

Partnership Council for Wales

10 June 2020

Attendees

Welsh Government Ministers	
Minister for Housing and Local Government	Julie James MS (Chair)
Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government	Hannah Blythyn MS
Counsel General & Minister for European Transition	Jeremy Miles MS
Local Government	
Leader of Welsh Local Government Association and Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council	Cllr Andrew Morgan
Leader of Cardiff Council	Cllr Huw Thomas
Leader of Ceredigion County Council	Cllr Ellen ap Gwynn
Leader of Conwy Council	Cllr Sam Rowlands
Leader of Newport City Council	Cllr Jane Mudd
Leader of City and County of Swansea Council	Cllr Robert Stewart
Leader of Denbighshire	Cllr Hugh Evans OBE
Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council	Cllr Huw David
Deputy Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council	Cllr Mair Stephens
Police and Crime Commissioners representative	Mr Alun Michael
National Health Service Wales and Local Health Boards representative	Maria Battle
National Park Authorities representative	Owain Wyn
Community Councils representative	Cllr Michael Cuddy
Observers	
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	Peter Davies, Chair
Welsh Local Government Association	Chris Llewellyn, Chief Executive
Wales TUC	Savannah Taj, General Secretary
One Voice Wales	Lyn Cadwallader Chief Executive
Welsh Government Officials	
Reg Kilpatrick, Director, Local Government	
Welsh Local Government Association Officials	
Chris Llewellyn, Chief Executive	
Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy	
Did not attend	
Cllr Tudor Davies	
Fire and Rescue Authorities	

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Welcome and Introductions

1. The Minister for Housing and Local Government (the Minister) welcomed all members and thanked them for attending, recognising Cllr Andrew Morgan's first meeting as the leader of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
2. The Minister reported that as a lot had happened since the last meeting in October she would not go through the previous minutes at this time, but they were available on the Welsh Government website and any comments could be directed to the secretariat.

<https://gov.wales/partnership-council-wales-meeting-2-october-2019-0>

Item 1: Unlocking our Society and recovery.

3. The Minister introduced Jeremy Miles MS, Council General and Minister for European Transition (CG&MET) to provide an update on Welsh Government's latest assessment of the Covid 19 position and projections and strategic approach to recovery planning.
4. The CG&MET thanked members for the opportunity to speak with them and said he would welcome their views today. The CG&MET summarised the latest on future focused post Covid work, and how it impacts public services, the economy and the Welsh Government's green agenda. The CG&MET also briefed on updates given to the Senedd on roundtable events bringing expertise from across the UK and overseas - focusing on four key areas (Public services, economy, vulnerable people and a green recovery). The CG&MET commented that the roundtables had been thought-provoking and not without challenge, but it was good to test assumptions and he was grateful for the time individuals had given to the sessions.
5. The CG&MET touched on elements of the work underway in Wales regarding the easing of lockdown, highlighting the importance of a rapid yet cautious approach to what the First Minister described as the 'green' phase. The CG&MET made reference to what 'normal' might look like underlining whatever that may be will be different to what we experienced before Covid.
6. The CG&MET described that one of the key messages deriving from the round tables, and from discussions with both internal and external stakeholders, is to plan for a quite different future.
7. One observation that was echoed by other members of Partnership Council was the proven ability of public services over the past few months to quickly adapt, to be innovative and to learn how to do things differently. The CG&MET stated that part of the challenge for all levels of government going forward is to learn from these experiences and to build on them. The CG&MET highlighted effective joint working between Welsh Government, local government and other public bodies which had minimised and helped overcome some of the obstacles which would have been more difficult prior to Covid.

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8. The CG&MET made reference to specific policy interventions, highlighting the positive impact the crisis had had in a number of areas, including tackling homelessness and encouraging fast developments in the use of digital tools such as NHS GP appointments and increased local authority services online.
9. One key theme that had emerged from the roundtables and which the CG&MET confirmed needed to be addressed was the question over intergenerational fairness, in particular the impact on children of not being able to go to school and the long term negative economic effects on young people entering the job market.
10. The CG&MET summarised that the Welsh Government's decision making in relation to Covid is based on evidence and advice from experts including the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and science professionals in the Technical Advisory Cell (TAC). All updates relating to the latest position are posted on the Welsh Government Website.
11. The CG&MET observed that when lockdown was introduced there were 400 confirmed cases of Covid reported daily, whilst today there are 50 cases daily. The CG&MET reported that if this trend continues there will be more headroom to lift restrictions, detailing how lockdown restrictions might be lifted and the importance of community consent in that process.
12. The CG&MET reiterated the First Minister's comments earlier in the week in relation to the benefits gained from information gathered through the CovidZoe app. The CG&MET informed members that the app had been downloaded 70,000 times and urged all PC members to encourage others to download and use it.

