



Delivering a shared responsibility: performance improvement and community planning

This briefing provides details of APSE's response to the Welsh Assembly Government on 'delivering a shared responsibility'. It is provided to Council Leaders, Chief Executives and service contacts in Welsh authorities and to Scotland, England and Northern Ireland contacts for information.

Key issues

1. The Welsh Assembly Government launched a consultation on delivering a shared responsibility in February 2008.
2. The consultation focuses on the future development of the Wales Programme for Improvement and community planning.
3. This briefing paper details APSE's response to the consultation.

1. Introduction

APSE briefing 07-40 focused on 'a shared responsibility', which was a policy statement from the Welsh Assembly Government on local government's contribution to improving people's lives. The policy statement contained a number of commitments the combined effect of which require the statutory basis for performance improvement, the current best value regime, and local strategic planning in Wales to be reformed and redefined. Since then, the Welsh Assembly Government have sent out a consultation on 'delivering a shared responsibility', focusing on performance improvement and community planning. APSE responded to the Welsh Assembly Government on 11 April 2008 and this response is replicated below.

2. Replicated below is APSE's response

Introduction

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not for profit local government association representing over 250 local authorities across the U.K. APSE consults,

develops, promotes, advises and shares on best practice in the delivery and provision of public services. 20 of the 22 councils in Wales are members of APSE.

Consultation response

Chapter 1: Future development of the Wales Programme for Improvement

1. APSE supports the principle of widening out the definition of what best value means to include social, economic and environmental wellbeing and the sustainability and equity of public services. The best value duty has been an important part in developing continuous improvement in local government services and in securing best use of resources. APSE supports the retention of a broader duty which still contains provisions for best value.
2. The details on the future operation of WPI will rely on guidance and it is essential that adequate consultation takes place.
3. We welcome the clarity that the proposed changes will make to linking community plan to service provision.
4. The emphasis on the quality and availability of services as well as efficiency is welcomed. Local authorities have become experienced at measuring this through performance management arrangements including performance indicators and customer consultation and engagement.
5. APSE would welcome further details of how it is intended to increase a local authority's capacity to respond to local needs; whether this is through releasing resources to the front line, investment in skills and training or whether this is more at a strategic level in terms of their influence in the local service boards.
6. APSE supports collaboration between local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Governments approach to 'Making the connections' and 'A shared responsibility'. However, with the duty to collaborate, there may be associated political, practical and cultural interests to address.
7. APSE would like to seek further clarification about the reserve powers of Ministers with the duty to collaborate in terms of how this will be used and the criteria for intervention. Intervention by the Assembly should be as a result of service failure rather than to direct collaboration.
8. APSE welcomes the Welsh Assembly Governments approach to performance management in terms of comparing performance using appropriate data. APSE has, over the past 10 years, developed the largest voluntary public benchmarking service in the UK with 220 local authorities actively participating. We have worked

with the Local Government Data Unit in relation to using APSE customer satisfaction surveys and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Assembly Government in developing local performance measures.

9. APSE would welcome better joint working between regulatory and inspection bodies to reduce the burden on local authorities. APSE is committed to the independent audit and inspection of public services and believes that any inspection system should lead to a reduction in its role and ultimately the development of a self-inspection regime with light touch external audit.
10. APSE supports the principle that informal support should be a prerequisite of formal intervention. APSE would support the further use of peer support and identifying and using the support of the local government community.

Chapter 2: Community planning

1. It is APSE's view that community planning should be applied equally and fairly across the public sector, and not be restricted to local government. However, as the only democratically elected local body, councils should have a clear leadership role.
2. The duty to co-operate may be problematic if this is not backed up by joint budgets and appropriate organisational arrangements. If local authorities have a duty to co-operate whilst individual partners retain their own budget controls and have their own priorities, there are restrictions as to how far the local authority can influence partner organisations.

3. Further proposals

APSE is keen to work with the Welsh Assembly Government on developing further guidance and would welcome being part of any of the working parties. 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 Debbie Johns, Principal Advisor, APSE on 0161 772 1810 or email: djohns@apse.org.uk

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