

Local Government and Public Services Committee

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Date: Wednesday 29 June 2005

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Local Government Partnership Scheme Report For 2004-2005

Purpose

1. To invite the Committee's comments on the draft annual report on the Local Government Partnership Scheme for 2004 - 2005 (Annex A).

Summary

2. Section 113 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 ("the Act") requires the National Assembly to make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales. After each financial year the Assembly is required to publish a report of how its proposals, as set out in the local government scheme, were implemented in that financial year. Under the terms of the Scheme, the annual report is submitted to the Partnership Council prior to consideration by LGPS Committee and the National Assembly in plenary.

Local Government Partnership Scheme Report 2004-2005

5. The draft Local Government Partnership Scheme Report for 2004-2005 was compiled by the Welsh Assembly Government in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association and the other local government organisations representing community councils, national parks, fire and police authorities.

6. The draft report was discussed by the Partnership Council on 9 June 2005. Following the meeting the report was amended to take into account comments by One Voice Wales.

Next Steps

7. Following consideration by the Committee, the report will be considered by the National Assembly on 6 July 2005.

Action for the Committee

8. Committee is invited to comment on the draft report on the Local Government Partnership Scheme for 2004-2005 (attached at Annex A)

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Annex A

Local Government Partnership Scheme Report 2004-2005

Introduction

1.1. Under Section 113(1) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 the National Assembly is required to make a scheme "setting out how the Assembly proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales". The Assembly is also required to prepare a report after each financial year of how its proposals in the Scheme were implemented in that financial year.

1.2. The Local Government Partnership Scheme was agreed in July 2000 and updated in June 2004. This is the fifth report on the implementation of the scheme. The report has been prepared in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the other local government organisations representing community councils, national parks, fire and police authorities.

Partnership

A commitment to working in partnership with local government, voluntary organisations and business organisations.

2.1. The Assembly Government and local government in Wales are committed to working together in partnership, within an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, recognising the value and legitimacy of the roles both have to play in the governance of Wales. Both are committed to openness and accountability in decision making and in their relations with each other and the public.

2.2. Partnership working is one of the key elements in the Assembly Government's vision for the future of public services in Wales as set out in the policy document "Making the Connections". It seeks to make efficiency gains through the scale economies of more effective co-operation and co-ordination between agencies across the whole of the public sector, not excluding the independent, voluntary and private sectors. Joint working is vital to deliver public services of top quality and the best outcomes will be obtained when those who use and those who provide services work together in collaboration. The

following paragraphs set out a range of examples of how this partnership approach is bringing significant benefits in Wales.

2.3. Health Challenge Wales, announced by the First Minister in February 2004, seeks to extend the partnership approach by engaging the efforts of the whole nation in action to improve health and well-being. In seeking to address all the economic, social and environmental determinants of health, Health Challenge Wales finds particular resonance in local authorities whose work affects many areas that influence health and well-being. The WLGA has welcomed Health Challenge Wales, and, at the request of the First Minister, local health, social care and well-being strategies are going forward under Health Challenge Wales branding. A number of local authorities are currently developing their response to the Challenge, and more will be doing so. This is important in building momentum for the national efforts to improve health and well-being.

2.4. The Health Challenge Wales Voluntary Sector Grant Scheme offers grants to national voluntary organisations across Wales. There are currently 2 grant rounds in existence funding 19 organisations in total. These organisations are making links with local government in various ways e.g. Sustrans (Sustainable Transport) plays an important role in developing and delivering transport/environmental improvements locally and across Wales. This involves close partnership working with local authorities (including health alliances) and local health boards to enable partners to look at the transport component when promoting physical activity through increased walking and cycling.

2.5. The Assembly Government has supported and worked with 22 Local Health Alliances (LHAs), led by local authorities. These alliances were set up to identify and tackle local health issues and health inequalities, they have provided an important local means of addressing the determinants of health. Over the past 6 years, alliances have evolved and developed in different ways and have laid solid foundations on which to build the new Health, Social Care and Well-being strategies. The role of this support has now moved to focus on how ‘alliance’ activity can help maximise and integrate health and wellbeing into existing strategies and agendas. Part of this focus is around community health and wellbeing, as well as involving communities. Also some initiatives take place to improve lifestyles such as: Men’s Health Day; Keep Well this Winter campaign, establishing fruit tuck shops in schools. Many are involved in health impact assessments ensuring the wider determinants of health are considered before local authority projects are undertaken.

