



# A shared responsibility

A policy statement from the Welsh Assembly Government on local government's contribution to improving people's lives

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 paper identifies further areas for action following on from 'Making the Connections' and the Beecham Review
- Proposes a new role for non-executive elected members
- Calls for more collaboration and joint scrutiny committees
- APSE Wales Seminar 2 July 2007 investigates these issues further

## 1. Introduction

The Welsh Assembly Government made a policy statement in March 2007 in the context of 'Making the Connections' and the Beecham Review. It sets out their expectations of and support for local authorities in:

- Ensuring that public services are centred on the needs and experiences of citizens
- Encouraging specialisation and economies of scale to be achieved through cross boundary collaboration
- Encouraging integration and responsiveness to the diverse needs of citizens to be achieved through cross sector collaboration.

To achieve much improved service delivery and citizen experiences of services, their strategy will be to focus on three key areas of development:

- Local service boards and Local service agreements
- Development of a vibrant and effective, cross-sector model of scrutiny, blending participatory and representative democratic approaches
- Generation of excellent local and national information on citizen satisfaction and local authority performance.

This full paper is available by clicking on the following link: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dlgc/localgovculturepubs/localgovpubs/LGPolicyStatement07/?lang=en>

## 2. Partnerships across service & sector boundaries

The Welsh Assembly Government has consulted on Local Service Boards (LSBs) (see APSE briefing 07-21), as a means of agreeing joint action by relevant bodies. This will be an extension of the existing Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and will be a partnership of equals; although local government as the convenor will set the tone. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Free up local authorities to work on LSBs by discontinuing policy agreements from the current round, March 07 and review the performance incentive grant.	WAG	October 07
Closer partnership working between local government and the NHS through promoting joint planning, commissioning, delivery and performance management.	WAG, WLGA, NHS, Local Government	Ongoing
Facilitate the development of LSPs into LSBs.	Making the Connections, WAG, Public service partners	2007-08
Invite the National Assembly for Wales to legislate for a duty to co-operate between named partners on the LSB.	WAG	Consultation on draft by end of 07

## 3. Delivering services from different places coherently

It is the Welsh Assembly Government's intention to create a national framework where the Wales Spatial Plan at a national and regional level and the Community Strategy at a local service delivery level will be connected. The emerging role of the WLGA's Regional Partnership Boards in Central, North, South East and South West Wales will be important in terms of the regional and sub regional picture. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Connect Community Strategies and Wales Spatial Plan Area visions and co-ordinate Ministerial and official engagement with LSBs and Spatial Plan partnerships.	Local Government Policy Division & Wales Spatial Plan team, WAG and LSB partners	Spring 2008
Develop a national approach to partnership rationalisation.	Local Government Policy Division, WAG	Winter 2008
Develop Local Service Agreements (LSAs) to take account of the four major statutory plans.	WAG LSB partners	LSA development projects in small number of areas 2007-08 LSBs and LSAs in all areas 2010

## 4. Collaborating across boundaries

The paper acknowledges that there are examples of collaboration and there has always been partnership working at an operational level. Joint working at a more strategic level has been encouraged by the Regional Partnership Boards, which will be shortly

producing conclusions from their first year of project work. In terms of efficiency gains, the majority of savings have been in-house and given the challenges in the next few years, there is a need to move faster in the sector and across public service. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Invite the National Assembly to legislate for explicit powers for WAG to enhance or direct collaborative approaches to service delivery.	WAG	Consultation on draft by autumn 09
Continue to deliver against Value Wales' key priorities including the publication of the refreshed Value for Money Collaborative Procurement programme	WAG Public sector partners	June 07

## 5. Improving access & service through technology

The Welsh Assembly Government highlight the need to draw on current experiences of using technology to improve access to services and identify how technologies will make the most difference to citizens' lives. Improved customer service is of fundamental importance and it's a matter of changing all our key business processes to make them more citizen-focussed. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Produce a public service access transformation strategy and a baseline study to inform it.	e-Wales, WAG	Baseline study start spring 07 Strategy published end 07
Invest in a baseline study to map customer contact arrangements	WAG	End of 07
Develop a cross sector method for measuring citizens' views of public services.	Making the Connections, WAG, with support from public service partners	Method to be piloted by the initial LSBs (by early 2008)
Establish a customer service training and development programme involving peer support and the promotion of best practice.	Making the Connections, WAG,	Commence in 2007

## 6. Representing people in their localities

The development of LSBs will require a broader, public service model of scrutiny (as local authorities collaborate with other organisations) and there will be a new role for the non-executive, backbench member. This new role may include clearly defined budgets and decision-making powers being delegated to local councillors, to enable them to address issues of local concern. It is also the Assembly's intension to legislate to allow the creation of joint scrutiny committees between two or more local authorities and to enable local authorities to co-opt members of other organisations onto these and allow them voting powers if the authorities so decide. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Develop a citizen-centred approach to scrutiny (evaluating public services from the citizens perspective).	WAG and public service partners	Consultation 2007-08
Develop a new role for non-executive members as citizen champions and a strong focus on performance appraisal.	WAG and public service partners	Consultation summer and autumn 2007

Enable the establishment of joint scrutiny committees.	WAG and public service partners	Consultation summer and autumn 2007
Raise awareness of local government and increase interest in candidacy through the 'Widening Participation' programme.	WAG and public service partners	Regulations before Assembly in March 07
Reform and review political structures to maximise the effectiveness of Welsh local government.	WAG, WLGA and partners	Run up to 2008 local elections
Simplify the legislation on responsibility for functions and member code of conduct.	WAG	Consultation summer and autumn 2007

## 7. Focusing on citizens within their communities

The Welsh Assembly Government state that it is imperative for the very local level to connect to the other collaborative work and state that the voluntary/third sector has an essential role to play in connecting people with service providers. Community and town councils have an important citizen-focussed role to play in service delivery; identifying and enabling the delivery of services in response to citizen's priorities.