Action: Secretariat to share details of the CovidZoe app with members.

Item 2 – Our Shared Recovery

13. WLGA representative Daniel Hurford summarised the paper that has been provided which set out the initial local government response to the Covid crisis and highlighted some of the challenges they anticipated moving forward into the recovery phase; as well potential opportunities. Central to the WLGA's thinking was the vision of what we want for local government, public services and the economy in the future. Daniel stressed that the paper represented a local government perspective but echoed the sentiments of other members in relation to how proud they were of the local government and public services responses in rapidly working with partners in their communities to provide support to the most vulnerable.
14. Daniel referenced that the CG&MET had also recognised local government's contribution to social care provision; the building of field hospitals; the shielding

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scheme; and the provision of support to businesses. Daniel also specifically made reference to the Test Trace and Protect scheme and how all involved had adapted quickly to overcome logistical challenges.

15. Chris Llewelyn added that Covid has highlighted the strength of local government in interpreting and implementing Welsh Government strategy, taking into account local capacity and circumstances and delivering for their communities.
16. Chris made reference to the success of the political engagement that has taken place, with weekly meetings between local government leaders and the Minister and other Ministers. The close working arrangements have meant that things have happened very quickly and barriers have been overcome in a very short space of time. Chris highlighted the importance of capitalising on these ways of working to assist us through the recovery stage.
17. Cllr Andrew Morgan welcomed Chris Llewelyn's comments and acknowledged the very close working relationship between local government leaders and Welsh Ministers which has led to local government being able to influence policy going forward. It was acknowledged that the crisis has led to a far wider understanding of local government's role and impact on communities by both politicians and the public.
18. The Minister agreed and commented that it had been a real pleasure to work so closely with local government colleagues and expressed her thanks to front line staff who have worked so hard to support our communities through the crisis.
19. There was a discussion around capacity going forward into recovery phase and the intensity of the work to be done to support the national agenda, requiring significant commitment from all partners.
20. It was agreed that the period of response to the Covid crisis had led to some regular meetings and groups being temporarily stood down and it was suggested that now appropriate to check the relevance of some of those groups going forward. It is important to ensure engagement is focused on supporting recovery and the transformation to the new world.
21. It is also important to question our ways of working, and to continue to take the opportunity for online meetings and the avoidance of unnecessary travel in future.
22. Alun Michael welcomed the discussion around engagement structures and urged consideration of linking the work of Public Service Boards and Regional Partnership Boards together to avoid duplication. Alun Michael echoed others members' comments as to the effectiveness of the engagement that had taken place throughout the Covid crisis, particularly in relation to Police links with Welsh Government, Ministers and local government.

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23. There was a discussion around the challenge of working within existing emergency structures which had not been designed for an emergency of this nature. Members agreed with the general point that whilst partnership working and ongoing engagement are crucial, there was a need to consider the appropriateness of existing structures in supporting that.
24. Mike Cuddy noted that the spontaneity shown by Community and Town Councils (CTCs) and local community groups had assisted greatly during the emergency. Mike also said that the CTCs had shown a willingness to continue their support during the long recovery phase in helping to rebuild local economies and community resilience.
25. The Minister confirmed the importance of CTCs in the recovery effort.
26. Cllr Huw Thomas welcomed the paper by the WGLA and reiterated the importance of localism and the need to assess at what level services are best governed and delivered. Huw detailed two specific examples, economic development in terms of the delivery of crucial business support, and public health interventions which he believed added weight to the case for returning public health functions to local government.
27. Cllr Elin ap Gwynn stated that the Covid crisis had emphasised the importance of working locally and in the case of Ceredigion how effectively the PSB partners had worked together on the ground.
28. Reg Kilpatrick referred members to the final report of the review of strategic partnerships, which was included as a paper to note. Reg noted that there were recommendations within that report which were consistent with the points that has been made, including that no new partnerships are put in place without very careful consideration, and that existing partnerships should be reviewed periodically to consider whether they need to continue and, if so, whether the terms of reference were still relevant. Reg agreed that unnecessary bureaucracy should be challenged, and that this would be important across all areas of policy.
29. Gary Haggaty introduced the next paper '*Moving from response to recovery: Civil contingencies*' which sought to address planned arrangements in the civil contingencies field, particularly in light of the fact this was not a 'normal' emergency. Gary explained that the paper primarily focuses on the transition from the Strategic Coordination Groups (SCGs) to Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) and how best the RCGs could interact with existing partnership arrangements such as PSBs. Gary explained that although the Welsh Government has an interest and is happy to facilitate the conversations, decisions about how RCGs will work at a local level will be made by local government and partners. However, the issues of consistency versus local determination needed to be discussed quickly as three SCGs had already established their RCGs and the fourth was doing so imminently.

