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# Local Government Partnership Scheme

## Foreword

The publication of "*Making the Connections*" in October 2004 heralded a distinctive approach to public services based on collaboration rather than competition. Sir Jeremy Beecham's review of local service delivery endorsed this approach and has fundamentally challenged the way in which we manage public services in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government is emphasising the need for public services to be more integrated, efficient and responsive to citizens and communities. At the regional level, local authorities are working together to an unprecedented degree on service delivery. At the local level, local authorities are being asked to convene Local Service Boards in which local service-providers come together to integrate their role wherever necessary to achieve better outcomes and services for the people they serve. "*Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries*" has started the Welsh Assembly Government's journey towards a new style of working. This has been endorsed in the Local Government Policy Statement "A Shared Responsibility" published on 8 March 2007 which recognises that local government has a huge role to play in hearing our citizen's voices and acting upon them. We are not alone in this commitment and have excellent partners in the wider public service, in the Welsh Local Government Association, One Voice Wales and across the wider local government family. This partnership approach is exemplified in preparation for the Local Service Boards and will continue to be a fundamental part of the Making the Connections agenda.

The Government of Wales Act 2006 allows us more freedom and will now allow us to have the legislative levers in place in order to meet our commitments.

The Local Government Partnership Scheme has been fundamentally revised since its inception in 2000 and now reflects the emerging public service reform agenda, which recognises that effective public services must be provided by a wide range of collaborations between public service providers working across geographical and sectoral boundaries.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

**1.1** The Government of Wales Act 1998 required the National Assembly for Wales to make a Scheme setting out how it proposed, in the exercise of its functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales. The Government of Wales Act 2006 effected a formal separation between the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales and, as a consequence, the Welsh Ministers are responsible for discharging the various duties previously laid on the National Assembly for Wales to establish statutory partnership arrangements. The 2006 Act repeals the provisions of Schedule 11 of the 1998 Act and the relevant provisions for the Scheme are now found in section 73 of the 2006 Act.

## The Statutory Provision

**1.2** Section 73 of the 2006 Act makes provision for Welsh Ministers to make a Local Government Scheme as follows:

*73(1) "The Welsh Ministers must make a scheme ("the local government scheme") setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales.*

(2) The Welsh Ministers -

- (a) must keep the local government scheme under review, and*
- (b) may from time to time remake or revise it.*

*(3) In determining the provision to be included in the local government scheme, the Welsh Ministers must have regard to any advice which has been given, and to any representations which have been made, to them by the Partnership Council.*

*(4) The Welsh Ministers must publish the local government scheme when they make it and whenever they remake it; and, if they revise the scheme without remaking it, they must publish either the revisions or the scheme as revised (as they consider appropriate).*

*(5) If the Welsh Ministers publish a scheme or revisions under subsection (4) they must lay a copy of the scheme or revisions before the Assembly.*



- (6) *After each financial year the Welsh Ministers must -*
- (a) *publish a report of how the proposals set out in the local government scheme were implemented in that financial year, and*
  - (b) *lay a copy of the report before the Assembly."*

**1.3** Local government in Wales comprises the county/county borough councils, community and town councils, police authorities, fire and rescue authorities and the national park authorities.



## Chapter 2

### Partnership

**2.1** The Welsh Assembly Government and local government in Wales are committed to working together in partnership, within an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, recognising the value and legitimacy of the roles both have to play in the governance of Wales.

**2.2** The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that public services must be provided by a wide range of collaborations between public service providers. Getting our partnership approach right is a big challenge and is perhaps the linchpin of all our activity in Wales. One key aspect of this is the development of Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements. Local Service Boards are a means of agreeing joint action by the relevant bodies, with the Welsh Assembly Government round the table alongside other partners. The aim is to develop the existing Local Strategic Partnerships to enable them to have greater impact in achieving better outcomes for citizens through more effective delivery of the community strategy. They will work on critical issues, where services need to work better together across sectoral or organisational boundaries. Their role is to ensure concerted and collective leadership across public services and ensure that people are not passed from pillar to post from one service to another and that the most difficult problems in public services are dealt with.

