

Partnership Council for Wales – 10 July 2023

Via Microsoft Teams

Chair's opening remarks

Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance and Local Government.

1. The Minister for Finance and Local Government (the Minister) welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were noted.
2. The Minister noted the minutes of the previous meeting (2 March 2022) had been circulated and asked if there were any comments or amendments, but there were not.
3. The Minister also confirmed that all actions from the previous meeting were either complete or in hand.
4. The Minister drew members' attention to the paper to note by the Local Government Strategy Panel on its work towards Net Zero, which was circulated ahead of the meeting. In particular, the Minister highlighted the work that was happening under each of the four themes set out in the paper and annex: transport, building, land use and procurement.
5. The Minister and members noted the progress and recommendations set out in the paper.

<p>Action 1: The Minister for Climate Change to be invited to attend November's Partnership Council meeting for a wider discussion on our collective work towards Net Zero in Wales.</p>

Agenda item 1: A discussion on Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers

6. The Minister introduced the item on Cymraeg 2050. The Minister highlighted Wales' journey to a million Welsh speakers and how the aim of doubling the daily use of Welsh by 2050 has captured the imagination of the people of Wales since Welsh Government published its Welsh Language Strategy, *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh Speakers*, in 2017.
7. The Minister welcomed the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, to today's meeting to talk to members about the strategy and how we can all contribute to the overall goals set out in it.

[Technical issues with the simultaneous translation via Microsoft Teams were experienced throughout and had a significant impact on the Minister for Education and Welsh Language's update as part of agenda item one . As a result, the following provides an overview of the points made by the Minister

for Education and Welsh Language. This note was circulated to members of Partnership Council for Wales following the meeting.]

8. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language began his update by affirming the Welsh Government's ambition and passion for the Welsh language and its plans for the language. Implementing language policy - making sure language has a chance to survive and thrive - is a long term effort that requires robust and consistent action in a wide range of areas. Welsh Government needs the support and active participation of all stakeholders. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language felt together we can drive meaningful change to help achieve our goals and that Partnership Council members are key stakeholders in this endeavour.
9. At the end of last year, the Welsh Government received the results of the 2021 Census which showed that fewer children aged three to 15 were able to speak Welsh in 2021 than in 2011. However, during the last Census period Wales had seen an increase in the numbers of children in Welsh-medium education, with over 11,000 more children in 2022 than in 2011. There had also been an increase in the percentage of 16–19 year olds, and 20-44 year olds who can speak Welsh parents of the next generation of Welsh speakers.
10. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language felt there was no doubt that education was key to growing the Welsh language, and appreciated members' support in ensuring that all children in Wales could begin their journey to bilingualism. He was also pleased to confirm that every local authority in Wales now has a *Welsh in Education* Strategic Plan and that the Welsh Government had also committed to introducing a Welsh Language Education Bill during this Senedd term, the purpose of which is to strengthen and increase Welsh language education provision across Wales to meet our Cymraeg 2050 targets. The Welsh Government is also committed to improving linguistic outcomes for pupils in English-medium schools so that all pupils would leave school confident and eager to use their language skills in the community, in workplaces and in everyday life.
11. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language felt the Welsh language was unique as it was one of the very few minority languages that was still a living community language and he was keen to ensure it remained that.
12. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language was keen to make opportunities available for Welsh to be spoken and to be used by people in all aspects of their lives. He felt work of the Commission for Welsh-speaking communities was valuable to that and noted that the Commission had already looked in detail into policy areas such as housing, economic development, town and country planning, education and community development - all of which are considered to be vital for the linguistic sustainability of Welsh-speaking communities. The Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities was established by the Welsh Government in August 2022 with the aim of making recommendations to strengthen Welsh-speaking communities. The Commission's final recommendations will be published in the form of a report by August 2024. Its [Position Paper \(interim report\)](#) was published in June 2023.

13. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language stated the contribution that events such as the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and of course the Urdd Eisteddfod make to the arts and culture agenda in Wales was immeasurable. Such events can have a lasting effect on our communities. Visiting the Eisteddfod is a great way to speak Welsh and to hear the language spoken widely and without support from the communities it would not be possible to host such successful and vibrant events whose legacies far outlast the festival period.
14. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language also wanted to express his gratitude to members for their support and said he looked forward to continuing to work with them to make sure Wales could move confidently towards one million Welsh speakers and doubling the daily use of Welsh.
15. To help achieve this, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language informed members that the Welsh Government had been working with Academi Wales to develop the Leading in a Bilingual Country programme, which he encouraged all to take advantage of. Indeed, he was pleased to learn that so many had already taken the opportunity to attend the course and was delighted by the number of applicants. He committed to continuing to develop the programme to ensure it goes from strength to strength and hoped that there would be further opportunities for members and their staff to apply. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language urged members to engage with the Welsh Government to share their expertise and help foster strong partnerships and shared goals.
16. During the discussion that followed, the following key points were raised:
 - Canon Aled Edwards (National Parks) broadly supported Minister's comments.
 - Councillor Darren Price (Leader of Carmarthenshire Council) supported the Minister's comments and said it was important to continue to discuss and confirmed in Carmarthenshire County Council they had recently engaged with Coleg Sir Gar on the matter.
 - Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Leader of Cyngor Gwynedd) confirmed Cyngor Gwynedd also offered broad support for the Minister's comments.
 - Councillor Huw Thomas (Leader of Cardiff Council) felt that the Eisteddfod needed to visit all local authority areas regularly as there would appear to be more emphasis on the traditional Welsh speaking areas to be host. However, it was noted that in 2024 and 2025 respectively the eisteddfod would be held in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Wrexham.
17. Following the Minister for Education and Welsh Language's update there was general agreement amongst members that it would be beneficial to continue the conversation at a future meeting of Partnership Council for Wales.

Agenda item 2: The future of our Health and Care system

18. The Minister welcomed the Minister for Health and Social Services, Eluned Morgan MS and Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, who had both attended the meeting to provide an overview of the challenges facing Wales' Health and Social Care system.
19. The Minister for Health and Social Services thanked members for the opportunity to attend Partnership Council and to update them on:
 - the role of local government in tackling health inequalities in the context of the 75th anniversary of the NHS;
 - the establishment of Llais; and
 - the *Further, Faster* work.
20. The Minister for Health and Social Services noted that the 75th anniversary of the NHS is not only an opportunity to celebrate our health system but also to raise awareness of the key challenges facing it. She highlighted that the health system currently receives 2 million contacts per month against a population of 3.1 million.
21. The Minister for Health and Social Services noted the links between health and social care were crucial and that she was keen to develop more preventative, community-based care where people only go to hospital when absolutely essential. The Minister for Health and Social Care felt that looking at other measures to promote good health would also be beneficial to this. For example, gaps in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas were still significant and there was a need to establish an environment which ensures the public can respond to a system conducive to good health. It was imperative to work across the whole of public health services to effectively promote the health of populations.
22. The Minister for Health and Social Services updated members on 'Llais' (the operational name of the Citizen Voice Body) which was a new independent statutory body set up by the Welsh Government to provide the Welsh public with a voice in the planning and delivery of health and social care services. Amongst the aims of the new body are to:
 - strengthen the citizen voice in Wales for health and social services, ensuring that citizens have an effective mechanism for ensuring their views are heard; and
 - use the service user experience to drive forward improvement.
23. Llais aims for a healthier Wales where people get the health and social care services they need in a way that works best for them, while being an inclusive, independent and leading voice for people-centred health and social care services.
24. The establishment of Llais has been a significant undertaking and investment. Llais has outlined a 100-day plan which has already seen a number of successes to date, including:

- the launch of a national public consultation on its proposed vision, mission, and strategic priorities, actively seeking input from the diverse voices and communities of Wales.
- working with the public to create simple and accessible ways for the people of Wales to connect with Llais and receive its services.
- setting up a strong regional presence in the areas covered by the seven Regional Partnership Boards in Wales, which bring together NHS bodies, local authorities, and the third sector to meet the care and support needs of people in their geographical area.
- working with Llais members and the public to develop organisational values and establish a healthy, inclusive, culture. It will develop and publish a diversity, equality and inclusion policy to support equity in Llais and across health and social care in Wales.
- working with the Welsh Government to further develop digital ways of working that support their activities.
- the launch of a marketing campaign to promote and raise awareness of Llais' independent role in driving improvement in health and social care services
- engaging with communities across Wales to hear from people about health and social care services, including proposals for service delivery changes, and share what they hear with the NHS, local authorities, and other local regional and national decision makers.
- supporting people to raise their concerns about health and social services through an independent complaints advocacy service

25. To conclude her update, the Minister for Health and Social Services highlighted to members that strengthening the capacity of health and social care services in the community would be a priority over the coming months and that she was grateful to local authorities for their work with the NHS last winter to deliver extra community step-down beds. She felt this made a real difference and wanted to build on that partnership approach through *Further, Faster* and focus ahead of next winter on community care for older people and those living with frailty.