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30. Rob Thomas described the situation in South Wales in relation to the SCG moving towards an idle state whilst the RCG ramps up, albeit with the opportunity to revert back in the case of a future Coronavirus peak. Rob highlighted a key issue which needed to be considered in relation to how the RCG would link at a local level with partnerships such as city deals and also nationally with the Welsh Government.
31. There was further discussion on the importance of ensuring the RCG arrangements were appropriate for the nature of the recovery work and could be adapted to suit the situation. There was an acceptance that one size would not fit all and local arrangements would be important, ensuring that the recovery work was led by those who were democratically accountable. Clarity of roles and responsibilities was crucial.
32. The Minister introduced the proposal for a new, strategically-focused Recovery Sub Group of Partnership Council which would support and drive recovery in a number of areas to create a new future. The Minister emphasised the need for a streamlined process that would maximise the use of everybody's time and would focus on some key issues for public services in Wales.
33. Alun Michael welcomed the establishment of the Recovery Sub Group and stated his desire to be involved in the group.
34. Maria Battle stated the importance of the transformation of social care and its links with health and so volunteered to nominate a health representative for the Sub Group to assist in these considerations.
35. There was a short discussion around the differing levels of effectiveness of PSBs, and the opportunity to decide locally how best to make these work, including the scope to merge PSBs if that was thought to be the most effective approach.
36. The Minister closed this item by reiterating that the Recovery Sub Group would help bring together the recovery efforts and would inform key policies going forward. In terms of membership, the Minister was mindful of the requests from PC members to be involved and stated the group would be formed on that basis and reviewed to ensure its effectiveness. Members were invited to make any further comments in writing after the meeting.

Standing item: brief update on Exiting the European Union

37. The Counsel General and Minister for European Transition updated the members on the current EU transition situation. The CS&MET stated the impact of the Covid crisis in having reduced the opportunity for meaningful negotiations on EU transition.

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38. The CG&MET stated that there is no certainty in relation to post-transition and so it has been necessary to plan for a range of outcomes, including preparing Wales for the UK leaving the transition period with no deal.
39. The CG&MET confirmed the volume of legislative work that will need to be undertaken once more information is available, and also the Welsh Government's expectations relating to funding from the UK Government and levels of autonomy as a devolved administration.

Papers to note: 'Review of Strategic Partnerships' and 'Decarbonisation and Local Government'

40. The Minister thanked all involved on the strategic partnership review. The Minister and members agreed the review is now complete.
41. The Minister asked members whether they were content to agree the Decarbonisation paper, emphasising how central it was to a green recovery. The Minister outlined the Paper's proposed Joint Statement, setting out the ambitions for decarbonisation and asked Council members if they were happy for their organisations to sign up to it.
42. The Minister also set out the proposal for the Partnership Council to take a leadership role on decarbonisation, with the recommendation of a Decarbonisation Strategy Panel set up to report to it.
43. The Minister noted that there wasn't time for a detailed discussion but sought confirmation that this approach was supported so she could ask officials to start implementing the proposal. Agreement was indicated with a number of positive comments received. The Minister asked for any additional comments to be emailed.
44. The Minister thanked everyone for their participation, noted the next meeting would be on 14 October, and closed the meeting.