**2.3** The Welsh Assembly Government shares with local government a commitment to working in partnership with voluntary organisations and business organisations. The role of the Voluntary/third sector and the Business sector will be important in delivering this new order of partnership working.

**2.4** This approach is underwritten by “Partnership and Managing Change”, a partnership agreement for Public Services in Wales, launched in March 2007. The agreement sets out a shared vision for public services in Wales that are:

- World class and exemplars of outstanding small country governance;
- Efficient, effective and delivered through collaboration;
- Designed with citizens at the centre and promote social Justice and equality;
- Provided by model employers and regarded as offering careers of first choice;
- Delivered by a well trained, well-rewarded and well-motivated workforce.



**2.5** The agreement is, in itself, a product of partnership through the Wales Public Service Workforce Forum, which is Chaired by the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery. Membership comprises employer representatives from across the Welsh public services, the Wales Trade Union Congress and those who represent sections of the workforce not allied to the TUC.





## Chapter 3

### Partnership Council for Wales

**3.1** In pursuit of its commitment to work effectively with all areas of local government and in keeping with their statutory obligations, Welsh Ministers will establish and maintain a body known as the Partnership Council for Wales (“the Partnership Council”). Previous experience has shown that the Partnership Council provides an effective forum for discussion and joint working between the Assembly Government and local government. The 2006 Act provides that the Partnership Council must comprise of members appointed by the Welsh Ministers from among Welsh Ministers, Deputy Welsh Ministers and members of local government in Wales. It will normally meet three times a year. Section 72 of the 2006 Act provides that the statutory functions of the Partnership Council are to:

- give advice to the Welsh Ministers about matters affecting the exercise of any of their functions;
- make representations to the Welsh Ministers about any matters affecting, or of concern to, those involved in local government in Wales; and
- give advice to those involved in local government in Wales.

Within this remit, the Partnership Council will provide a forum for collaboration by Welsh Ministers and local government in promoting major cross-cutting themes such as equality of opportunity and sustainable development.

**3.2** The Partnership Council may also establish committees and working groups to undertake specific pieces of work in furtherance of the Partnership Scheme. The Consultative Forum on Finance is a standing working group of the Partnership Council and is responsible for assessing the revenue and capital funding requirements of local authorities in Wales and advising the Partnership Council accordingly. It will also make recommendations to the Partnership Council on the formulae for distributing revenue and capital resources.

**3.3** From time to time, the Partnership Council may arrive at outcomes that contribute to partnership issues that have implications for the wider public services workforce. In such circumstances, the Partnership Council may refer items to, or make recommendations for consideration by, the Wales Public Services Workforce Forum. Similarly, the Partnership Council may refer matters to, or receive items from, the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council and the Business Partnership Council.



**3.4** The Assembly Government in partnership with local government will ensure the effective operation of the Partnership Council and its 'task and finish' groups. These will operate in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Partnership Council and any protocol that may from time to time be agreed between the Assembly Government and local government.



## Chapter 4

### Improving Local Government Organisation and Accountability

**4.1** The Welsh Assembly Government shares with local government the commitment to create a transparent and modern democracy that is open and participative, where policy is developed and evaluated openly and in partnership to meet the needs and aspirations of the Welsh people. In the policy statement 'Freedom and Responsibility in Local Government', published in 2002, the Assembly Government supported innovative voting methods and access for all to the democratic process. This sentiment has been echoed in the Local Government Policy Statement, 'A Shared Responsibility', published on 8 March 2007. It has been strengthened in the Assembly Government's response to the December 2006 report of the Assembly Local Government and Public Services Committee, "Electoral Arrangements in Wales". This supported moves to improve levels of voter registration, to improve access for the disabled and under-represented groups (especially young people), to improve the postal voting procedure, to consider electronic voting and to encourage local authorities to pilot new electoral methods.

