

Partnership Council for Wales

14 October 2020

Welsh Government Ministers	
Minister for Housing and Local Government	Julie James MS
Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government	Hannah Blythyn MS
Local authorities	
Leader of Welsh Local Government Association and Leader of RCT County Borough Council	Cllr Andrew Morgan
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 County Council	Cllr Hugh Evans OBE
Ceredigion County Council	Cllr Ray Quant (Replacement for Cllr Mair Stevens)
Leader of Cardiff Council	Cllr Huw Thomas
Police and Crime Commissioners representative	Mark Brace attending in place of Mr Alun Michael
Fire and Rescue Authorities	Cllr Tudor Davies
National Parks	Paul Harries
Community Councils representative	Cllr Michael Cuddy
Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council	Cllr Huw David
NHS Wales and Local Health Boards representative	Maria Battle
Observers	
Wales Council for Voluntary Action	Peter Davies, Chair
Welsh Local Government Association	Chris Llewellyn, Chief Executive
One Voice Wales	Lyn Cadwallader Chief Executive
Wales Audit Office (Observer)	Huw Rees
Apologies	
Wales Audit Office (Observer)	Adrian Crompton
Deputy Leader of Denbighshire Council	Cllr Mair Stevens

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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.
2. The Minister apologised on behalf of the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition (CG), Jeremy Miles, who was unable to attend but the Minister and Liz Lilley would cover the Covid-19 update on the CG's behalf. The Minister welcomed Piers Bisson to provide an update on the current position relating to European Transition.

European transition

3. Piers Bisson stated that this is a crucial time with the European Council meeting later this week, the outcome of which is uncertain. Piers mentioned no one is predicting a deal to be made on the back of this meeting, the question is whether or not sufficient progress has been made that a deal looks to be in sight, or whether there are still fundamental differences to be resolved.
4. Piers made reference to the 3 main areas that are still outstanding: fisheries and access to UK waters; state aid and what the UK Government future state aid regime may look like; and governance, and whether or not the EU feels it has sufficient reassurance in terms of current dispute resolutions.
5. Piers stated that the Welsh Government position has been very clear and the importance of continuing the talks even if the deal is not yet in sight, it was important to continue to strive to achieve the best deal possible.
6. There are other trade deals the UK Government is looking to pursue with other countries, including a deal with Japan which was agreed in principle.
7. Piers stated whether or not a deal is in sight by the end of the year, we should expect a lot of changes from January, particularly for businesses who import and export personal data between the UK and EU and to expect changes to the migration rules. Piers stated Covid19 has added pressure on to businesses who need to best prepare for the transition period, and that colleagues within the economy sector are looking at how best to provide support.
8. Piers stressed the importance of ongoing communications, particularly in regard to expected changes to travel insurance and driving licenses.
9. One major concern stems from the friction at the borders. Piers stated businesses who aren't ready could lead to hold ups at the border for essential goods such as medicines and food. Piers stated the Welsh Government is mindful of the impact this will have on our communities and businesses, layered on top of that with the Covid19 pandemic, intensive work is underway within Welsh Government and its partners to deal with this issue.

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10. The worst case assumptions had been received and shared earlier this week with the Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) in Wales and partners.
11. There are wide range of other operational responsibilities that we have yet to put in place and during the final stages of the transition period.
12. Communications between UK Government and Welsh Government continue to be important, particularly leading up to January. The internal Market Bill raises major concerns in relation to devolved policies such as social and environmental protection, and causes particular concerns over access to EU funding and delays to the UK prosperity funds.
13. The Minister thanked Piers for his time and requested that no questions be asked at this time in order to let Piers leave the meeting, but that the Minister would relay any question she is unable to answer to Piers after the meeting.

Minutes of last meeting

14. Minutes were agreed.

Agenda Item 1: Covid 19 Recovery

15. The Minister stated that Jeremy Miles, the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition (CG), is the lead Minister for the Government in relation to Covid 19 Recovery but was unfortunately unable to attend today's meeting, so the Minister would briefly start and then invite Liz Lalley to provide an update.
16. The Minister expressed her gratitude to the WLGA and all colleagues who worked on the economic stimulus package. The Minister welcomed the content and stated the proposals are a good fit with the Government's recovery proposals.
17. In the longer term, the Minister wishes to establish joint arrangements between the Welsh Government, WLGA and other partners to consider how to best align strategic priorities and funding. The Minister was particularly interested in identifying what is possible to achieve in this financial year on immediate priorities, and at the start of the next year and beyond.
18. The Minister requested that the WLGA convene a small group of politicians, experts and other officials to consider this.
19. Liz Lalley confirmed the Future Recovery document was published last week and it was the accumulation of a combination of conversations the CG had held with people across Wales. These included as a follow-up to the CG's invitation for citizens, communities, businesses and others across Wales to engage on the future recovery, which had received over 2 thousand responses. In addition, the CG had chaired a series of round table events to engage with as many sectors as possible, in addition to chairing meetings of an expert group to identify the biggest challenges for Wales as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

