

Partnership Council for Wales meeting

7 July 2021 - 11.00-12.30 via MS Teams

Note of meeting

Chaired by the Minister for Finance and Local Government

Agenda item 1 – Welcome and Introductions

The Minister welcomed all members and noted her thanks to everyone for their combined efforts in working together throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Minister noted this was her first time as Chair of the Partnership Council and stated how much she was looking forward to working with members through this forum on issues of importance for Wales.

Agenda item 2 – Welsh Government’s Programme for Government

The Minister for Finance and Local Government outlined the context behind the Welsh Government’s (WG’s) new Programme for Government (PfG) and highlighted some of the key priorities, including:

- The PfG being grounded in the distinct Welsh values of community, equality, and social justice.
- Transforming our existing care services into a new flexible, responsive and better integrated system which will help people live meaningful and independent lives for longer and will support those children, young people and families who face the greatest challenges.
- Supporting and developing our town centres and cities.
- Embedding our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do. Through local climate action plans and the Wales Net Zero Plan, Wales will have the national and local ambition and delivery in place to respond to the climate emergency and reach public sector net zero by 2030.
- Continuing to support our partners in local government and invest in local public services and local democracy.
- Supporting Wales’ long tradition of volunteering, local charities, faith groups and community organisations
- Fundamentally reforming homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing, as well as supporting cooperative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.

The Minister stated that none of this is going to be easy but we will work together as we have done recently during the pandemic. The Minister noted that the First Minister is always keen to stress the PfG is a programme for all of Wales, for all public services, not just for Welsh Government. The Minister invited members to

think about the priorities for their own sectors that are within the PfG and to consider the role they would like to see this forum taking in working towards delivery of those.

Cllr Andrew Morgan as WLGA Leader welcomed the approach and agreed on the importance of early engagement, and of local government helping to shape how they and WG work together, building on the model developed throughout the pandemic to now working together early on PfG priorities to the benefit of services and citizens.

The Minister confirmed her intention to continue the regular rhythm of engagement, including early engagement on policies and strategies to deliver. This would include facilitating links with other Ministers who are leading on specific portfolios.

The discussion between Members then included the following areas:

- The need for joint discussions on changing school days and free school meals.

ACTION: Ensure follow-up meeting with Minister for Education

- The commitment of policing in Wales to continue to work closely with WG and LG colleagues. Particularly welcome additional pcsos in pfg.
- The importance of the work on town centres and cities also including focus on rural areas and villages.
- Housing and second homes, particularly helping people stay in their communities through affordable housing.

ACTION: Share link to Minister for Climate Change's written statement.

- Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, and the importance of working together on this issue. The last Christmas period Swansea had zero people on the street (from 20) and this could not have been achieved without WG funding and commitment. The Minister confirmed recently agreed additional funding through LG hardship fund for homelessness, and WG's ongoing commitment to support.

Agenda item 3 – Building towards Local Government Elections (May 2022)

This item focused on a number of areas, including:

- Ideas being considered to help drive up levels of engagement in local democracy, particularly amongst young people, encouraging them to vote. WG are keen to work with LG colleagues to develop creative ideas and to pilot these during the LG elections in May 2022.
- The difficulties in promoting involvement in standing for elections was also raised, particularly in relation to the impact on people's personal lives, employment and parental responsibilities. It was felt these challenges are particularly exasperated in rural areas.
- Forthcoming consultation on LG elections conduct rules covering franchise and candidate statements.
- WG seeking local authorities' support for an elections communications and awareness campaign, promoting the importance of LG and encouraging people to vote.

- WG to engage with LG shortly to develop a Candidate Survey, seeking input to inform content of survey and method.
- Boundary reviews – commission has completed all 22 and the intention is to have those orders in place by end of September, but to announce those decisions as soon as possible. This isn't the end of the process, however, as the Minister has been taken by arguments some authorities have put forward. Current law does not allow the commission to consult on its final proposals, but the Minister is keen to address this issue longer term.
- Issues raised about the omission of 16 and 17 year olds from the boundary commission reviews, impacting on size of ward and population, and linked with levels of social deprivation.

Ideas for encouraging more people to vote included:

- Political education in schools and throughout adulthood.
- When Leaders and Elected Members hold meetings at schools, Democratic Services Officers could attend to register 16 and 17 year olds.
- WLGA recently agreed to implement recommendations of Newport Council's Democracy Report. Has cross party support and builds on the tremendous will across LG family to become as diverse as possible. Committed to diversity declarations this summer/autumn.
- Important to engage with younger generation through their own channels such as youth council podcasts and tiktok influencers.

Item 4 – Decarbonisation

This item was introduced by Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of WLGA. Cllr Morgan highlighted two particular areas of focus:

- The importance of building on the relationships developed over the past 18 months of the Covid pandemic when WG and LG have worked closer together than during any other time in history. Cllr Morgan made the point that tackling climate change will also require that close relationship.
- There is existing investment in developing strategies and interventions, but if we are to tackle this going forward we need to look at bigger issues, eg there would be significant extra cost in enabling schools to become carbon neutral; and more widely there needs to be consideration of reprioritisation and targeting of funding to achieve increased impact on carbon reduction by targeting money elsewhere. Significant investment and significant change in how we work.