**4.2** The Welsh Assembly Government, working with the Welsh Local Government Association, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives Wales, the Electoral Commission, One Voice Wales in partnership with other organisations and local authorities, has revived, and extended, the Widening Participation Campaign undertaken prior to the 2004 local government elections. The Campaign aims to raise and renew awareness, interest and participation in local democracy up to the 2008 local elections, including increasing the number and diversity of candidacy at these elections. This is in keeping with Sir Jeremy Beecham's report *Beyond Boundaries*. It is anticipated that this campaign will continue between 2008 and 2012.

**4.3** The reform of public services will lead to an increase in services being delivered through partnerships of two or more local authorities and by local authorities collaborating with other organisations. The development of Local Service Boards will require a broader public service model of scrutiny. The Welsh Assembly Government will consider using measure making powers to change the operation of political structures, including a citizen centred approach to scrutiny.



**4.4** The Assembly Government will also establish an Independent Remuneration Panel to review allowances to elected members on a regular basis, in order to ensure that councillors are fairly remunerated and that financial barriers to participation in local government are minimised. In line with the Aberystwyth study, the Assembly Government will also undertake a consultation on the payment of a basic allowance to community and town councillors.



## Chapter 5

### Improving Local Government Services

**5.1** Public services should be joined up and collaborative. Local authorities have a long tradition of working collaboratively and will need to build on this further as they work increasingly with each other across boundaries as well as with partners in their area through Local Service Boards.

### Regional Collaboration

**5.2** Regional collaboration has developed significantly in services where another region is part of the natural geography, or where services are too specialised to be delivered by single authorities or where there are economies of scale from joint working.

**5.3** Value Wales, provides support for such strategic partnerships in the form of advice, guidance and support of best practice, as well as in shared procurement, where it undertakes a role in negotiating all-Wales contracts in key areas and leads national initiatives where centralised co-ordination will deliver benefits.

**5.4** Public Service Management Wales (PSMW), was established in 2004 by the Welsh Assembly Government alongside the public services policy, Making the Connections, Delivering Better Services for Wales. PSMW provides support for the improvement of public services by addressing the development needs of managers and leaders, individual public sector organisations and the wider public service community. PSMW delivers through:

- a range of different learning and development interventions to address individual needs;
- promoting the development and engagement of the Welsh public service workforce by encouraging partnership and collaboration across public services to improve employment practice;
- providing thought leadership across the public service by ensuring the provision of high quality, leading edge information.

**5.5** PSMW's Advisory Board includes senior representation from local government organisations and the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA). This partnership assures probity and good governance in delivery and design of products and support for public service organisations in becoming fit for purpose.

## Local Service Boards

**5.6** Local Service Boards represent a new approach to local leadership on service improvement. They bring together the providers in Wales of the main local services, to agree joint action where it will result in better outcomes and services for others. Fundamental to them is the need to integrate services across institutional boundaries, pooling resources if necessary, where it will enable more effective, responsive and often, more efficient, services. The Welsh Assembly Government is represented on the Boards to support their work and to identify where it can take action to remove barriers or complexity. Local authorities have a key role in convening the Boards and driving the agenda.

**5.7** The Welsh Assembly Government will develop with each Board a Local Service Agreement that identifies a limited and tangible number of national or local priorities to be delivered through the Local Service Boards. The Local Service Boards should lead the development and then delivery of the community strategy and help to ensure that it takes account of, and links appropriately to, other local strategies and is founded on a strong local commitment to delivery.

## Local Service Agreements

**5.8** Policy agreements between the Welsh Assembly Government and each local authority in Wales have provided a unique and successful example of partnership working between tiers of government. They have yielded significant improvements in the quality of key local services across Wales. This task is now to extend that approach across local service-providers in line with the public service reform agenda, and to develop local service agreements that reflect local and national cross-sector contributions to improving citizen's quality of life.