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20. Liz highlighted 8 priorities that required immediate action:
 - Keeping people in jobs and creating new job opportunities recognising the difficult economic situation we find ourselves in
 - Supporting young people to stay in education as long as possible
 - Increasing construction of affordable housing and supporting low carbon construction
 - Investing in local and town centres
 - Continuing to respond to climate change while pushing ahead with the decarbonisation agenda
 - Transport strategy, Foundation economy helping to support local businesses
 - Supporting the NHS to make up lost ground due to the Covid Pandemic
21. Liz stated the next steps will be focusing on delivery of those 8 key priorities. The CG will ensure the report is sent to all those who wrote in and will endeavour to promote an ongoing national conversation.
22. The Minister thanked Liz for her update.
23. Councillor Andrew Morgan stated the need to move at pace to get some delivery on the ground. Cllr Morgan stated the importance of inviting opposition spokespersons on to the group to get cross-political buy-in. Andrew welcomed the approach outlined by Liz but reiterated that making decisions at pace is key.
24. The Minister agreed.
25. Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn requested that information that is being provided to Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) is also shared with Leaders in order to provide democratic oversight.
26. Cllr ap Gwynn also asked for clarity on what is included within the Covid-19 £320 million regeneration fund, stating her authority had submitted proposals for 21st Century Schools funding, and coastal regeneration funding but she was unsure whether these areas were included.
27. Reg Kilpatrick stated that the LRFs are essentially operational planning forums and so normally do not engage at a political levels, although in the cases of Brexit and Covid-19 Reg emphasised that the Welsh Government had encouraged discussions with local authorities.
28. Liz Lalley stated that the £320 million pot is a separate Covid Reserve, and will check on the detail. The Minister confirmed this was also her understanding.
29. The Minister stated that the National Park Authorities (NPAs) had expressed an interest in accessing funding to undertake work on a community decarbonisation project and the Minister stated her hope to ensure the decarbonisation work across local authorities and NPAs is aligned.

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ACTION: The Minister requested that the WLGA convene a small group of politicians, experts and other officials to look at setting up joint arrangements between the WLGA and other partners to consider how to best align priorities and funding between central and local government. The Minister was particularly interested in identifying what is possible to achieve in this financial year on immediate priorities, and what is possible next year and beyond.
ACTION WLGA & WG

Agenda item 2 – Town Centres & the Circular Economy

30. The Minister introduced the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn MS, to provide an update on this item.
31. The Deputy Minister thanked partners and everyone who had worked on the repurposed funding for getting it out so quickly. This funding has greatly helped town centre adaptations, outdoor heating/seating etc. The Deputy Minister stated it was done in a way that addressed the immediate challenges but also offered a different way of us viewing the town centres, and she was keen to hear any suggestions on how we drive this forward in the future.
32. The Deputy Minister stated that the Welsh Government has received a significant number of applications for the circular economy fund and she is pleased to report that additional funding has been secured to support a range of town and community based projects.
33. The Deputy Minister also stated she is keen to explore the future role of Community and Town Councils in the delivery of a range of projects, including green infrastructure projects.
34. The Minister thanked the Deputy Minister for her update.
35. Councillor Hugh Evans welcomed the Deputy Minister's update and the financial investment in town Centres.
36. Cllr Evans stated that lockdown measures had created confusion for residents about how they may best support their towns, and that financial investment guidelines would need to include sufficient flexibility to provide benefits for towns across Wales.
37. The Deputy Minister stated she would write to all local authorities to enable consideration and understanding of how legislation could better align with their unique town centre strategies, including helping people to feel safer when returning to town centres.
38. Councillor Mike Cuddy also thanked the Deputy Minister for her update, stating his view that cultural change and mind-sets, as reported in the Better Places document, are the biggest hurdles to overcome.