2.6. The Inequalities in Health Fund was established in 2001 to stimulate and support local action to address inequalities in health and the factors that contribute to it, including inequities in access to health services. The fund is currently supporting 62 projects in disadvantaged communities across Wales through joint action by the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary sector, with a budget of £5 million for 2004-2005. The Fund has targeted coronary heart disease as a first priority and is making an important contribution to the implementation of the standards set by the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease. Separately, the Fund has also provided £1 million a year to address inequalities in oral health. One of the Fund’s main objectives is partnership/ collaborative/ cross-boundary working. Four of the 62 live projects are being taken forward by local government organisations.

An example is a Cardiac Rehabilitation project led by Powys County Council. This project has established cardiac rehabilitation services in five leisure centre sites across the County.

2.7. The Assembly Government's Schools Management Division held a series of successful workshops for all Local Education Authorities (LEA), which were completed in April 2004. The aim of these workshops was to give LEAs a better understanding of the procedures for bringing forward school reorganisation proposals. This in turn has reduced the time taken for the Assembly Government to process proposals to decision stage. Other examples of partnership working in education are:

- Development of the National Pupil Database - the WLGA is a member of the project board overseeing this important development.
- The Daugherty Review Group, which looked at the assessment and testing arrangements for 11 and 14 year olds in Wales, included representation from across local government and the education sector working in partnership to achieve the best outcome for learners and teachers alike.
- In 2004, the Assembly Government consulted local government and other stakeholders on proposals contained within the draft School Transport Bill which would enable local authorities to pilot innovative school travel schemes

2.8. The National Museums & Galleries of Wales (NMGW) has set up a Visual Arts Partnership with 5 local art galleries to enable works from the national collections to be displayed at venues around Wales. The two local authority funded galleries are the Ruthin Craft Centre and the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea. The Ruthin Craft Centre proposes a continuing programme over three years featuring major historical and recent figures in applied arts. This display, to be changed on a six monthly basis, will provide a UK and international perspective as a wider historical context for Ruthin Craft Centre's contemporary craft and design exhibitions. The Glynn Vivian Art Gallery has worked regularly with NMGW as a receiver or provider of touring exhibitions. It is currently in the first stages of a feasibility study to restructure and represent the gallery, including possible capital refurbishment.

2.9. The Assembly Government works with the relevant National Parks and local authorities in Wales, the Welsh Development Agency, Environment Agency and Countryside Council for Wales as part of the Coed Cymru Partnership. With funding support from the Assembly Government and partner organisations, Coed Cymru's purpose is to assist and guide owners of small and neglected woodlands to enable them to restore productivity and diversity of their woodlands. Over the last year, Coed Cymru has developed a wood pellet-making process which will enable small and medium size users to process wood which can then be used in wood burners to provide heat. Coed Cymru has also developed a heat treatment process which allows less marketable timbers to be used for a wide range of products including flooring and furniture.

2.10. The WLGA is represented on the Farming Connect Partners Group which meets throughout the

year to discuss the progress and future direction of the service to the Welsh farming community. The WLGA is also consulted whenever any part of the Farming Connect service or any proposals for future developments has an impact on local government or the communities of Wales.

2.11. In April 2003 the Assembly Government and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) entered into a Framework Agreement with local authorities in England and Wales relating to their enforcement activities in respect of movement and biosecurity controls. DEFRA provided funding to local authorities for this additional work. It set out measures required for consistent disease control through risk-based enforcement and enhanced reporting and information systems. The requirements in the agreement have necessitated a close working relationship between local authorities, the Assembly Government and the State Veterinary Service in Wales. The Assembly Government has also worked in partnership with local authorities through LACORS (Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services) to ensure consistency in enforcement by local authorities of tagging regulations, other matters including animal welfare and the implementation of the Animal By Products (Wales) Regulations 2003. The Assembly Government is committed to an international aim of halting biodiversity decline by 2010. Local Biodiversity Actions Plans (LBAPS) are key to this. They aim to conserve and enhance nature across communities by bringing together all interests, involving sectors such as agriculture and business as well as the communities themselves. Action is developed and taken forward in partnership and in doing so reflects local priorities as well as biodiversity needs e.g. a recent LBAP project on Anglesey involved the local authority and Forestry Commission contributing to the enhanced Dingle Nature reserve in Llangefni. The project included the construction of new wooded boardwalks and foot bridges giving full disabled access to the reserve. LBAP Partnerships are now in place across Wales, and many local authorities provide a Biodiversity officer to facilitate a collaborative approach to delivery.