26. *Further, Faster* launched on 6 June with the publication of a Statement of Intent document which set out the broad areas of work. This initiative would be the vehicle for bringing together and accelerating this community-focussed work across health and social services. The Minister for Health and Social Services expressed her desire to work with local authorities, as well as the NHS to develop a service and workforce model based on the existing best practice across various workstreams. The Minister for Health and Social Services confirmed her intention to stand up the Care Action Committee over the summer in order to drive *Further, Faster* actions ahead of and during the winter.

27. During discussion, the following key points were raised:

- Councillor Jason McLellan (Leader of Denbighshire County Council) was pleased to hear Llais was an advocacy service but queried the extent of the services it provided.
- Jan Williams (Public Health Wales, attending on behalf of Maria Battle) referred to a number of valuable resources and materials already in existence

which would support the Minister for Health and Social Services' intention to promote healthier communities.

- Councillor Steve Hunt (Leader of Neath Port Talbot Council) referred to the draft social services statement of intent from the WLGA and excellent work done in conjunction with the Welsh Government to develop that. He also felt it was important to recognise the full extent of the challenges the health services and local government are facing and the work being done to overcome them.
- Councillor Alun Williams (Deputy Leader of Ceredigion County Council) noted concerns about the local health boards across Wales. He felt Wales was on the verge of losing a swathe of General Practitioners and they were facing a whole system collapse which did not appear to be a priority for local health boards.
- Councillor Huw Thomas (Leader of Cardiff Council) recognised the resource and financial pressures the health service and local authorities were under and welcomed the focus from the Minister for Health and Social Services and the First Minister for Wales on prevention. Longer term he urged the Minister for Health and Social Services to look at where the public health function sits noting that the WLGA have long campaigned for public health functions to sit with local authorities.
- Councillor Sean Morgan (Leader of Caerphilly County Borough Council) queried whether there could be consideration to taxing high sugar products and developing a public health campaign to sit alongside that.
- Councillor Huw David (Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council and WLGA spokesperson for Health and Social Care) wanted to reflect on the successes last winter when the health service was under immense pressure but through working together with local government averted a potential crisis. He emphasised the importance of working together to ensure there is enough capacity in place as possible.
- Councillor Mark Pritchard (Leader of Wrexham) expressed concern regarding Primary Care and the longer-term strategy for Betsi Cadwalader Health Board.

28. The Deputy Minister for Social Services thanked local authority leaders for their work with her and the Welsh Government especially over the last winter. She acknowledged that there was a big commitment to move closer to community and preventative services and felt one of her areas of Ministerial responsibility in relation to early years and helping families early would be key to this.

29. The Deputy Minister for Social Services assured members that she was aware of the following issues which impact on social care and that the Welsh Government was continuing to work hard with partners to resolve them:

- Move towards standardisation of social work salaries. Also keen to develop a national approach to achieve parity between health and social care salaries – building blocks in place.
- Delays in transfer of care – aware that social care packages are only part of the issue, that there is now a better understanding of where the issues lie and she is grateful for the major efforts being made by everybody involved to improve the situation.

Agenda item 3: Programme for Government Commitment: Reducing the administrative burden on local government

30. The purpose of this item was to discuss the Programme for Government commitment to reduce the administrative burden on local authorities.
31. The Minister confirmed she had discussed this issue with local authority leaders and elected members at the WLGA Annual General meeting at the end of June 2023 but felt a short item would be useful at Partnership Council as the process to reduce the administrative burden would be of benefit across the wider public services, and members would be key to sharing information and good practice.
32. The Minister stated the Welsh Government was committed to doing all it could to reduce the administrative burden on local authorities to enable them to focus their resources where they were most needed. Welsh Government officials had consulted local authority officers on what the biggest burdens were on their time and resources, and the management and administration of grants came out on top. Other burdens in relation to requests for data and information were also noted and will form part of this work.
33. In response to this, the Minister confirmed Welsh Government Cabinet's agreement to pursuing a programme of work with three objectives:
 - To pay fewer revenue grants to local authorities by de-hypothecating funding into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) or consolidating grants where possible to allow for increased local flexibility
 - To have more proportionate administration of remaining grants; and
 - For there to be no increase in other administrative burden or information requests as a result.
34. The programme of work would be overseen by Ministers and Welsh Government officials have begun the process of reviewing all existing revenue grants paid to local authorities. Equality Impact Assessments will also be undertaken to ensure no unintended adverse consequences on the end users of services as a result of the proposals. Local authority delivery teams, Treasurers and governance teams will be engaged in the process throughout, and it will be important to include other stakeholders such as the third sector in the process where relevant.
35. The Minister confirmed the Finance Sub Group of the Partnership Council would provide a joint forum for discussion and ratification of Ministerial proposals. The Minister also confirmed her intention for Partnership Council to be involved in considering the broader implications of the new ways of working and the development of principles for future funding arrangements which would ultimately lead to increased flexibility for local authorities whilst delivering policy objectives. The Minister was keen for the benefit of this work to be passed on to wider partners such as the third sector.

