

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Date: 29 March 2012

Time: 9.30 – 10.30

Title: Evidence Paper - Local Government and Communities Portfolio

1. The Programme for Government outlines each of my key priorities for this Assembly Term. This includes improving public services, supporting people, creating safer communities and tackling poverty. I am pleased that we have already successfully delivered upon many of our identified priorities. We will continue to work hard to ensure that progress is made on all of the commitments made in our Programme for Government.
2. Using the format of the Programme for Government as a basis this summarises progress in some of the key areas within the Local Government and Communities portfolio, excluding transport policy.

PUBLIC SERVICES IN WALES

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Local Government Elections

Local elections to county and community councils take place on Thursday 3rd May except in Anglesey, where they will take place a year later. A consultation is underway on the date of the following elections, scheduled for the same day as the Assembly elections in 2016, with a view to delaying them until 2017.

Proposed Local Government [Democracy Bill

The Programme for Government included an undertaking to introduce a Democracy and Elections Bill. The title of the Bill may alter slightly to reflect the legislative competence of the Assembly. Work is underway on the policy development for this Bill with a White Paper publication due in Spring. The Bill is scheduled for introduction by the end of 2012.

Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Consultation is underway on guidance under the Measure and is due to complete on 30th March. This covers the timing of council meetings, training and development of councillors, the Democratic Services Committee, public engagement with scrutiny, councillor calls for action, chairs of scrutiny committees, co-option to scrutiny and the operation of audit committees.

SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

Local Government Byelaws (Wales) Bill

I was pleased to introduce the Local Government Byelaws (Wales) Bill into the National Assembly on 29 November 2011. It is the first Bill to be introduced since the National Assembly obtained its greater legislative competence following last year's referendum.

The Bill forms part of the Welsh Government's commitment to reduce complexity and simplify process wherever possible. The Bill will simplify the process for making, amending and revoking most byelaws in Wales by removing the need for confirmation by the Welsh Ministers. It also introduces a more effective and efficient means of enforcement through the optional use of fixed penalty notices. The opportunity has also been taken to consolidate and, where appropriate, modify existing byelaw provisions from the Local Government Act 1972. This represents a first step in the development of a distinct Welsh Statute book.

Committee has, of course, recently undertaken Stage 1 scrutiny of the Bill and I look forward to seeing its conclusions when its report is published.

Single Integrated Plans

Another important development of the Welsh Governments drive to reduce burdens and complexity is the commitment to Single Integrated Plans. Consultation is underway on guidance for integrated plans and partnerships, *Shared purpose – Shared Delivery*. This sets out how local service boards (LSBS) should be the strategic collaborative leadership team for an area, developing a single integrated plan with a focus on delivery, and ensuring partnership structures are fit for purpose. This proposal aims to reduce partnerships by 50%.

Anglesey Intervention

I appointed five Commissioners to run the Isle of Anglesey County Council in March last year, following a report from the Auditor General which found critical failures of governance. Since then, the Council has made good progress under the Commissioners' stewardship. Member behaviour and engagement has improved markedly, as was demonstrated by productive and consensual discussions over a very challenging 2012-13 budget and council tax. Several key governance and management systems have been also completely overhauled. More remains to be done, in particular recruiting and appointing a high-calibre senior management team. But the Commissioners believe that there is now clear potential to reduce the level of intervention in the medium term, with a view to ending it altogether in due course. The Auditor General concurred with this assessment in a recent report.

ENSURE THAT OUR FUNDING SUPPORTS STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

Local Government Settlement

The local government settlement for local authorities over the spending review period will result in an increase in funding of 0.7% compared with a reduction in England of 0.6% on a like for like basis. The settlement includes 1 percent protection for social care up to 2013-14 and up to 2014-15 for education.

Local authorities are forecasting the lowest council tax increases in Wales since it was introduced.

SECURING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN PUBLIC SERVICES

Public Service Reform

Public Services face twin challenges of financial constraint and the growing and increasingly complex needs of citizens. Against this backdrop reform is essential. In the past, change has meant either 'marketisation' or re-organisation. Both approaches have significant impacts on citizens and costs. Collaboration offers the potential to achieve the benefits, without the costs or risks to services of reorganisation.

The approach in Wales has been to mobilise leadership across the public services through bringing together chief executives from services such as local authorities, Police and Health on the Public Service Leadership Group. Political leadership is brought together through the Partnership Council for Wales. This executive and political leadership across Wales will give clear leadership and authority for the necessary reform.