2.12. The Assembly has committed joint funding for 2003-2006 to the development and delivery of the Police led All Wales Schools Programme, originated by Gwent Police Force. The programme is delivered by 70 police School Liaison Officers who deliver the programme in partnership with Personal and Social Education (PSE) teachers in Welsh secondary and primary schools. The programme encompasses Crime Prevention / Reduction issues and is based on the ACCAC PSE framework. It is a spiral scheme of work through Key Stage 1-4 in line with the framework and is intended to compliment the good work already going on in schools. The programme consists of 3 main strands that of Drug and Substance Misuse; Social Behaviour; Community and Safety which comply with good practice as outlined in the Welsh Assembly Government Circular 17/02. There are 5 lessons in each strand. Each area inherited aspects of good practice indigenous to the area which have been absorbed into the programme. This does not effect the corporate approach, but does incorporate develop and enhance local partnerships. Over 855 of Welsh schools have received the Programme during the 2004/5 academic year.

Strategic Priorities

Working with local government and all parts of Welsh society to help deliver and refine

the Assembly Government's strategic vision set out in 'Wales: A Better Country'.

3.1. The Assembly Government is committed to consulting local government through the Partnership Council for Wales and its sub-groups before determining its policy and spending priorities. The Assembly Government recognises that new initiatives and new responsibilities must be fully funded before they are passed onto local government.

3.2. Policy agreements between the Assembly Government and each unitary authority in Wales have proved a unique and successful means of partnership working between tiers of government. The second round of policy agreements is now in place, covering the years 2004-2007. Each agreement sets out the targets which the local authority has committed to meeting over the course of the agreement. They reflect both the authority's contribution to national strategic priorities and its progress in delivering specific local priorities and programmes. They are also a way of demonstrating improvements to service-users and others in a clear and accountable way. The targets for national priorities cover:

- improved school attendance;
- fewer children leaving school without qualifications;
- more help for homeless families;
- better energy efficiency;
- fewer delayed transfers of care;
- more help for older people to live at home, and fewer older people in residential care;
- better support for children in care, and less disruption to their education.

3.3. It is hard at this stage to evaluate the total all-Wales improvement that would result if all targets were met, as each agreement has been negotiated separately. However, it is clear that the agreements have the potential to deliver significant improvements in these key areas.

3.4. Local authorities have also proposed measures and targets for their own priorities and programmes in their policy agreements. They have a free choice in this, subject only to broad conformity with the overarching themes in '*Wales: A Better Country*'. There is a very diverse range of such measures as a result, reflecting particular local needs and concerns.

3.5. Grants totalling £30 million in 2004-2005 and £31 million in 2005-2006 are available to authorities, initially for concluding an agreement and subsequently for meeting the milestones and targets in it. This report will in future years contain an overview of the progress local authorities have made in delivering their policy agreements.

3.6. In 2005-2006 the Assembly Government will begin to reduce the number of plans and strategies which it requires local authorities to produce and will seek to complete the process as soon as practically and legislatively possible. The Assembly Government will focus instead on monitoring performance and delivery and is putting in place a radically reformed performance measurement framework to support this. This is described further in paragraph 5.3.

3.7. The remaining plan requirements will cover only an authority's high level and long-term strategic vision in key areas. The structure of detailed business and operational planning will be a matter for each authority, although the adequacy and robustness of such arrangements and the ways in which local authorities make use of the new performance measurement framework, will be subject to assessment under the Wales Programme for Improvement.

3.8. The Assembly Government seeks to provide local government with financial support which adequately reflects the responsibilities placed on local government by law. It recognises the discretion of local authorities to raise local taxes and will not normally use its powers to intervene in the budgetary decisions taken by individual local authorities.