36. The Minister notified members of the Scottish Government's Verity House Agreement which focuses on a small number of shared priorities, and aims to limit the use of grants to provide local authorities with more flexibility to enable more decisions to be made locally over how funding was used.
37. The Minister agreed to provide a further update on the work at the next meeting of Partnership in November.

Agenda item 4: Keeping regional partnership arrangements under review

38. The Minister welcomed Cefin Campbell MS, Plaid Cymru Designated Member for the Co-operation Agreement commitment to '*Keep regional partnership working under review*'.
39. The Minister noted the work on the commitment has been undertaken in a proportionate and pragmatic way, aiming to build on the work of the Review of Strategic Partnerships of 2019-20, and recognising the work underway to align partnerships in the regions.
40. The Minister noted that she and the Designated Member had valued the constructive way partnership chairs responded during the engagement exercise, and she had welcomed the opportunity to seek the views of Partnership Council at the last meeting.
41. The Minister set out some reflections from undertaking the review. The Minister noted that she has heard how the relationships built through partnership structures have been of value in responding to the big challenges faced over recent years, with one chair describing during the engagement exercise how their PSB gave a '*framework for resilience*' during the pandemic.
42. The Minister added that she had heard there has been progress in aligning partnership working, that there is more work to do, but that regions are working to identify the right approach, with some more advanced than others. There is a strong sense of local ownership of these considerations, rather than calls for Welsh Government intervention.
43. The Minister noted that partnerships should work together effectively and efficiently in a model that is right for their area and its priorities, adding that there is not a single model, and regions have the flexibility to find the right approach.
44. The Minister commented that this should be underpinned by a consistent framework for partnership working – expectations that, for example, there will be terms of reference with clarity of purpose, and line of sight to other single-purpose and multi-purpose strategic partnerships where there are over-lapping interests.
45. The Minister introduced the draft report which had been circulated to members, noting that it recognises that progress has been, and continues to be made in aligning partnerships, but it is important to regularly reflect on the partnership

landscape to maximise its effectiveness and efficiency. The Minister stated that Partnership Council is well placed to lead on this, as reflected in the draft recommendations. The Minister noted that the recommendations are organised around 4 key themes:

- **Theme 1:** Collective responsibility for the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership landscape
- **Theme 2:** Local leadership for effectiveness and efficiency of partnership working
- **Theme 3:** A consistent framework for partnership working
- **Theme 4:** Sharing practice and learning

46. The Minister referred to the recommendation for national sharing of practice. She thanked Councillor Huw Thomas for offering to share Cardiff's experience of reviewing partnership priorities and delivery arrangements, which she hoped to include on the agenda at the next meeting of Partnership Council. She invited other members who would like to share in this way to contact the secretariat. The Minister also noted what Welsh Government could offer in relation to this recommendation, stating that there are regular opportunities to engage such as the twice yearly meeting she has with PSB chairs and the PSB network meetings. The Minister added that Welsh Government hopes to deliver an event, jointly with the Future Generations Commissioner, where practice can be showcased.

47. The Minister invited Cefin Campbell MS to offer some reflections at this point. Cefin Campbell MS noted he was very grateful for the opportunity to take part in the engagement exercise with partnership chairs across Wales. He noted that he had heard evidence that partnerships are an important and effective way of delivering support and general services. He added that the challenge is to make the best use of staff resources and time, and to avoid duplication, share best practice and collaborate.

48. The Designated Member noted that, from his own experience and from the evidence from the engagement exercise, having the appropriate seniority of decision-maker in attendance is a consistent message, with the delegated powers to make decisions so that partnerships can move quickly on issues.