Cllr Morgan introduced Tim Peppin, WLGA, to update Members on the work of the Decarbonisation Strategy Panel which was originally developed at the request of PC.

Tim introduced the four key areas included in the Net Zero Wales route map:

- Procurement
- Mobility and transport
- Buildings
- Land use

It was acknowledged that there is already a lot of work already in hand and that the work of the Panel was not looking to duplicate.

The Net Zero Carbon document will be issued in the autumn, and Tim expressed gratitude for the funding which enabled the WLGA to undertake the work once on behalf of all 22 authorities. The report will be considered by the WLGA Executive Board on 16 July.

LAs are working towards COP 26 but also towards a Wales version of COP.

The discussion then focused on the importance of having funding and resources to deliver the targets. Significant costs were identified for issues such as retrofitting of council housing stock, whilst also focusing on improvements in fire safety and the need to build extra new homes. Help is needed in building local supply chains, giving local businesses confidence to grow and help create jobs for a green recovery. Also challenges were identified in relation to private properties and owner occupiers, and an increase needed in grants available for authorities to issue to owners.

The Minister agreed that the issues related to housing were one of the biggest challenges with this work and suggested the Minister for Climate Change be invited to a future meeting for the Decarbonisation agenda item as her portfolio covers both climate change and housing.

ACTION: Invite Minister for Climate Change to a future meeting for the Decarbonisation agenda item.

The Minister also stated the importance of individuals' responsibility and how the biggest way to influence carbon reduction is through personal actions.

It was agreed that Wales is world leading in a number of areas, including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and being the first UK nation to charge for plastic bags. The willingness of local government to come together on the issue of climate change and the cross party support shown at the recent WLGA event provided an opportunity to pull together good practice across Wales to strengthen the effort of the whole.

The involvement of the National Park Authorities of Wales in the Decarbonisation Strategy Panel was welcomed, and also the opportunity to understand more about the National Parks UK approach was agreed to be useful.

Item 5 – Minister for Social Justice – Implementing the Race Equality Action Plan

The Minister for Social Justice thanked Members for the opportunity to attend and to discuss the Race Equality Action Plan (REAP). The Minister wished to gain as much engagement as possible on the issue and encouraged all public bodies to respond to the consultation on the REAP which was launched on 24 March, closing 15 July.

The Minister described how the plan had been constructed in an innovative way, including the involvement of those with lived experience, who had been, or are, living and experiencing racism in their lives, in their communities. The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted disproportionately on BAME people and this created an urgency to develop the plan, which was co-produced with BAME people and also with trade

unions, amongst others. The Minister emphasised her commitment to take meaningful action on the Action Plan and to ensure there was not a gap between the policy documents and their implementation. All ministerial colleagues have actions within the REAP which they are responsible for taking forward. The Minister encouraged PC Members to engage with the steering group, co-chaired by the WG Permanent Secretary, so that together colleagues could help create the anti-racist Wales we strive for, where people and communities thrive.

Cllr Jane Mudd stated she was very keen to work with WG on this, and outlined some of the actions undertaken including moving the WLGA Spokesperson role to a Leader and also have the involvement of a number of deputy leaders to support implementation. Cllr Mudd thanked the Minister for Social Justice for agreeing to join a WLGA meeting tomorrow to discuss further and help continue the momentum.

Alun Michael also confirmed the commitment from policing to work with WG, led by the Deputy Police Commissioner, and which was also reflected in the Black Lives Matter campaign.

The Minister agreed on the importance of the work of the Policing Partnership Board, which also included local government representation, and which help support community cohesion. The Minister commented on the importance of all the opportunities for promoting our inclusive and wonderfully diverse Wales. The Minister had met with a refugee and asylum seekers group this morning and was proud that WG, LG and the voluntary sector are working together to make an important difference to people's lives. The Minister closed by emphasising the high level of expectations locally and nationally for public services together to deliver on the REAP.

Item 6 – Priorities for Partnership Council for Wales

Members discussed shared priorities for a forward work plan and also agreed standing items for future meetings, which would involve all partners as appropriate.

It was agreed that:

- EU Transition no longer be a standing item.
- Decarbonisation continues to be a standing item.
- A new standing item on Recovery would be included on all future meetings. It was agreed this item would include a number of themes to jointly work on including, but not limited to, health and social care recovery, and economic recovery. Relevant Ministers would be invited to join Members, with workstreams being developed to drive forward/oversee work in these areas, as required.

AOB

The Minister highlighted to Members that two consultations would soon be launched relating to Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) – one on *Draft Statutory Guidance on the Establishment of CJCs* and a second on *Draft CJC General Regulations*.

The Minister thanked all members for their time and their valuable input, stating that future meeting dates are yet to be arranged but suggested the quarterly rhythm be continued, with consideration given to forecasting of Recovery themes.