3.9. The Assembly Government adopted the Wales Spatial Plan on 17 November 2004. This followed an extensive and active period of consultation in which local authorities took an active part. Following adoption, a further series of workshops were held in which Local Government actively engaged. Ministers and officials have been proactive in discussing the spatial plan with local authorities and they will be a key part of the area and national implementation structures. The Spatial Plan provides a framework for future collaborative action to achieve priorities nationally and regionally. It sets a context for local community planning. It encourages cross-boundary working to improve regional decision making. In time it will inform and be informed by revisions of local community plans.

3.10. Local government officers have worked closely with Assembly officials, as members of specialist sub groups, to produce a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework for Wales. The Framework reflects the vision contained in '*Wales: A Better Country*'. Work with a local authority is currently being undertaken to produce a specialist assessment module for the Substance Misuses Treatment Framework. Operation Tarian is a unique partnership initiative between the Assembly Government, the Home Office and the four Welsh police forces. This co-operative project aims to stem the influx of Class A drugs in Wales via the disruption and dismantling of the illegal drugs supply networks of existing organised crime groups, specifically targeting the supply of heroin and crack cocaine.

3.11. In May 2004 the Assembly Government established an Advisory Group of WLGA, local authority and Welsh European Funding Office officials to ensure that Local Regeneration Fund resources were maximised. The resultant monitoring and recycling of resources is enabling more efficient and effective strategic planning of match-funding for local authority projects.

Community Leadership: The Role of Local Authorities

Providing the framework to support local authorities as community leaders

4.1. The democratic nature of local government enables it to fulfil a local leadership role similar to that of the Assembly Government nationally. Local authorities are ideally placed to establish mechanisms to elicit community views and to work with partners in formulating a vision for its area that identifies

strategic opportunities for collaboration and the delivery of services.

4.2. Local authorities and their partner organisations have made good progress in preparing community strategies. Almost all local authorities have now adopted their strategies and are in the process of putting into place arrangements for their implementation. Some authorities have established area forums comprising representatives of the county council and local councils to advise on local needs and aspirations. In addition some local councils have drawn up their own local visions in consultation with their partners including the county council. The Assembly Government has adopted a two-stage approach to evaluating the first round of community strategies. The first stage is an in-house assessment of individual community strategies, while the second stage is an evaluation of the process of preparing and implementing them, which is currently being undertaken by external consultants. The Assembly's in-house assessment of individual strategies was considered by the Assembly's Local Government and Public Services Committee in February. It shows that the strategies for the most part are based on consultation with local agencies and communities and that they reflect the six business areas set out in '*Wales: A Better Country*'. It is anticipated that the independent evaluation of the community strategy process will be completed by the Summer of 2005 and that it will inform the Assembly's future policy on community strategies.

4.3. The Community Strategy Working Group, comprising representatives of the key stakeholders such as the WLGA, One Voice Wales and the WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Action) met frequently over the year to track progress in preparing the strategies and to consider the provision of appropriate advice and guidance. It contributed to the preparation of the evaluation framework and the proposals for a good practice guide on participation and engagement, which will be issued in 2005. The working group also developed proposals for action learning sets to establish good practice in implementing the strategies and hosted a visit by the Scottish Executive to Cardiff in November to discuss the different approaches to strategy preparation and implementation. The Assembly Government separately organised a meeting with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on its approach to community strategies.

4.4. Assembly Government and WLGA officials, with the support of members of the Community Strategies Working Group, also organised a Wales wide network of community strategy practitioners. Two meetings were held in 2004-2005 which examined good practice between councils, the evaluation framework, the relationship between community strategies and the Wales Spatial Plan and the use of integration tools to assess the consistency of policy proposals. The purpose of the network is to share experiences, encourage discussion of issues relating to community strategies, including joint working between authorities.