49. The Designated Member then asked for the views of Partnership Council on how partnerships engage with Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) now they are established. He noted that exploring CJCs had not been part of this engagement exercise, but now they are established he would be interested in hearing early views on how Partnership Council see the landscape moving as CJCs become embedded. The Designated Member closed by noting that the work on this commitment had been a really important learning exercise for him and Welsh Government.

50. The Minister highlighted paragraph two in the discussion paper and the questions to inform the discussion at paragraph 13. She noted that there is an opportunity to take further comments outside the meeting. The Minister extended her thanks to Cefin Campbell MS for his work on this commitment. She then invited comments in accordance with the questions in the discussion paper.

51. The following key points were raised:

- South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael referenced paragraph 37 in the draft report. He noted that he felt it got the balance right and he particularly agreed with the priority for 'line of sight', in Welsh Government and in regional arrangements. PCC Michael noted that the task of getting the 'line of sight' established everywhere, as appropriate to local arrangements, should not be underestimated.
- Councillor Mike Theodoulou (Chair, One Voice Wales) commented that this is an excellent report, and that progress could be seen. He added that community and town councils are not included in the partnerships that had been considered, but as the tier of government closest to the electorate they could effectively contribute to these partnerships.
- Jan Williams (Public Health Wales) commended those involved in this work and noted that the report covers a lot of ground. She noted that she would consult with colleagues and provide a collective response on the draft report. Jan Williams added that the recommendation to develop national principles for aligning partnership working is welcomed. She noted that shared and jointly owned data systems would support effective partnerships and referred to the All-Wales Public Health Dashboard. Jan Williams also commented that partnerships are fundamental to One Welsh Public Service.
- Councillor Steven Hunt (Leader of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council) noted he is very supportive of this work. He added that he has concerns in relation to CJs, particularly around funding. Councillor Hunt also reflected on Public Services Boards (PSBs) and CJs, the relationships between them, how officers support and how to ensure there is no duplication.
- Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Leader of Cyngor Gwynedd) referred to recommendation 2 in the draft report, which set out that PSBs and Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) should provide local leadership for aligning partnership working, including exploring pathways from the single purpose partnerships to the multi-purpose partnerships. Councillor Siencyn commented that he was unsure in practice whether those boards would be best placed to do that work. He added that in his view the least effective partnerships are the ones that have been created on a statutory basis, including CJs, and he said he echoed Councillor Hunt's comments.
- Councillor Darren Price (Leader of Carmarthenshire Council) stated that he generally welcomed the recommendations and the approach to reviewing systems locally and regionally. He noted he agreed with the point about budgetary impacts of CJs. Councillor Price concluded his comments by saying that he welcomed the draft report and agreed in principle to Partnership Council being the appropriate body to have collective responsibility for the effectiveness and efficiency of regional partnership working and to oversee future reviews of the landscape.

52. The Minister for Finance and Local Government thanked members for their comments. She turned to the decisions for Partnership Council to make as set out in the paper as follows:

- Consider and agree the draft final report and the recommendations it contains.
- Agree the recommendation that Partnership Council for Wales have collective responsibility for the effectiveness and efficiency of regional partnership working and oversee future reviews of the partnership landscape (Recommendation 1 of the draft report).
- Agree that a working group of Partnership Council be established to co-develop draft principles for regional partnership working (Recommendation 5 of the draft report).
- Nominate representatives for the working group to co-develop core national principles for regional partnership working. Nominations (including contact details) to be sent to the secretariat.

53. The Minister asked if there were any objections to these points in principle. No objections were raised.

54. Councillor Llinos Medi Huws referred to the request for nominations for the working group to co-develop core national principles. She noted that the working group should include representation from across Wales. The Minister noted that any further comments on the draft report, and nominations for the working group, could be sent to the secretariat.

55. Before closing the item, the Minister noted that she has had conversations recently with community and town councils (CTCs) during which they have indicated that engagement with them was variable. PSBs were raised as a specific case where engagement with CTCs was not as good as it could be, and this was a clear message at a One Voice Wales conference the Minister had attended the previous week. The Minister noted that she would raise this directly with PSB chairs.

Action 2: Partnership Council for Wales members to send the following to the secretariat:-

- comments on the draft report '*Keeping regional partnership working under review with local partners*', and
- nominations for the working group to co-develop core national principles for regional partnership working.

Concluding remarks

56. The Minister thanked all members for their input to the discussions, and informed members that the next meeting would be held on 8 November.

