



## COUNCIL – 21ST APRIL 2015

**SUBJECT: WELSH GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER, REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: POWER TO LOCAL PEOPLE**

**REPORT BY: INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members of the content of the recent White Paper on Local Government, and of the draft response prepared by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
- 1.2 To invite Members to endorse the draft WLGA response and / or make other comments they see fit as part of the consultation currently being undertaken by Welsh Government on the White Paper.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Welsh Government has published a White Paper on the future of local government in Wales. Consultation on the White Paper closes on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The full text of the White Paper and an online consultation response form can be found at <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/localgovernment/power-to-local-people/?lang=en>.
- 2.2 The White Paper sets out Welsh Government's vision for local government. It contains ambitions for:
  - "Activist councils" working more closely with communities;
  - A limited set of national priorities and standards, with other priorities set at a local level;
  - More diverse membership of local authorities;
  - Reducing the cost of local government;
  - Empowering local people to be more involved in service delivery and decision making.
- 2.3 The Welsh Local Government Association has prepared a draft response to the White Paper which is attached to this report. This response deals with most of the significant questions posed by Welsh government in their consultation document.
- 2.4 Members are invited to consider whether to support this WLGA draft response and / or to offer other views which the authority should submit. Individual members and political groups are entitled to submit responses in their own right if they so wish.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 This White Paper is a highly significant development which could have a major influence on the future shape and role of local government in Wales.

## 4. THE REPORT

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- 4.2 The White Paper sets out Welsh Government's vision for local government. It contains ambitions for:
- "Activist councils" working more closely with communities;
  - A limited set of national priorities and standards, with other priorities set at a local level;
  - More diverse membership of local authorities;
  - Reducing the cost of local government;
  - Empowering local people to be more involved in service delivery and decision making.
- 4.3 Some parts of the White Paper have attracted significant publicity. These include changes to the way local authorities are elected, including limits on the number of terms elected members can serve.
- 4.4 However, the White Paper includes many other far-reaching ideas which have not been so well publicised.
- 4.5 The White Paper includes proposals regarding the powers, structure and procedures for new authorities which will be formed from mergers of existing authorities. The new authorities will be known as 'counties' but will have the power to appoint Mayors, which is not currently possible in county authorities. Consideration will be given to having new, streamlined constitutions for these new councils, and there could be legislation to provide a general power of competence for these new councils. There would also be more flexible powers to allow authorities to contract out services or to work in partnership with other councils nationally or more locally.
- 4.6 'Renewing Democracy' is another of the key themes in the White Paper. This section deals with options around local government elections (e.g. electing part of the council each year or having fixed terms of 4 or 5 years). It also looks at the role and responsibility of the Leader, Cabinet Members, and Elected Members generally. There is discussion of reducing the size of Cabinets, and having fewer 'senior' full time Cabinet positions, with some becoming 'deputy' positions. Promoting greater diversity amongst local authority membership, and in senior roles, figures prominently in the White Paper.
- 4.7 The Paper looks at reducing the number of councilors, raising the current ratio in Wales (each councilor serving on average 2,401 electors) closer to the English position (1:3,914 electors) or even Scotland (1:4,259).
- 4.8 There could be term limits of five terms for elected members and two terms for continuous service for Leaders and Cabinet Members. There is also consideration of a power of recall of councillors if, for example, there have been sanctions imposed on a councillor by a Standards Committee or the Independent Adjudication Panel and 10% of the electors sign a petition demanding a new election.
- 4.9 The White Paper also looks at the role of Chief Executives and senior managers. There are suggestions included as to term limits for chief executives and more consistency in the number of senior officers in each authority and their remuneration.
- 4.10 A large part of the White Paper looks at the relationship between local government and community organisations, and with Town and Community Councils. Wider powers are envisaged for Community Councils who can pass the test of 'competency' and greater

powers are proposed for community groups who wish to effect 'asset transfer' from local government, or who wish to be given a greater role in service provision.

- 4.11 New models of service provision receive consideration, including co-operative and mutualised forms of delivery. There is an expectation that authorities procure services from "... *the best value provider...*" and that Councils "... *work with other Councils, Community Councils, co-operatives and mutuals, and their local community to develop new models of service delivery*".
- 4.12 The White Paper also looks at several options regarding the monitoring of performance in local government, and options for intervention in authorities where deemed necessary.
- 4.13 These are some of the many wide-ranging and highly significant proposals to be found in the White Paper.
- 4.14 The draft response of the Welsh Local Government Association is included at Appendix 1 to this report. This response deals with most of the major questions posed by the White Paper, and in a separate on-line consultation form.
- 4.15 Members are invited to consider whether they agree with and wish to endorse the WLGA's draft response. Members may alternatively wish to offer a different view on any or all of the issues contained within the White Paper. Individual Members and political groups are also free to respond separately if they so wish.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 No equality impact assessment has been undertaken on this report as it has no implications on service delivery at this time.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There may be significant financial implications arising from many of the provisions in the White paper but these will be subject to whatever final decision is reached on each of the individual proposals by Welsh Government over time..

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None at this time, dependent on what proposals emerge following the White Paper.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 All consultation responses have been reflected in this report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 Council is requested to:
  - (i) Consider whether or not to endorse the WLGA Draft response to the White Paper;
  - (ii) Consider whether or not to make any other observations or response to the White Paper.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 To respond to this highly important consultation paper from the Welsh Government.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 Not applicable

Author: Chris Burns, Interim Chief Executive  
Consultees: Cllr Keith Reynolds, Leader and Leader of the Labour Group.  
Cllr. Colin Mann, Leader Plaid Cymru Group  
Cllr Dave Rees, Leader Independent Group

Appendices:  
Appendix 1