

Local Government Moving Forward



UNISON Cymru/Wales supports a vibrant and diverse public sector delivering services for the benefit of the people of Wales. It considers that the purpose of Local Government is to provide a vehicle for local service delivery providing community support and shaping how communities look and live in Wales. Local Government has a role to play in providing a democratic voice for the community which then informs its work to meet the general health and wellbeing needs of the communities that it serves, which are often diverse and complex. It provides a level of local accountability that is necessary to ensure that every citizen of Wales has the ability to exercise the rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen and to hold those elected to public service at a local level to account for the decisions that are made.

Local Government is a complex democratic and operational structure that offers many advantages such as finding solutions for localised challenges and encouraging local leadership. As a large local employer it is responsible for providing essential services especially to the most vulnerable in our communities such as young and older people which includes all statutory functions legislated by the Welsh Government. Also Local Government provides frontline services such as waste and recycling, planning and environmental health, youth services, education, regeneration, community services etc.

Local Government should also be at the forefront of providing viable opportunities for young people and should act as a stimulus for business growth and jobs whilst providing affordable and good quality homes within the community. This will include meeting the aspirations of the Welsh Government in reducing the number of young

people not in education, employment or training and tackling poverty.

It is within this context and vision for Local Government that UNISON Cymru/Wales responds to Welsh Government consultations concerning Local Government in Wales. The overall purpose of Local Government should not be lost in the debate or decisions regarding reform and reorganisation as this is essential to underpinning a sustainable and vibrant Local Government sector that can adapt to any changing political or social environment.

UNISON Cymru/Wales has long advocated that the number of Local Authorities in Wales is not sustainable and does not provide the stability and sustainability that the people of Wales expect or require for the continued provision of effective public services.

Any reform process should be guided by the need to reform local government and not used as a vehicle for delivering conservative imposed austerity on the citizens in Wales. Recognising the Welsh Government's commitment to partnership working with the Trade Union movement in Wales, reform should not be used as a mechanism to dilute the ability of Unions to represent their members and as a result time and resources provided to Unions to undertake this work, which is vital, should not suffer a detriment as a result of any reform proposals and/or changes to structures.

UNISON Cymru/Wales considers that it is naive to exclude any discussions regarding reforming Local Government funding from the consultation process. The continued sustainability of the Local Government sector, is underpinned by the need for adequate and appropriate funding for the delivery of local services by Local Authorities, from the Welsh Government.

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UNISON Cymru/Wales recognises that the political and social landscape of Wales has evolved since the Williams Commission published its findings in 2014. UNISON Cymru/Wales' position however remains that Local Government reform and reorganisation is not just desirable but essential to delivering a coherent, sustainable and fully funded public service in local communities.

UNISON Cymru/Wales therefore supports a reform of Local Authorities, including the use of mergers within the boundaries of existing Health Boards. This support for any reform and reorganisation of Local Government in Wales is on the proviso that any proposals are fully funded by the Welsh Government and accompanied by a commitment to no compulsory redundancies as a result of reform. The Welsh Government should also make available a package of support for Local Government to support change including funding to support an all Wales voluntary severance scheme. UNISON Cymru/Wales would expect the parties in the merger process to undertake a comprehensive audit of roles required within any new structures which would provide the framework for any national severance scheme.

It is considered that the adoption of all Wales pay scales and job evaluation scheme for Local Government would be of benefit to the continued sustainability of the Local Government Sector, reducing unnecessary competition and ensuring a necessary level of pay transparency across Wales. Consideration should be given by Welsh Government to make the introduction of an all Wales pay scale and job evaluation scheme a condition of reform. Further exploration is required to determine whether Chief Officers could also be part of this process within the proposals for Local Government reform and whether the establishment of an NJC for Wales would deliver more effective outcomes for Local Government in Wales.

UNISON Cymru/Wales considers that any new Local Authority in Wales should commit to signing up to the UNISON Apprentice, Ethical & Residential Care Charters and Respect your Youth! A Charter for Young Workers in Wales. All of these Charters seek to ensure that the fair employment of workers

in Wales and ensuring that some of the most vulnerable workers gain valuable employment protections. A commitment should be made to reviewing practice of employing school support staff on term time only contracts along with a national structure for school support staff in Wales. Further, any new Local Authority in Wales should automatically become a Living Wage Employer supporting the Welsh Government's commitment to social justice and ending poverty in Wales.

UNISON Cymru/Wales strongly believes that public services should be delivered by the public sector and as a result strongly opposes outsourcing. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that the Code of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains should be binding on Local Authorities and that non compliance with this code, and associated procurement legislation, should result in an appropriate financial sanction so as to deter non-compliance.

