



Consultation- Proposed Local Government Measure Committee

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) represents officers and members involved in the management and provision of quality public services. APSE's mission statement positions the organisation as 'networking organisation which consults, develops, promotes and advises on best practice in the delivery of public services'. APSE is currently working with almost 300 authorities within the United Kingdom.

APSE supports the principles of best value and continuous improvement and the inclusion within this of a balanced set of measures including strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation. The best value duty has been an important part in developing continuous improvement in local government services and in securing best use of resources. APSE supports the retention of a broader duty of continuous improvement which still contains provisions for best value.

Within the continuous improvement duty, there needs to be recognition that each local authority will be at different levels of performance and even though all organisations can continually improve, the level of improvement will vary between authorities who are already good performers compared with authorities who are performing at an average or lower quartile level. Therefore, current performance as well as continuous improvement needs to be measured and assessed.

APSE supports collaboration between local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to 'Delivering the connections' and 'A shared responsibility'. However, the collaboration power (and the power for Welsh Ministers to direct this (section 31(2)), may be problematic in terms of political differences between local authorities, practical issues such as duplication of roles and cultural fit between different public sector bodies.

APSE has written to its membership in Wales over the proposed Local Government (Wales) measure and feedback is as follows:

- 70% indicated that they thought that there is a need for legislation to reform the statutory basis for service improvement by local authorities and 78% thought that there a need for legislation to reform community planning and strategies. However, comments included that this should only be light touch and empowerment rather than prescription. Comments also included that local government should be the responsibility of local representatives and English Authorities often find their performance indicators act as inhibitors.
- In relation to how the proposed Measure will change what organisations do currently, comments included that it will introduce consequences for not delivering high quality effective services, that the legislation should help direct organisations down the best route for both service users and local authorities, that it will improve strategic planning and better coordination and it may redefine and broaden service area responses.
- When asked what impact any such changes will have in terms of service improvement and community planning, APSE membership though that this may introduce quality and customer focus awareness to delivering services, better target available resources and will help to work beyond service area boundaries. However, some individuals may have doubts on extent of the impact the changes will make.

In relation to the performance indicators and guidance (section 8), APSE would like further clarification on whether the performance standards will be set as minimum standards and how these will be set. For instance, will these be on an individual local authority basis, based on a quartile mark for what is expected from similar authorities or will these be set based on past performance? In addition, as different local

authorities will have their own local priorities, the performance measures and standards that are set need to be relevant to the local circumstances.

APSE would welcome better co-ordination in the exercise of regulatory functions to reduce the burden on local authorities. APSE is committed to the independent audit and inspection of public services and believes that any inspection system should lead to a reduction in its role and ultimately the development of a self-inspection regime with light touch external audit.

APSE supports the principle that informal support should be a prerequisite of formal intervention. APSE would support the further use of peer support and identifying and using the support of the local government community.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. APSE would be prepared to give oral evidence to the Committee.

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APSE Wales Chair



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