ensure arrangements deliver for Wales. We need the list to support the health service and local authorities particularly. We need to take care when considering paying for the settled status scheme. UK Home Office may not allow the public sector to do this – they have previously suggested they are not willing for the Welsh Government to do this directly. Those wishing to do so may need to set up complex re-imburement approaches to undertake this. The Welsh Government had done some work on this which could be shared.
- On advisory services, the Welsh Government will be providing funding for additional advice services but we will need to be certain on the demarcation between general advice and specialist advice. The laws for each are very different and complex, and we have been liaising with the Home Office on this.
- On funding generally, the UK Treasury has confirmed there is a contingency fund and the Welsh Government will be able to claim from this but there is currently no processes or rules to enable that. If we do crash out in March UK Government has already said that there will be an emergency budget.

35. Cllr Andrew Morgan asked if it was possible for information coming out of the Welsh Government to areas such as Local Resilience Fora to be copied into Chief Executives and local authority leaders. He also asked what the Welsh Government's communications plan is and how local government could help to shape and influence this? Cllr Morgan stated that we need to consider issues of panic buying, misinformation and any public safety issues. Messaging was important to address any perceived risks which might drive unwanted behaviours.

36. The Counsel General informed members there was a communications plan in place for Brexit and the Welsh Government was developing a single web portal for all Brexit advice. It was important we provide a source of reliable and dependable advice and that messages can be easily understood. The Counsel General stated that it was essential for the Welsh Government to work with local

authorities as large organisations with significant channels of communication with citizens.

37. Reg Kilpatrick informed members the civil contingencies response framework will be in place from the middle of February and was interested in members' views on how we shared common messages and advice in advance of that structure being in place. Communications and social media impact will be important.
38. Ruth Marks stressed the importance of partnership working and shared actions. She noted that some partnerships were including private sector to cover aspects of logistics and storage. In terms of vulnerable citizens, there may be an opportunity to work with utility providers who have registers of vulnerable customers. She said it would be interesting to see if those providers were in the same space as us and how they are dealing with it.
39. Chris Llewellyn welcomed the messages on communications and planning that the Counsel General was giving and echoed the view that we need to use existing networks where possible. He believed there was a lot local government can do at a practical level if needed.
40. Martin Mansfield believed the workforce would be able to deliver for Brexit but we had to remember that the workforce is also impacted. There would be an immediate impact on Welsh industry and on the public sector in dealing with mass redundancies in the Welsh economy. The impact is likely to be on those individuals who are less mobile in the workforce. People most impacted are those who can cope with it less – the 21 per cent of workers without qualifications will be most affected by redundancies.
41. Martin did not believe we would be able to use similar short term responses (for example PROACT) which had previously been used and we would need a longer term response to deal with very long term downturn.
42. He believed we need to deliver a proper social partnership approach, both locally and regionally, to respond positively to the challenges ahead of us and that this needs to be more coordinated and consistent across Wales.
43. He stated that the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) is on a much better basis at the moment, but noted that we do not have same structure for the third sector. It is important to not set up new bodies but to make existing structures work better. Martin believed the WPC should be on a statutory basis, but cannot wait for that. Delivery on public sector issues, and response on private sector issues, is too important to deal with piecemeal.
44. He also noted that social partnership and dialogue was enshrined in EU treaties, and wanted to see this replaced in Wales in the event of Brexit. There were already recognised and agreed practices on consulting / engaging with social sector and these should be used.

45. The Chair welcomed comments and agreed that our workforce needed to be informed so that they can support the dissemination of consistent and up to date information. The Workforce Partnership Council agenda would need to reflect Brexit.
46. Owain Wyn thanked the chair for the invitation to the meeting and the opportunity to attend. He believed consideration was needed of the impact on rural areas, for example where the National Park Authorities work. Around 70 per cent of this year's spring lambs would be due to be exported to the EU. There was a question about what impact Brexit would have on this and if the rural economy is affected what will be the wider impact on our landscape. Rural tourism would also be impacted by any issues relating to EU workers so any opportunities to contribute to the debate and proposed solutions would be welcomed. The NPA's were less involved in service delivery than local government and heavily dependent on external funding. He was interested in the longer term issues in accessing funding streams such as 'LIFE'.
47. Cllr Rob Stewart noted that we need a strong social media intervention strategy to address misinformation and deliberate attempts to disrupt. He made the following points:
- There had been reference to updating legislation to reflect a world without the EU, it would be helpful to understand how soon this would be in place and how the changes would be communicated. Local authorities and other s needed time to understand and act on any new legislation, including time to ensure appropriate advice is given to businesses
  - We needed to recognise the fragility of the domestic care market and the potential impact on those businesses and the services they provide to our citizens. Local Authorities do not have the ability to step in if these businesses fail
  - We need to consider scenario planning not just for Brexit because Brexit may not come alone – Brexit and adverse weather as an example
48. Cllr Lynda Evans raised concerns about how Local Authorities were meant to address any potential fear and anxiety amongst its citizens. She believed we needed a system that ensured consistency of messaging from all public bodies. We need to recognise the potential impacts on others, such as families spending money they don't have; on the police; and on people's changing social attitudes.
49. The Chair confirmed the importance of consistent messaging from all public services.
50. The Counsel General believed that the Welsh Government web portal could provide an authoritative source of information but we needed to consider how we use social media.

51. Cllr Andrew Morgan asked whether local authorities were all coordinated across Wales via communications and social media officers and whether there was value in daily key messages update from Welsh Government even if this was a no change message? He also stressed the need to consider those who were not digitally engaged. He also asked whether there may be an opportunity to include inserts into things like council tax notices that were due to go out end of February – although he noted that timing would be tight and there would need to be something provided quickly but it could be a simple clear message on sources of information. He also noted that any portal would have to be live and be kept up to date.
52. The Chair and members agreed that this would be an excellent idea to follow up on.
53. Reg noted that Welsh Government is already engaged on communications planning through the Comms Cymru network and work is ongoing but welcomed the suggestion on council tax mail shot and noted the need to confirm with local government as soon as possible if Welsh Government wanted to use this opportunity.
54. Alun Michael believed we should also work with the media in Wales to help get a consistent message out about where citizens can find more information and advice, and how the Welsh public services are responding in partnership in a uniquely Welsh way.
55. Maria Battle wanted the group to recognise that there may be different issues in different parts of Wales and welcomed the idea of a single web portal if it could cover health as well.
56. Cllr Mair Stephens wanted to ensure that we were able to deal with uncertainty and make sure we take people with us in how we address the issues of Brexit. She also believed we needed to look at the long term including for example the shared prosperity fund and how this might help address the future.
57. The Chair asked for clarification of what the deadlines would be and Cllr Morgan confirmed that letters will issue at the end of February so it was essential that communications teams, social media teams and council tax teams need to liaise urgently. Suggested one side of A4/A5 to highlight web domain and any other messages about where to seek advice or information.
58. The Chair closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and for their contributions and the opportunity to explore ideas and develop the much needed communications channels in order to support the whole of Wales to prepare. She noted that it is likely that here will need to be a Welsh bid to the UK contingency fund to support some of the areas identified today. She asked members to ensure that they shared any information or intelligence with members as it arises.