4.5. The Welsh Development Agency is a key player in the formulation of Local Authority led Community Strategies, which bring together agencies and organisations from all sectors to create and implement long-term plans for the communities within each Unitary Authority area. The aim is to ensure greater convergence and integration of these Strategies with the Plans of the Agency and its partners so that activities and resources are targeted at agreed priorities. The Heads of the Valleys is a major new partnership programme launched by the Minister for Economic Development and Transport on 22nd November 2004. A cross-organisational Programme Team is being formed and has already begun to

take forward the development of the strategy (Currently the Team includes representatives from the 5 Local Authorities, the Welsh Assembly Government, WDA, ELWa and Countryside Council for Wales). The Welsh Development Agency's Support for the regeneration of Clydach has been one of the key factors in revitalising this area of Swansea. Through working in partnership with Clydach Development Trust, the Community Council and the City & County of Swansea, significant progress has already been made through implementation of the WDA programmes of town and environmental improvements.

4.6. The Assembly Government is committed to building stronger and safer communities and tough action on anti social behaviour. To achieve this, the Assembly works closely with the Community Safety Partnerships led by local authorities and the police, which are implementing crime and disorder reduction strategies in every part of Wales. The Partnerships were strengthened in 2003 by the addition of police and fire authorities and LHBs as statutory partners arising from the Police Reform Act 2002. The Act also placed a statutory duty on the Partnerships to develop and implement local strategies to tackle substance misuse. One year Local Substance Misuse Action Plans for 2004-2005 were produced by the 22 Community Safety Partnerships and were integral to their 2004 activities, spending plans and funding. Partnerships have developed their three-year Local Substance Misuse Action Plans for the period 2005-2008.

4.7. Designated Community Safety Officers are in place in every unitary authority area and are being joined by new anti social behaviour officers. Action on crime, anti social behaviour and substance misuse is backed by significant funding from both the Assembly Government and the Home Office. The Partnerships are encouraged to achieve a close fit with other agencies' local strategies. The close collaboration between the Assembly Government, local authorities and the police is driving forward work across Wales which is having a positive impact on people's personal safety and quality of life.

4.8. The Assembly Government, the WLGA and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) also convened a joint working group to revise the draft guidance on the use of the wellbeing power. The guidance encourages local authorities to make maximum use of the power to overcome the legal uncertainties that otherwise could hinder the taking of much needed actions and includes case examples. The guidance will be launched at a joint seminar in July 2005.

4.9. During the year, the Internal Assembly Partners Group met regularly to facilitate joint working across the Assembly Government and to ensure that the production and implementation of cross-cutting strategies is consistent and operates in a co-ordinated way.

4.10. The Assembly Government provides funding to support a health and well being unit housed within the WLGA. The unit supports local authorities in undertaking their joint statutory duty with LHBs to deliver the Assembly and local government's vision for health, social care and well being in Wales. This includes the provision of specialist advice and support for the implementation of the health and well being strategies, the development of an effective strategic partnership between local authorities and LHBs and the dissemination of good practice.

Modernising Welsh Local Government

Keeping political management structures under review, evaluating performance and adopting the highest standards of probity

5.1. The Assembly Government shares with local government the commitment to create a modern democracy which is open and participative, where policy is developed and evaluated openly and in partnership to meet the needs and aspirations of the Welsh people.

5.2. The Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) has delivered real and significant improvements since its establishment, both in terms of higher levels of performance and reduced levels of assessed risk. This fully vindicates the decision to move away from the old regime, but also offers an opportunity to build on success and to continue to develop the WPI in line with its basic principles. The Assembly Government is thus working with local authorities, the WLGA, the Audit Commission in Wales (the Wales Audit Office from April 2005) and others to reform and enhance the WPI. This is likely to encompass:

- re-emphasising the importance of self-assessment, and of local authorities and those they serve taking full ownership of planning and delivering improvement, with support from others where necessary. The WPI will continue to avoid formal ranking or classification of authorities;
- setting out how improvement activity fits within and contributes to the accountability of local authorities to those they serve, and providing clearer links between it and other elements of the accountability framework (such as local authority strategic planning and policy agreements);
- greater freedom for local authorities in exactly how they structure their improvement activities, but with no loss of rigour;
- a stress on the need for improvement to be based on actual and continuous engagement with the communities that local authorities serve – to identify their needs and priorities and to share outcomes with them;
- the support that regulators and inspectors can provide to improvement – by identifying and spreading solutions and best practice examples, and working with authorities to implement them, rather than simply validating good or bad performance.