Following the Simpson review carried out in 2011, the Welsh Government has a Compact for Change with Local Government and all 22 Authorities have signed up to the actions set out in

the Compact. This brings coherence to the major service reviews and policies under social services and education and sets out other areas where Local and Welsh Government will explore the opportunities for working locally, nationally and regionally.

To help reduce complexity the Welsh Government has provided a simple collaborative footprint for public services based on 6 regions aligned to health areas. This is not just about collaboration between local authorities to deliver their services in ways that minimise cost and ensure resilience. It is about using the power of collaboration across services as well, to meet the complex needs of people in ways which tackle the causes not just the symptoms.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE

ARMED FORCES

The Welsh Government has made an overarching commitment to support the armed forces community to ensure serving personnel, veterans and Forces' families are able to access services which meet their specific needs and recognise the service that they have given to their country.

Specific overarching developments in 2011-12 included :-

- The publication of the Welsh Government's Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales.
- Confirmation of funding to support armed forces day events in both North and South Wales.
- Continued activity on issues raised by the Expert Group on the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales, including a conference to promote Local Authority take up of Ministry of Defence's Community Covenant.

SAFER COMMUNITIES FOR ALL

REDUCTION AND PREVENTION OF YOUTH OFFENDING

Commitment to consult on a Prevention of Youth Offending Bill

The Welsh Government is committed to exploring alternative approaches in relation to strengthening existing powers around the devolved areas to influence delivery of youth justice services in Wales.

Officials are currently engaging with key stakeholders with a view to consulting on proposals which aim to:

- Reduce the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system by improving support from devolved services for pre-court diversion.
- Provide better support from devolved services for children and young people in the youth justice system.
- Strengthen the accountability and co-operation of local and regional partnerships in their support for young people while they are in the youth justice system.
- Provide better support, aftercare and re-integration services for children and young people after a community or custodial sentence.

Commitment to continue the Safer Communities Funding to Community Safety Partnerships in Wales.

The Safer Communities Fund has distributed £4.5m to Community Safety Partnerships in 2011/12 to enable local Youth Justice projects and initiatives aimed at the prevention and reduction of youth offending and re offending. The grant criteria is currently being reviewed to ensure that projects deliver results in line with the proposals outlined in the above proposals and that the fund is distributed in line with the regional footprint boundaries in 2013-14.

REDUCING THE LEVEL OF CRIME AND FEAR OF CRIME

Employment of 500 Police Community Support Officers

The funding of an additional 500 Community Support Officers (CSOs) is one of the Welsh Government's 'Five for a Fairer Future' commitments in our Programme for Government. Implementation is being taken forward in partnership between Welsh Government, ACPOC and PAW, overseen by a project board chaired by the Deputy Director, Community Safety Division, and including representation from ACPOC, PAW, Communities First, Local Government, Transport, and Social Research officials.

The project board has made significant progress, including signing off the branding and Terms and Conditions. The importance of additionality has been emphasised through the project board and police forces have provided current projections of police staffing until 2013/14. This provides a fuller picture of the core complement of each force as a baseline against which the additionality of the Welsh Government funded CSOs can be measured. Predictions beyond 2013/14 are difficult to make at this time given that Police and Crime Commissioners will be elected in November 2012.

A proposal to evaluate the impact of the additional CSOs has been agreed by the Project Board and a detailed specification is now being developed.

Funding arrangements have now been finalised and training of Welsh Government funded CSOs is now underway in 3 of the 4 Welsh Police forces, with the final force due to start training in March and British Transport Police in May. The first recruits have now been deployed in Gwent and Dyfed Powys.

Police and Crime Commissioners

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act came into force in November 2011. The elections for Police and Crime Commissioners are due to take place in November 2012. The Home Office have indicated that they would like to see Police and Crime Panels established by July 2012, although they understand that this may need to be reconsidered in light of the Local Government elections on 3 May 2012. I have written to local authorities in Wales to encourage them to make appropriate nominations to Police and Crime Panels.

