



Briefing 07/25 April 2007

Local Service Boards

APSE's response to the consultation on the establishment of Local Service Boards in Wales and the development of Local Service Agreements with the Welsh Assembly Government

TO: All Chief Executives, main and email contacts (Wales)

CC: All Chief Executives, main and email contacts (England, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

Key issues

The Welsh Assembly Government released a consultation on the creation of Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements

This briefing paper contains the APSE response

APSE welcomes some of the proposals but calls for a greater leadership role for local authorities

1. Introduction

APSE has recently responded to the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation document on Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements. This briefing outlines the APSE response to the relevant sections of the consultation.

2. Response to the Welsh Assembly Government

a) Introduction

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 and 20 authorities in Wales.

b) Response

1. Overall, APSE has welcomed the approach taken by the Welsh Assembly Government in 'Making the Connections', that the best outcomes in Wales will be delivered through collaboration and co-ordination, not competition.

2. APSE agrees that it is important to create a core team membership comprised of statutory organisations with a remit to consult a wider stakeholder group in agreeing priorities, but that the delivery of these priorities should be down to the core membership team.

3. The focus on making services more responsive to citizens is a welcomed approach. There is a need to strike the right balance between the demands of individuals and the needs of the whole community and it is vital that choice doesn't come at the expense of universal provision. The distinction made in 'Beyond Boundaries' between the citizen model in Wales and the customer model in England was welcoming. In APSE's opinion, it is important that the model differentiates between the role of the Board and the role of the stakeholder network as it reinforces rather than undermines the role of statutory organisations in representing the community.

4. What is particularly welcome in the paper is the recognition of the role of Local Service Boards in ensuring the delivery of personalised and preventative services. The public are more discerning and want greater personalisation of services; such as options for recycling or healthy school meals.

5. The paper acknowledges that there will need to be a cultural shift to move towards collaborative leadership and this is likely to be underpinned by a new duty to co-operate. This will be a new challenge in terms of transcending organisational interests and APSE would stress the need to allow sufficient time for this to embed itself.

6. What is lacking from the proposals in the consultation paper is any leadership role for local authorities, who are the only democratically accountable body. The paper refers to all parties being equal, which indicates that if a local authority is the only party to disagree with a specific priority, then they could be overruled by other members of the board. APSE would argue that local authorities should have a clear role to not only convene the meetings but to lead the partnership and have overall strategic responsibilities for an area, across the public sector remit rather than treating this as a partnership of equals.

7. The consultation paper refers to service delivery and a willingness to consider new ways of providing services, including a mixed provision and a greater role for the third sector. The Assembly has made a previous commitment to collaboration as opposed to competition in 'Making the Connections' and APSE would welcome further emphasis of this commitment. The danger of fragmenting service providers and breaking up direct service organisations is that the full governance and management structures will be undermined and be not as coherent.

APSE would argue that where services are clearly failing, then there is the opportunity for challenge, but the reason behind this failure needs to be understood. Is the problem going to be resolved by mixed provision or are there local differences causing this

performance, such as demography? If a service is performing well and evidence substantiates this, then there is no justification for going through such a time consuming and resource intensive exercise of market testing and changing provider. In addition, outsourcing services would go against everything that local authorities are trying to achieve in co-ordinating services effectively towards one common goal. APSE would argue that any partnership with the voluntary and community sector needs to be managed via a quality framework and not a transfer of responsibility. There is a danger that services become managed by well meaning but inexperienced amateurs lacking in expertise or worse by extremists.

8. The emphasis in the Paper on collaboration is welcomed by APSE. The potential benefits can be noted in both back office functions such as finance and procurement as well as in front line services such as street scene service delivery or joint work with Primary Care Trusts on healthy living initiatives.

9. It is also welcomed that the number of priorities in Local Service Agreements may be restricted to 2-3 local priorities and 2-3 national priorities and that existing performance information is being looked at first, to minimise the new data collection requirements as a result of the introduction of Local Service Boards. APSE supports reducing the burden and potential duplication for local authorities, with indicators being based on existing PI's or existing data sources.

APSE has been liaising with the Local Government Data Unit – Wales in relation to developing standardised survey questions and has shared surveys used by APSEs performance networks to prevent duplication. APSE developed performance networks in 1998 as a means of ensuring consistent application and development of performance indicators. This is the largest public sector benchmarking database in the UK with over 200 member authorities in the UK and 19 councils in Wales being actively involved. APSEs performance networks contains both headline and local performance indicators across 16 service areas.

c) Partnership working with APSE

APSE is keen to work in partnership with the Assembly to represent the views of local authority practitioners in Wales and also give wider comparisons of current policy in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Thank you for giving APSE the opportunity to submit evidence on this subject. If you require any further information on this or any other topic please do not hesitate to contact me on 0161 772 1810 or email: djohns@apse.org.uk

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Chair APSE Wales