5.3. To support the WPI, the Assembly Government is implementing a radically reformed system of local authority performance measurement. This will establish:

- a much smaller number of statutory performance indicators, covering local government's contribution to key national strategic objectives;
- core data sets, which provide detailed, balanced and comparable performance information for all local authority services, and which will allow authorities to benchmark their performance and communicate it objectively to their service-users and partners;
- shared outcome measures, which capture the extent to which local authorities work with others to deliver services and outcomes of mutual concern;

- local measures, devised by individual authorities to cover issues and programmes of particular local interest.

5.4. It was not possible for local authorities to use pilot voting methods at the 2004 elections due to the combination with the elections to the European Parliament. Electoral reform remains, however, a priority and the Assembly Government has worked closely with the Electoral Commission and relevant UK Government departments to further this.

5.5. One Voice Wales, the new national representative body for community and town councils in Wales, held its inaugural meeting in April 2004, with over 510 councils initially becoming members. The Assembly Government provided £100,000 to One Voice Wales in 2004-2005 to assist in meeting setting up and core administration costs in its first year. The association's Chief Executive took up post on 4 January 2005. The Assembly Government hopes that all local councils will join One Voice Wales, since a single community and town council association is fundamental to enhancing the performance of local councils and to establishing links with the Assembly Government and other bodies in local government.

Liaison and Consultation with Local Government

Ensuring the effective operation of the Partnership Council for Wales and wider consultation and collaboration mechanisms

6.1. It is generally agreed that the Partnership Council for Wales ("Partnership Council") provides an effective forum for discussion and joint working between the Assembly Government, Assembly Members of other political groups and elected representatives of local government. The Partnership Council has met 21 times up to March 2005. There were three meetings in 2004-05 in Cardiff and Flintshire

6.2. To ensure that all relevant policy initiatives are identified and given due consideration by the Partnership Council a longer-term forward programme was introduced in 2004. The Forward Programme is intended to bring a systematic and comprehensive approach to the identification of potential agenda items for Partnership Council meetings. It also enables Ministers to consider issues in advance, within the Assembly Cabinet Sub-Committee on Local Government and Public Services, and to determine appropriate Ministerial representation at meetings.

6.3. Working Groups that have reported back to the Partnership Council over the last twelve months include:

- Wales Programme for Improvement
- Local Government Code of Conduct

Policy issues discussed include:

- Devolution of the Fire Service
- The Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils
- Older People's Strategy
- Health Challenge Wales
- Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales
- Local Government Plan Rationalisation
- Review of National Parks Authorities in Wales
- Implementation of the Wales Programme for Improvement and the Performance Measurement Framework
- Emergency Planning

Frequent and Open Consultation

6.4. The Assembly Government is committed to consulting, as soon as practicable and within the constraints of proper confidentiality, the representative associations of Welsh local government on all matters of common concern affecting local government. On major issues of policy, the Assembly Government is also committed to consulting individual authorities, including community and town councils where appropriate. It is recognised that the consultation process must be full, open and transparent and must give proper consideration to timescales. Some specific examples of this process in action are described below:

6.5. The Assembly Government, jointly with the Home Office, consulted on revised guidance on managing unauthorised camping. Comments from local authorities, police authorities and the WLGA were taken into account in finalising the document, which issued in January 2005. The guidance encourages local authorities to take the lead in formulating local strategies, which should be developed through consultation with all key stakeholders including the police. Strategies should seek to balance the rights, responsibilities and legitimate expectations of the travelling and settled communities.

6.6. Research into the accommodation needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales, undertaken by the University of Birmingham, commenced in February 2005. Representatives of the Assembly Government, WLGA, local authorities and the Gypsy Traveller community are members of the research steering group.

6.7. In August 2004, the Assembly Government issued its response to the Report of the "Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales" (August 2003). This set out proposals for modernising local councils in Wales, taking into account the very large number of respondents to the consultation on the research report. Initiatives were subsequently begun by the Assembly Government, in conjunction with One Voice Wales (the new national association for community and town councils) and the WLGA, and will continue over the coming years. These initiatives include the establishment of working groups to encourage closer working between county and local councils, including greater delegation of services from county to local councils, and to enhance the performance of local councils. A national training advisory group comprising of representatives of those

organisations involved in the purchasing and provision of training for local councils has been set up. Detailed proposals involving primary legislation will be worked up to, for example, to make it easier for new community councils to form and more difficult to disband, and to provide for joint delivery partnerships to deliver one or more functions. In addition, the Assembly Government intend to fund a research project to review the current and possible future arrangements for the funding of local councils.