REDUCING THE HARM ASSOCIATED WITH SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Substance Misuse Review Programme

A Substance Misuse Review Programme has been put in place to review what has been achieved in substance misuse over the last three years under the existing Strategy and determine whether it has been delivered in the most effective and efficient way. The review is scrutinising national governance structures and local delivery mechanisms as well as the associated funding models. Research has also been commissioned to provide a baseline of evidence and data. The review has five components;

- Review of the Key Performance Indicators
- Review of the Funding Formula
- Review of the Area Planning Boards

- Evaluation of the Strategy (Incorporating a Cost Benefit Analysis)
- Organisational Development Workstream

The findings of the Substance Misuse Review Programme will provide the opportunities for partnership rationalisation and simplification to ensure delivery mechanisms are fit for purpose and capable of regional collaboration and coherence. It will also provide recommendations for a more transparent and simplified funding model which encourages regionally strategic decisions and provides for the potential for pooled budgets.

New Three year substance misuse Implementation Plan 2012-2015

Consultation events are currently being held around Wales to seek the views of substance misuse stakeholders on what are the key priority substance misuse issues that need to be addressed over the next three years both nationally and locally.

Substance Misuse Funding 2012-13

Substance Misuse Revenue Funding for Area Planning Boards/community Safety Partnerships for 2012-13 have remained constant at £22.63m. Substance misuse capital funding has decreased from £6.1m to £5.69m.

REDUCING RATES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Continue to challenge out-dated attitudes towards women by taking forward “The Right to be Safe”, our Violence against Women Strategy, and the “Tackling Domestic Abuse: A Partnership Approach” Strategy

The ‘Right to be Safe’ implementation plan is challenging and contains 89 actions for delivery. By March 2011, 41 actions had been completed and one action abandoned when UK Government disbanded the UK Inter-Ministerial Cross Government Working Group. Work has commenced on a further 40 actions which are at varying stages of progression. There are five actions that were originally due for completion during 2010-11 which will be progressed in the forthcoming year.

Proposed Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women Bill

The Bill will support the Government’s intention for relevant public bodies to address violence against women and domestic abuse (“VAWDA”) in a coordinated and coherent manner and specifically to address preventative, protective and supportive aspects.

10,000 Safer Lives Project

The 10,000 Safer Lives project (domestic abuse) was set up to apply the learning from the 3 Kafka Brigade -led projects in South Wales - and the 1,000 lives project in the NHS. The project is seeking to improve the multi-agency service provided to victims of domestic abuse in standard and medium-risk cases. From mid November 2011 to mid January 2012, Welsh Government held a series of regional workshops across Wales involving a range of partners including those from local government, the health service, the police & criminal justice system and the third sector. The emerging themes - around the importance of good leadership; effective sharing of information; improved multi agency training; prevention (with an emphasis on education); and the provision of a consistent high quality service; are being worked through in detail by officials.

Anti Human Trafficking Coordinator

In April 2011, Wales’ first Anti Human Trafficking co-ordinator was appointed with the aim of co-ordinating the best possible support for victims of both internal and external human trafficking making Wales a hostile place for human trafficking to exist. The appointment is also ensuring that the good practice already achieved since the launch of “The Right to be Safe” Strategy continues with a view to achieving a co-ordinated response and a single point of contact for all the relevant agencies across Wales. With this being the first appointment of its type in the UK we

have had an opportunity to lead the way in tackling human trafficking. The coordinator's activity in his first year has achieved many things including working closely with the UK Human Trafficking Agencies in addition to personally visiting over 80 organisations across Wales and the UK to establish a more comprehensive Welsh and UK picture. Wales is now firmly on the map in addressing this very complex and hidden issue. It is important that we do not lose this momentum but build on this achievement.

TACKLING POVERTY

TACKLING POVERTY ACTION PLAN

A Cabinet written statement issued on 7 March confirmed that the Welsh Government remains committed to reducing poverty and mitigating as much as possible the effects of the UK Government's Welfare Reform Programme. The Tackling Poverty Action Plan will bring together the levers available to the Welsh Government and our social partners to help communities and individuals out of poverty. Specifically, the Tackling Poverty Action Plan will set out the contribution made by the Welsh Government as a whole to tackling poverty, while keeping a strong focus on child poverty. The Tackling Poverty Action Plan will be arranged around the themes of preventing poverty, helping people to lift themselves out of poverty by removing barriers to employment, and acting to improve the quality of life of those in poverty. Crucially, the Action Plan will provide regular updates and contain measurable outcomes – to show progress in implementing the Child Poverty Strategy.

Communities First will be taken forward as a community focussed tackling poverty programme, together with our Financial Inclusion Strategy "Taking Everyone into Account". Both of these initiatives are key components in the Welsh Government's efforts to tackle poverty.