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39. Councillor Huw Thomas stated the funding stream is also available for cities in addition to towns, acknowledging that the terminology isn't always clear. Cllr Thomas highlighted that after London, Cardiff had taken the biggest hit in terms of footfall in the city centre. There are 45,000 jobs in retail, hospitality and leisure in Cardiff City centre, jobs primarily made up by residents from the surrounding inner city areas, some of which are the most ethnically diverse and economically deprived areas in Wales.
40. Cllr Thomas urged Welsh Government to look at specific targeted support for city centres and to help change the mentality that city centres are doing okay, to help avoid an economic catastrophe.
41. The Deputy Minister stated this is a separate issue to be discussed with partners regarding city centre pressures and stated she will liaise with her colleagues in economy to discuss how best to support the specific challenges that city centres face.
42. The Minister stated she has had specific conversations with city areas and interaction with suburban areas and is currently taking those considerations into account in the context of the investment package.

ACTION: The Deputy Minister to write to all local authorities to enable consideration and understanding of how legislation could better align with their unique town centre strategies, including helping people to feel safer when returning to town centres.

ACTION: The Deputy Minister to liaise with Economy colleagues to discuss how best to support the specific challenges faced by city centres.

Agenda Item 2 – Update WCVA update

43. The Minister invited Peter Davies, Chair of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), to provide an update relating to the third and voluntary sectors following his recent meetings with the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs).
44. Peter Davies stated that he wrote to the Minister following the discussions with the chairs of the CVCs who collectively represent the governance of Third Sector Support Wales. Discussions had focused on the need to balance stimulus and recovery planning between top down investment and support for community led recovery.
45. Peter stated that an assessment of the relationship between the very local and regional structures is needed, emphasising the importance of building on the learning and establishment of those relationships while recognising specific attributes of community-led local development.
46. Peter summarised that the recovery plan should include practical steps for enabling a community-led response rather than being a list of projects that land

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on communities. Peter highlighted Pembrokeshire as an example of where community groups are developing a new way of working.

47. The Minister thanked Peter for his update, and stated she would work with him in the future to better understand how we incorporate that ethos in to future work.
48. Mike Cuddy welcomed Peter's comments. Mike stated there are regional structures beneath the town centre partnership architecture that could be used to strengthen Peter's sentiment.
49. Chris Llewellyn echoed Peter and Mike's comments. Chris highlighted how the community had come together to face recent challenges and showed how in touch they are with their local authorities. Chris stated that everybody recognises these are the fundamental elements we need to build on, and learn lessons from whilst moving forward.

Agenda item 3 – Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill

50. The Minister confirmed that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill (the Bill) had passed Stage Two of the Committee process. The Minister stated she is hosting a series of engagement events on Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs), for local government, National Parks and other stakeholders.
51. Stage 3 of the Bill will go before the Senedd on 10 November and assuming its continued passage, the Bill will go for Royal Assent in January 2021.
52. The Minister encouraged Members to be involved in the ongoing development of the draft Establishment Regulations for CJCs.
53. The Minister confirmed the formal consultation on the regulations had been launched and encouraged members to take the opportunity to contribute their views on how best to make CJCs work effectively and to ensure they added value to local government.
54. The Minister explained there would also be a series of technical briefings at regional level to focus on the functions that are being transferred to CJCs (strategic development planning, regional transport planning and some economic development functions) The Minister expressed her hope that people would engage with the process as widely as possible.
55. The Minister also alerted members to a second consultation, this time on Part 6 of the Bill (Performance and Governance), which would launch on 11 November. This would specifically be on the draft guidance to facilitate the implementation of the new performance and governance regime.
56. Some members expressed concern over the purpose of CJCs and the level of bureaucracy they envisaged would be involved, especially in the context of how much pressure authorities are under due to Covid-19.

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57. The Minister thanked both for their comments. The Minister sympathised with the issues around timescales but stated that these are bound by the Senedd timetable and so she is unable to change that.
58. The Minister confirmed that levels of bureaucracy should be minimised by CJC arrangements and stated her willingness to work with Leaders to ensure this. The Minister confirmed that CJsCs would enable local decisions, such as if North Wales authorities decided to morph the North Wales Economic Ambition Board into the CJC arrangements.
59. The Minister confirmed that Education Improvement is not currently on the list of functions to be undertaken by CJsCs due to ongoing discussions regarding potential arrangements for this area.
60. The Minister confirmed local flexibility for region to ensure CJsCs fit with local needs and priorities.