6.8. The Assembly Government will continue to work with One Voice Wales and the WLGA in taking forward this programme of work in 2005-2006. A further progress report will be included in next year's annual report.

6.9. The Local Government and Public Services Committee produced a report entitled "The Operation of New Political Management Structures in Local Government", including 17 recommendations, most of which have attracted the support of the Assembly Government and the WLGA. In addition to proposals concerning openness and transparency, the report addressed the overview and scrutiny function, member development and the ability of authorities to change their constitutions. The Assembly Government is also in the process of amending existing legislation to ensure that the provisions for disclosure of information in local government are in line with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

6. 10. Recent Consultation documents in Education include:

- The Individual Pupil Data Project: Expanding Electronic Data Management & National Curriculum Assessment Arrangements for 11 and 14-year olds
- . Consultation of LEAs on criteria for use of Assembly funding to support community focused initiatives in schools.
- Involvement of WLGA and ADEW in the Pre-Consultation Reference Group looking at implementation of Education Act 2002 provisions

Exchange of Information

6.11. The Assembly Government, subject to any inescapable constraints and data protection, encourages the free flow of information between itself, its agencies and local government. Some specific examples are described below:

6.12. On policy announcements involving individual councils, such as Policy Agreements, the Assembly Government's press office works closely with the council's PRO to devise a joint release with quotes from both parties.

6.13. The Local Government Data Unit continues to provide a distinctive, specialist service to local authorities in Wales. It provides local authorities with a wide range of training, advice and support in all areas where data is an essential part of service delivery and accountability. The Data Unit also continues

to provide invaluable support to a range of policy initiatives, including the Performance Management Review, the development of policy agreements and the data requirements of the Wales Programme for Improvement.

6.14. Operation Dragon – a joint initiative between the Assembly Government and the Home Office encourages the free exchange of information related to crime and anti-social behaviour as well as the mapping of such incidents via an agreed data sharing protocol between all agencies involved in community safety partnership working for the purposes of reducing crime and anti social behaviour.

6.15. Devolution of the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales to the Assembly occurred on 11 November 2004. Following this the Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales, which sets out the Assembly Government's expectations of the Service and the support it in turn can expect from the Assembly, was agreed in plenary during March. Over the course of the forthcoming year, the Assembly Government in consultation with Fire and Rescue Authorities and other key stakeholders such as the WLGA, will undertake consultation to ensure that fire and rescue policy development is taken forward in partnership. This will involve a range of both strategic and operational issues, including the development of advisory bodies; the development and implementation of guidance on risk management planning and the implementation of the Wales Programme for Improvement; and regulations to extend and define the range of incidents and emergencies that Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to respond to.

Joint Working Arrangements

6.16. The Assembly Government and local government are committed to working together to develop policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of Wales. Previous sections of this report describe numerous examples of joint working and collaboration between the Assembly Government and its partners. Further examples are given below.

6.17. Following its introduction in 2001, the Assembly Government gave a commitment to review the model code of conduct for local government members in light of experience of its operation by local government. A multi-agency working group was established in 2004 to undertake the review. The Review Group's report makes 26 recommendations for changes to the current code. These range from minor points of clarification, to a fundamental change in the approach to the disclosure and registration of interests.

6.18. The Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) is the Wales-wide high bandwidth network funded by the Assembly Government. Designed to address the aggregated broadband connectivity requirements of public sector organisations, the network connects schools (primary, secondary and special), libraries and ICT learning centres to Broadband across Wales.

Officials in Trade and Invest Wales (TIW) - the commercial arm of the Assembly's Economic Development and Training Department - enjoy constructive working relationships with their counterparts in the economic development departments of the various unitary authorities. Many

authorities hold regular meetings with the various Team Wales partners involved in economic development in their areas. Other activities, including joint business support surgeries, business advice exhibitions and seminars have seen increased collaboration this year between the local authority economic development teams and TIW investment grants managers. With specific regard to international trade development, 15 Economic Development Counsellors employed under the Wales Trade International EU-funded Export Assist programme have been located with the economic development team of the appropriate Objective One LEA's to ensure close co-operation on the programme.

