

Finance Sub Group of the Partnership Council for Wales - Minutes

Monday, 17 November 2025 15:30-16:30 MS Teams

Attendees

Welsh Government Ministers

Jayne Bryant MS, Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government – Chair item 6 onwards

Welsh Local Government Association

Cllr Lis Burnett (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cllr Anthony Hunt (Torfaen)
Cllr Dimitri Batrouni (Newport)
Cllr Andrew Morgan (RCT)
Cllr Mark Pritchard (Wrexham)
Cllr Rob Stewart (Swansea)
Cllr Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey)

Welsh Local Government Association/ Local Government officers

Dr Chris Llewelyn – Chief Executive, WLGA
Jon Rae – Director of Resources, WLGA
Nathan Gardner – Finance Manager
Jane Thomas – S151 Powys Council (Secretary SWT)

Welsh Government officials (excluding Observers)

Reg Kilpatrick – Director, Local Government and Planning (part meeting)
Claire Germain – Deputy Director, Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families
Clare Blake – Deputy Director, Council Tax Policy
Ben Crudge – Deputy Director, Non-Domestic Rates Policy
Emma Smith – Local Government Finance Policy & Sustainability
Andrea Melvin - Local Government Finance Policy & Sustainability
Simon Edwards - Local Government Finance Policy & Sustainability
Freya Gregory – Local Government Finance Police & Sustainability (Note taker)
Andrew Wagstaff – Private Secretary
Tal Michael – Special Advisor
David Willis - Tackling Poverty and Supporting Families

Apologies

Cllr Paul Griffiths (Monmouthshire)
Cllr Darren Price (Carmarthenshire)
Lisa Hayward - Finance Policy Officer (Revenues and Benefits)
Judith Cole – Deputy Director, Local Government Finance Policy & Sustainability

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Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. The CSHLG was running late from her previous meeting so Emma Smith thanked members for attending and welcomed Cllr Gary Pritchard. The group agreed to the use of Microsoft Copilot to support officials in drafting the minutes for this meeting.

Item 5: Streamlining Welsh Benefits

2. Cllr Anthony Hunt presented slides on ongoing work to streamline Welsh benefits. Cllr Hunt shared that in January 2024 the Partnership Council for Wales signed up to the Welsh Benefits Charter which will look to create a more coherent, compassionate Welsh benefits system. The charter aims to make it easier for people to access benefits administered in Wales in a streamlined way, only having to make contact once to access the support they are entitled to.
3. Cllr Hunt explained the delivery of the charter was being led by the Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group who work alongside the Senior Responsible Officer Group who bring existing expertise to the work.
4. In January 2025 the [Streamlining Welsh Benefits Phase 1 route map](#) was published, again agreed through the Partnership Council for Wales, which focused on three of the Welsh Benefits – Free School Meals, Schools Essential Grant and Council Tax Reduction scheme. These benefits were chosen as they are core local authority delivered benefits and support the poorest in communities.
5. Cllr Hunt had recently met with the chair of the steering group and the Cabinet Secretary for social justice to discuss the progress. Cllr Hunt asked for this group to continue taking steps needed to reduce the complexity of accessing benefits, to increase the use of existing data to proactively target those with entitlements, and to help develop shared solutions for simplifying the benefits process in Wales.
6. Claire Germain explained how the work was being progressed in two main areas. Where individuals are known to the council via the Universal Credit data share, this data is being used for auto enrolment across 20 out of 22 authorities to support council tax reduction applications. For those not already known to councils, the focus was on simplifying the application process for free benefits. Claire described a pilot project underway with some authorities to test how data could be used to better identify and target individuals.
7. The group thanked Cllr Hunt and Claire for their presentation.

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Item 2: Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

8. Emma Smith asked the group for comments on the previous meetings' minutes. Emma noted that the two actions from the previous meetings had been completed. The group agreed the accuracy of the minutes from the previous meetings (Papers 1a and 1b).