Any reform proposals must also be supported by a funding framework which ensures an appropriate level of funding moving forward for Local Government to ensure the continued sustainability of the sector.



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UNISON Cymru/Wales acknowledges that Local Government requires additional powers to enable it to respond to the challenges of the 21st Century and beyond. For this reason UNISON Cymru/Wales supports the introduction of the general power of competency for Local Authorities that engage in the reform agenda. Further, Local Authorities should be able to lend and borrow money on a professional basis with the offer of preferential interest rates from the Welsh Government. Such an approach could be used to support the development of Small and Medium Enterprises within Local Communities. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that Local Government reform provides an opportunity for the Welsh Government to legislate in support of the concept of one public sector and providing a framework to enable a mobility of the Local Government workforce to support this.

UNISON Cymru/Wales would not wish to see any changes introduced in relation to non-domestic rates in Wales and would oppose any moves to impinge the re-distribution across Wales of revenue from these rates.

It is understood that recently steps have been taken to provide more stability for Local Authorities by providing a two year funding settlement. UNISON Cymru/Wales would advocate a system of funding that provides some certainty and stability for a period of between three and five years, which would allow for effective and efficient long and short term financial planning. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that the Welsh Government should explore whether it would be possible to introduce some flexibility to the requirements around budget setting for Local Authorities allowing for the setting of deficit budgets for specific projects that would have a long term benefit to Local Authorities and the communities they serve. With appropriate financial monitoring measures in place, such as the requirement to return to a break even budget for the next round of local elections UNISON Cymru/Wales believes this would enable Local Authorities to adapt more effectively to challenge and change within the sector.

So as to ensure that Local Authorities enter into any proposed merger and/or reform process in an optimum financial position, UNISON Cymru/Wales would suggest that the Welsh Government considers some interim guidance or direction on the spending of reserves. UNISON Cymru/Wales would not like to revisit the situation that arose in 1996 where some Local Authorities sought to deplete reserves and resources prior to any mergers taking place.

What is essential to the reform agenda moving forward is that Welsh Government shows the necessary leadership to bring about change and demonstrates to the political leadership in Local Government the business case to support the reform agenda.

UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that the practicalities regarding the reform of Local Government should be led by those with a leadership role within Local Government, for example, Senior Management Teams, Chief Executives and Council Leaders in conjunction with the recognised trade unions as without this political buy in any proposals to reform Local Government will face challenges that will delay and disrupt the reform agenda. This work should be framed by a clear direction communicated by Welsh Government as the body responsible for funding Local Government.

Decision making and accountability at a local level is a foundation of Local Government and therefore steps should be taken to ensure that this principle is maintained through any reform process and that any advice provided on the process also has a local footing. UNISON Cymru/Wales would not support the use of Consultants to manage any change process as it considers the necessary skills and experience to bring about change can be found within the current workforce.

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However, should it not be possible to encourage political leaders in Local Government to engage in the reform agenda, it is the responsibility of the Welsh Government to show leadership and take decisive action to ensure the future sustainability and effectiveness of Local Government in Wales.

Fair representation and proportionality are the key principles underpinning representation within UNISON Cymru/Wales and we strongly believe that in order for to ensure that the democratic structures within Local Authorities are representative of the communities that they serve intervention by way of legislation is required. The Welsh Government may wish to consider legislating to ensure that wards have a gender balance of elected representatives and consideration of positive action to encourage citizens with protected characteristics to commit to public service.

The Welsh Government should review the remuneration of Councillors, the current allowance system has ensured council chambers across the country are not representative of their communities

which includes a third being young people. The number of days needed to attend council meetings and undertake council duties should be extended with companies/organisations being compensated for supporting their staff to carry out this important community function. Local Authorities should also look at the availability of crèche and childcare facilities to encourage those with caring responsibilities to engage in and contribute to public life.

UNISON Cymru/Wales notes that the Scottish Parliament operates the only facility of its type in Europe, providing supervision for children of people visiting the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament provides childcare for individuals participating in a guided tour, meeting an MSP or member of staff, taking part in Parliament's business meetings, watching parliamentary business live in the Chamber of committee rooms, attending an event, browsing and having coffee in the café. Such an approach strives to create an open and accessible democratic structure. UNISON Cymru/Wales feels that such an approach should be considered at a local and national level in Wales.

UNISON Cymru/Wales considers that in order to make democratic structures representative within Local Government a body of work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the purpose, structure and powers of Local Government are truly understood by the communities they serve. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that this education should start at a schools level within PSE Active Citizenship. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that trade unions, such as UNISON Cymru/Wales, have a role to play in the shaping the curriculum in this regard and the promotion of a social contract between citizens, communities, local and national governments.

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