The Welsh Government is also investing £4.056m over three years ending in September 2013 to support Welsh Credit Unions to offer financial products to people who otherwise would be financially excluded. Working in partnership with Credit Unions to offer people an affordable alternative to payday loan companies or other high cost doorstep lenders remains a key objective of the Welsh Government.

The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to support Third Sector advice providers to assist people who have debt problems and help people manage their finances. Improving access to advisory services that are delivered consistently and universally across Wales is imperative. This is of particular relevance in a climate of forthcoming changes to the welfare and benefit arrangements being introduced by the UK Government.

FUTURE OF COMMUNITIES FIRST

From April 1st 2012 Communities First will be a Community-Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme. It will be a new programme in many respects but will build on the achievements of Communities First and in particular continue much of the good work taking place in local communities.

The programme will continue to have a geographic focus, concentrating on the 10% most deprived communities in Wales, as defined by WIMD 2011, but there will be increasing emphasis on ensuring the most vulnerable individuals, families and groups in those communities are supported in these areas. Communities First will focus on tackling poverty with a particular focus on the three strategic outcomes of: healthier communities; learning communities; and prosperous communities. Grant funding for the programme will be allocated to Communities First clusters and a Communities First Outcomes Framework, based on the Results Based Accountability model will provide the structure for evidencing the achievements against grant funding.

Partnership working between communities and key service providers including the voluntary and private sectors will be supported and encouraged in the new programme.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK GOVERNMENT WELFARE REFORM

Replacing Council Tax Benefit

As part of the wider welfare reforms, the UK Government is abolishing Council Tax Benefit and from April 2013 responsibility for providing support for council tax in Wales will be passed to the Welsh Government. This localisation of support will be accompanied by a 10% cut in expenditure on CTB. Funding will also move to Departmental Expenditure Limited, meaning that fluctuations in demand will have to be managed within fixed budgets.

Significant concerns about the timing, legal and financial constraints within which these changes are being forced through have been raised with the UK Government however despite these reservations the UK Government has made it clear it will continue with its plans to abolish council tax benefit in and pass responsibility for providing support for council tax in Wales to the Welsh Government.

As a result detailed preparations to develop a system of council tax support that best meets the needs of the Welsh people are underway to ensure that some of the most vulnerable people do not experience severe financial hardship. In order to help inform the development of a new scheme, a consultation document was issued on the 6th February.

Social Fund

The Welfare Reform Act also abolished the discretionary Social Fund and will replace parts of it (crisis loans and community care grants) with new locally based provision. From April 2013 funding for the Social Fund will be devolved to the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and to local authorities in England.

The UK Government is proposing to devolve funding at the level of spending recorded for 2012-13. It has made clear its intention to reduce spending to 2005 levels by this date and has introduced measures to reduce demand and spend. It is estimated that, based on 2005 level of spending, £9.28 million would be devolved, roughly a 24% reduction from 2010 levels.

Without access to the 64 Job Centre Plus offices to continue the scheme administration, an alternative delivery means is required. Options could include delivery via local authorities, third sector organisations or some combination of these. Delivery could include issuing benefits in kind, e.g. reconditioned second hand furniture, bulk buying of white goods or use of foodbanks.

There is likely to be increased demand on any successor scheme due to the introduction of Universal Credit and reductions in other benefit, including housing benefit and Council Tax benefit, which may lead to real pressures on the budget being devolved by the UK Government.

Advice Services Review

I have asked officials to instigate a full-scale review of advisory services in the light of the unprecedented challenges being faced by not-for-profit providers as a direct result of UK Government proposals for Welfare Reform and Legal Aid and the impact arising from reductions in funding for advice through the Financial Inclusion Fund and the Equality and Human Rights Helpline.

The review will explore how a stronger network of advice services could be developed which is capable of providing people with support on all aspects of financial and housing related need.

The scope of the review is being developed but we envisage it will look at the whole range of advisory services across Welsh Government portfolios.

The scope is still to be finalised but, broadly, review will:

- explore how a stronger network of generic advice services can be developed which:
 - improves the quality of service to the consumer;
 - is capable of providing people with support on all aspects of financial, housing and other related needs; and
 - can help people with protected characteristics understand and exercise their rights and make informed choices.
- identify the impact of UK Government and local government funding cuts
- assess levels of demand for advice services over the next 5 years
- identify how funds can be used most effectively to support an advice network in Wales.