ACTION: The Minister confirmed that levels of bureaucracy should be minimised by CJC arrangements and stated her willingness to work with Leaders to ensure this.

Agenda Item 4 – Decarbonisation

61. The Minister stated that decarbonisation and climate change have been at the forefront of the Covid recovery and economic development plans. The Minister highlighted Wales climate week (2 – 6 November) which would mark the original United Nations COP 26 date. The Minister encouraged members to attend the virtual events organised for that week.
62. The Minister stated that a robust ‘team Wales’ approach is crucial to developing the next low carbon delivery plan, citing the partnership work underway in areas like recycling and the circular economy as great examples of this.
63. The Minister noted the opportunities in Wales to achieve a green recovery, assisted by development and implementation of the Low Carbon Delivery Plan and the Circular Economy strategy, helping showcase our green recovery plans and achievements in Wales.
64. The Minister reminded members that at the last meeting officials had been asked to set up a decarbonisation strategy panel, a new strategic group of local authority Chief Executives and Environment Directors to take forward some of the thinking and report back to us. The terms of reference have been circulated and membership is being finalised with the first meeting planned for Climate Week.
65. The Minister was pleased to announce that the Joint Decarbonisation Statement could be formally approved by Partnership Council members as comments on the strategy had been entirely positive.

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66. Shavanah Taj, Wales TUC, stated it would be useful to have union representation on the decarbonisation panel, more specifically environmental green representation, which she felt would play a key role in archiving the 2030 Target.
67. Shavanah queried whether the work place unions had been involved in the work, and whether there was any funding available to upskill people in future green technology roles.
68. The Minister was content to have trade unions involved.
69. Judith Cole stated she will liaise with Shavanah to identify trade union representatives. Judith mentioned the reason why the decarbonisation panel reported to the Partnership Council was to make sure every part of the sector was involved but still kept the sub panel small enough to be feasible.
70. Peter Davies welcomed this initiative, emphasising the importance of community ownership and the need for this to be built in to the conversation.
71. Paul Harris echoed Peter's comments and would like to register the National Parks' interest to be on the committee.
72. The Minister thanked all for their contribution.

ACTION: Judith Cole to liaise with Shavanah Taj, Wales TUC, to identify trade union representatives to be on the Decarbonisation Panel.

ACTION: Officials leading on Decarbonisation Panel to consider the inclusion of the National Park Authorities on the committee.

Agenda Item 5 - Local Authority Meetings remote attendance

73. The Minister opened the item by stating she continued to receive representations about the number and type of meetings being held by local authorities and concerns that a number, in particular scrutiny meetings, were not taking place. This had led to questions about the impact on democratic accountability. The Minister recognised the significant effort authorities had made to address the barriers to meeting and the efforts made by officers and members to participate through digital technology. The Minister confirmed she had committed to write to all Members of the Senedd identifying the range of meetings being held across local authorities.
74. The Minister confirmed her intention to retain key elements of the emergency regulations allowing electronic meetings to take place to be introduced through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.
75. The Minister raised concerns over the amount of scrutiny meetings being held and stated that her officials had undertaken some research to identify the number and range of meetings. The Minister confirmed that the information

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would be circulated following the meeting and that she would be grateful if local authorities could check the information for accuracy, updating as necessary and adding any further information for context.

76. There was a discussion over the fine balance between the right amount of scrutiny and too much scrutiny, with the current stresses on local authorities being raised as a reason for on occasion having to scale back on the volume of scrutiny meetings. The different structures that local authorities have in place were also highlighted as being important to take into account.
77. There were also occasions where scrutiny committees were meeting regularly but that this was not reflected on councils' websites. Action would be taken to publish details of scrutiny committees on websites in future.
78. Huw Rees stated that the situation presented a great opportunity to reconsider scrutiny arrangements and refresh the approach within a coherent Government structure.
79. The Minister stated that funding was available to support the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, particularly in terms of transforming digital democracy.

ACTION: The Minister confirmed that the information regarding local authority meetings would be circulated following the meeting and that she would be grateful for local authorities checking the information for accuracy, updating as necessary and adding any further information for context.

ACTION: Action would be taken to publish details of scrutiny committees on authorities' websites.

80. The Minister thanked all members for their participation and closed the meeting.