Item 3: DSG Progress Report (Draft)

9. Andrea Melvin summarised the draft DSG Progress Report, noting the recommendations made by DSG on the datasets to be used in the 2026-27 settlement. Andrea highlighted datasets where averaging and phasing were being used to manage volatility in the data. Andrea also shared that DSG had met four times in 2025, one of which being an in-person workshop attended by a Scottish Government official to discuss how their settlement is produced. Andrea also noted how DSG had held discussions surrounding the ongoing formula review work.
10. Reg Kilpatrick thanked Andrea and DSG for their work throughout the year and asked the group for comments on report.
11. Cllr Andrew Morgan thanked DSG for their work and agreed the need for using the latest data. Cllr Morgan also recognised the need for updating the oldest data and weightings, to reflect the current need to spend for local authorities. Cllr Morgan queried how this work could be expedited and how it would be managed after this initial formula review to ensure data used in the settlement wouldn't become so outdated again.
12. Emma Smith introduced Simon Edwards who is currently undertaking the formula review work plan, assuring that Simon had an item later in the meeting that would answer this more fully. Emma also assured the group that Simon had been engaging resources from KAS within Welsh Government and Data Cymru where appropriate.

Item 4: Update on Settlement formula review

13. Simon Edwards presented the update on the formula review work describing the workstreams to complete for implementation of the new formulae in the 2028-29 settlement. Simon explained that currently he was the only dedicated resource, but the settlement team were looking into additional analyst resource. Simon explained that the work was not straightforward as not only was he looking at updating datasets to the most recent but also exploring if there were other datasets that would more appropriately explain local authorities' need to spend. Simon also stressed that the formula review is a separate entity to the quantum, looking at distributing the funding available in the fairest way.
14. Cllr Dimitri Batrouni sought clarity around updating the settlement methodology. Simon explained that the overarching methodology of SSAs – built from RSG,

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NDR, and assumed council tax levels – will not be altered in this review. The methodology that the formula review work plan refers to is the recalibration of the IBAs which use a range of regression analyses and modelling to produce accurate weightings for the indicators.

15. Cllr Batrouni also sought clarity on the decision-making process for the formula review work. Reg clarified that Simon and the settlement team would be doing the analysis, which would be presented to DSG which is made up of officials from LAs, WLGA, and Data Cymru. DSG would then make recommendations to FSG and the CSHLG where the final decision would lie.

Item 6: Update from Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government

16. CSHLG apologised for missing the beginning of the meeting. The CSHLG gave an update on second stage draft budget was published on 3 November and confirmed the information already shared, a 2.5% average uplift with the aim of a 2.3% floor. Additional funding that has been distributed in this financial year has been baselined including, employers' national insurance funding, teachers and NJC staff pay, and ALN coordinators pay. The CSHLG shared that publication date of the provisional settlement as 24th November, this would include indicative information on specific grants.
17. The CSHLG shared that the CSFWL had been seeking options for additional flexibility for LAs and was exploring statutory overrides. Mainly the minimum revenue provision for the repayment of borrowing. The ability to exclude part of expenditure from the budget requirement calculations was also being explored. The CSHLG assured that these flexibilities would be on a time limited basis only. These had been shared by officials with SWT and there was a targeted consultation out at the time of the meeting
18. Emma Smith shared that the consultation would go out to section 151 officers, chief executives, local authorities, WLGA, Audit Wales, and CIPFA later that week.
19. Cllr Andrew Morgan thanked the CSHLG and welcomed the additional possible flexibilities as a fall back but reiterated local governments request for a 4% settlement. Meaning LAs would not have to use those flexibilities. Cllr Morgan understands the rationale for a roll over budget but was hopeful for the political parties to come together to pass a budget that gives local government 4%.
20. The CSHLG thanked Cllr Morgan for setting out the local government position and agreed hope for a beneficial budget process but highlighted the need for these safeguards in local government.

Item 6: Any Other Business

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21. The CSHLG and members gave thanks to Cllr Darren Price and his work within the group and well wishes for the future as he had step down as the leader for Carmarthenshire County Council.