6.19. The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning holds an annual meeting with the Cabinet Members for Education and Directors of Education together with regular meetings with the WLGA to discuss issues of interest/concern.

6.20. The WLGA was closely involved in 2003-2004 in the conduct of the Review of Welsh National Park Authorities and was a member of the Steering Group of key stakeholders which oversaw the review. The WLGA was also involved in helping to draw up the draft Action Plan which will guide implementation of the key recommendations from the Review. The Partnership Council considered the outcome of the Review at its meeting in November 2004 and generally endorsed the content of the draft Action Plan. The draft Plan has subsequently been issued for consultation to a very wide range of interests across Wales, including local government. In line with one of the key recommendations of the Review, local government interests were also consulted at the turn of the year on new Assembly Government guidance on partnership working within the Welsh Parks (and specifically the duty on all statutory organisations to take account of the statutory purposes of the Parks in undertaking activities in these areas).

6.21. The Assembly Government also continued to work closely in 2004/2005 with local government interests on preparatory work for increased public access to the countryside under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW). Activity included consultation on associated new regulations under the Act and a meeting in January 2005 between the Environment Minister, Carwyn Jones AM and local government leaders to discuss important CROW issues. The WLGA have also been participating in the all Wales Countryside Opportunities Steering Group, set up by the Assembly Government to help ensure that the wide-ranging benefits of greater access to the countryside are realised as soon as possible.

Co-operation between Officials

6. 22. Assembly Government officials and local government officers have worked closely together on a range of issues across the Assembly's functions.

6.23. A joint Assembly Government/WLGA working group has been set up to focus on certain aspects of the Transport (Wales) Bill. This Group encourages a partnership approach and ensures the Assembly Government continues to work with local authorities in taking forward transport policy issues in Wales. An example of this is the development of the statutory Wales Transport Strategy. The Assembly

Government is also working in partnership with the WLGA to ensure there is a joint understanding from the outset in developing the detailed content and procedural issues in relation to the production of regional Local Transport Plans. This is a change from the current requirement on local authorities to produce Local Transport Plans. In future the focus will be on a more regional basis.

6.24. The Assembly Government has involved local government extensively in the development of Public Service Management Wales. PSMW has been established in partnership with local government and others to develop the capacity of managers in Wales to improve public services. Local government, including the WLGA are key partners on the PSMW Board and have made a vital contribution to shaping as well as delivering the PSMW agenda.

6.25. Cymru Ar-lein, the Assembly Government's ICT Strategy was reviewed during 2004. The Local Government Partnership Council has created a joint working group, which is establishing the strategic approach to incorporating Welsh local government into Cymru Ar-lein. All local authorities have been invited to join Cymru Ar-lein as partners.

Reviewing the Local Government Partnership Scheme

7.1. Under Part II of Schedule 11 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the Assembly is obliged to keep the local government scheme under review and in the year following each ordinary election shall consider whether it should be remade or revised. In the Partnership Council meeting held in July 2003 members considered that the current scheme provided a good basis for promoting collaboration between the Assembly and local government and that a fundamental remake of the scheme was unnecessary. It was recognised however that the text had become somewhat dated and it was agreed that it should be brought up to date. The revised scheme was published in June 2004. This report fulfils the Assembly's obligation to review how the proposals in the Partnership Scheme were implemented in the 2004-2005 financial year.

Conclusion

8.1. The Assembly Government reaffirmed its commitment to joint working by identifying partnership working as one of the main principles on which the foundation of its strategic agenda "*Wales A Better Country*" is based. The Assembly Government's policy document "Making the Connections" takes this a step further by setting out the longer term vision for improving public services in Wales. Partnership and collaboration are the key elements of this vision.

The Local Government Partnership Scheme, embodied in the Local Government Partnership Council continues to illustrate the very successful partnership between the National Assembly and all elements of local government. This Report clearly demonstrates how the Assembly Government has worked with local government not only to deliver national priorities and local solutions but also to embed the values of the strategic agenda.

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