Performance Wales will draw together performance data which is available but currently uncoordinated. A policy statement on public engagement across Welsh public services will be produced in late 2007. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

Action	By whom	By when
Develop a model for LSB stakeholder groups through consultation	WAG, LSBs Public service partners	2007-08
Consider legislating for a broadened duty to consult and involve citizens in the development of the Community Strategy	WAG	Consult summer 07 Introduction 08
Develop a national survey framework for local satisfaction research targetted at new LSBs	WAG Public service partners	2008-09
Institute national annual reporting to citizens on local government performance	WAG	2007-08 First national report in 2008
Develop national charter guidance and a framework for local authorities and community & town councils	WAG Local authorities Community & town councils	Nov 07
Support the involvement of the voluntary/third sector in development of LSBs	WAG Public service partners LSBs	2007-08

## 8. Local government performance

Service providers benefit from comparing their performance with others and adopting good practice that has been developed elsewhere, but there is a need to eliminate 'postcode lotteries' (different standards in different areas) and gain some consistency in how local authorities account for their performance. The Welsh Assembly Government will establish a set of national service standards for key services. In addition, as services will be delivered across boundaries, there is a need to ensure that performance

information systems spread across boundaries. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>
Publish an initial set of national service standards for key services	WAG	2007-08
Develop an annual report on all-Wales local government performance	WAG Public service partners	October 07
Introduce a standard performance management software package for Welsh local authorities in May 2007	WAG National partners	October 07
Develop a supportive model for inspection & review	WAG Inspectorates	
Methodology and protocol for corporate management support and intervention	WAG National partners	March 2008

## **9. Financial framework**

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to implementing 3-year revenue and capital allocations to allow local government to improve financial planning. They have a policy to reduce hypothecation of grants, thus giving local authorities more freedom to address local spending needs. Development of local budget pooling will be important and the Welsh Assembly Government will also explore pooling elements of its budget to focus on specific objectives and provide LSBs with the resources to deliver results. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>
Implement 3-year revenue and capital allocations	WAG WLGA	Nov 07
Encourage pooling budgets locally and consider pooling resources centrally	WAG	April 08

## **10. Developing our workforce and our working style**

The key role of the workforce needs to be at the centre of thinking and there is a need to realise the possibility of skills shortages. The aim is to develop leaders and staff who can move across sectors to learn and stimulate innovation. Local government's managers and leaders will need to take the lead in encouraging and enabling this. Specific actions detailed in the paper include:

<b>Action</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>By when</b>
Produce a baseline review of workforce planning across Wales and provide a framework for action	Public Service Mgt Wales, WAG & support from public service partners	Dec 07
Respond to skills and capacity challenges identifies	WAG	Ongoing
Develop the Public Service Workforce Forum	Public Service Mgt Wales, trade unions, employer stakeholders and WAG	Quarterly meetings ongoing

## 11. Conclusion

APSE welcomes this policy statement from the Welsh Assembly Government, in providing a clear action plan, following on from Making the Connections and the Beecham Report.

APSE welcomes Local Service Boards as reinforcing the role of statutory organisations, including local authorities, as leaders of their areas, with a clear remit to consult a wider stakeholder group. However, 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.

The Welsh Assembly Government acknowledges that there are thousands of collaborative endeavours within and between local authorities. APSE supports the emphasis on collaboration where this makes services more effective. 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, as well as joined-up approaches with other agencies such as health. The paper states that a number of local authorities are now at an early stage in actively seeking joint working at a more strategic level and that this is being encouraged through the work of the Regional Partnership Boards. APSE would welcome the sharing of experiences through the Regional Partnership Boards.

APSE welcomes the proposed new role for non-executive, backbench members as citizens' champions. This is similar to the approach outlined in the White Paper in England, called the Community Call for Action. This appears to provide the facility for backbench councillors to be local leaders to dealing with problems on the ground, with budgets and decision-making powers. Meanwhile, executive members provide leadership for the council and community at a strategic level. In practice, there is a danger that there is an overlap between the role of the executive and non-executive members.

The paper argues for that the voluntary/third sector has an essential role to play in connecting people with service providers. 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.

APSE supports the recognition of the need to compare performance on a consistent basis across organisations and the need for performance management systems to be able to compare across boundaries. However, even though there will be an initial set of national service standards, there will be local variances in terms of the local priorities through the Local Service Boards.

Some of the issues raised in this policy statement will be debated at the next APSE Wales Seminar in Llandrindod Wells on 2 July 2007, with speakers from the National Assembly for Wales, WLGA, Regional Partnership Boards and good practice case studies from local councils in Wales. For a full programme, email: [kadair@apse.org.uk](mailto:kadair@apse.org.uk)

Debbie Johns  
Principal Advisor