

Local Government (Wales) Bill

RNIB Cymru Consultation Response

13 March 2015

RNIB Cymru is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Local Government (Wales) Bill. The reorganisation and merging of local authorities throughout Wales provides an opportunity to provide better social outcomes for blind and partially sighted people. However, there is a likelihood of unintended consequences if attention is not paid to the best practice which has been formed over a number of years and the expertise of different authorities across the country.

RNIB Cymru would like to give a response to the Local Government (Wales) Bill framing our evidence around the delivery of services in local areas.

1. About RNIB Cymru

RNIB Cymru is Wales' largest sight loss charity. We provide support, advice and information to people living with sight loss across Wales, as well as campaigning for improvements to services and raising awareness of the issues facing blind and partially sighted people.

The impact of sight-loss is often far-reaching, impacting on all parts of a person's life. This means that all those who are involved in providing services to blind and partially sighted people should be engaged in working together and making it as easy as possible to access support and services.

2. About sight loss

- There are currently 106,000 people in Wales living with sight loss. (1)
- It is estimated that the number of people living with sight loss in Wales will double by 2050. (2)

- The prevalence of sight loss increases with age: one in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss; one in two people aged 90 and over are living with sight loss. (3)

3. Local Government (Wales) Bill

Losing your sight creates multiple barriers to independence. Thus many people with sight loss rely on support from public services to maintain their independence and promote their wellbeing.

However, too often RNIB Cymru is told of people who have recently lost their sight being left to fend for themselves – and all too often they are sinking into depression and isolation. We hear of unacceptably low levels of support given to people with sight loss, leaving many isolated and in some cases incapable of even leaving their own homes. It is vital that local government reform ensures a focus on public services to promote the wellbeing of blind and partially sighted people. If it fails to do this, it will undermine the positive vision set out by the Welsh Government in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill.

At present, any of the proposed mergers from the Williams' Commission would cut across existing service provision. For example the North East Wales Sensory Support Services (NEWSSS) is an example where cross-authority collaborative services have been introduced as a response to cost saving exercises by local authorities, as well as a recognition of the need for experts to work together across a geographical area.

There is also an example of these services in the Gwent area; Caerphilly manages the provision for five local authorities, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouth, Newport and Torfaen since April 2012.

Current financial constraints mean it is unlikely that funding for such services will rise again, and it should be within this context that these functioning collaborative services are viewed.

These services have become important parts of the community and any proposed merger should take into consideration the good work which has been done over the last few years and ensure that

it is not lost, resulting in deteriorating outcomes for people with sight-loss.

The Gwent wide adult safeguarding board (GWASB) terms of reference states that they are accountable to the authorities which they are made up of. These agencies cut across the community and involve the full range of services from health boards, police authorities and even registered social landlords.

RNIB Cymru would like to ensure that functioning boards such as the two mentioned are not broken up, or if it is necessary to do so, the models they have adopted are learnt from and implemented across the rest of Wales. As these authorities have been ahead of their time in working across local authority boundaries, the lessons from their work and best practice should be the basis for the restructure of local authorities.

The Local Government (Wales) Bill provides a once in a life-time opportunity to link up all municipal authorities and align priorities for social care and safeguarding policy priorities. Ideally any realignment of services would follow the existing health board structure, or at least not have a local authority brought into existence where there is more than one health board serving the area.

For more information please contact:

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References

- (1) Estimate based on Access Economics 2009, Future Sight Loss UK 1: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population, RNIB, and Office of National Statistics (2014), Subnational Population Projections, Office of National Statistics.
- (2) Access Economics 2009. Future Sight Loss UK 1: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK Adult Population.

(3) Access Economics 2009. Future Sight Loss UK 1: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK Adult Population.