**5.9** Local authorities have a wealth of experience on how technology can be used to transform access to services. Drawing on this experience to identify new technologies could make a significant difference to people's lives. The Welsh Assembly Government has a key role in setting a clear direction in developing and delivering high quality e-enabled services.

**5.10** Citizens should know how services are performing in their area and public service organisations should be accountable for their performance. Good quality performance information is essential to the effective delivery of public services. We will set national service standards for key services in order to identify unacceptable variations in service performance.

**5.11** The Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) is the strategic framework for driving up local government service and corporate standards and accounting publicly for them. It allows flexibility and minimises burdens on local authorities. The WPI is a real success - services are improving and levels of risk falling. The Performance Measurement Framework supports the WPI by generating data that is valuable in improving services. WPI considers equality and sustainability to be key ingredients in effective and efficient performance and service delivery. The WLGA's Equality Improvement Framework has been developed to work with WPI and can be used by local authorities to ensure they take account of equality when carrying out their WPI annual risk assessments.

**5.12** The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 confers on the Assembly Measure-making powers that cover the 'best value' regime and could be used to amend, replace or repeal all or part of the 1999 Act. The policy statement *A Shared Responsibility* made a number of commitments to use these powers in particular ways, many of which flowed from the recommendations of the Beecham Review of local service delivery in 2006. These commitments will need articulating in the future development of the WPI.





## Chapter 6

### Local, Regional and National Priorities

**6.1** Public services are managed at a number of levels in Wales - nationally, regionally and locally. There needs to be less of a fixation on tiers and more focus on connecting and integrating services for the benefit of the citizen.

**6.2** To support this, the Welsh Assembly Government will consult on the possibility of inviting the National Assembly to legislate, to create a duty to co-operate between named partners.

**6.3** There must be effective alignment between the Wales Spatial Plan, Local Service Boards and the Community Strategy. It is intended 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.

**6.4** New statutory guidance on community planning will provide a clearer framework for shared local action to deliver local, regional and national strategic priorities.

**6.5** The emerging role of the Welsh Local Government Association's Regional Partnership Boards in Central, North, South East and South West Wales will be an important feature of the regional and sub regional picture over the next few years.



## Chapter 7

### Community Focus

**7.1** Community and town councils have an important role to play in representing the views and concerns of their communities. They are also well placed to identify community needs and priorities; provide leadership to encourage local people and agencies to meet those needs; and deliver specific services when a bespoke solution provides the best option for the community.

**7.2** One of the Assembly Government's priority commitments is the continued development of effective relationships between unitary authorities and community and town councils. The aim is that an agreement or charter between both parties setting down how they will co-operate with each other will help promote good practice and remove ambiguity. However since the community and town council sector is so diverse, it is also important that good relationships are developed amongst community and town councils themselves as well as with their other local government partners - national parks authorities, fire and rescue authorities and police authorities.

**7.3** The result of closer partnerships may be the delegation of functions to those community and town councils that have both the capacity and willingness to take these on.

**7.4** Within the wider partnership arena, there is also an emerging challenge for the community and town sector to find its place within the Local Service Board mechanism. The policy statement 'A Shared Responsibility' envisages extending the power of well-being to community and town councils and this will further facilitate partnership working to improve local services.

**7.5** The Assembly Government also believes that there should be greater partnership working across the whole range of local organisations and community groups, including the voluntary/third sector.

**7.6** The voluntary/third sector has an essential role to play in connecting people with service providers as they are often the first point of call for citizens. It therefore makes sense to concentrate on building a stronger relationship between the voluntary/third sector and the public sectors and to involve the voluntary/third sector on an equal footing in respect of community strategies and the Wales Spatial Plan.

**7.7** It is also important to find ways of bringing resource together to provide citizens with performance information that is easy to understand by all groups in our communities. Performance Wales will provide some underpinning information, drawing together performance data, which is available but is currently uncoordinated and dispersed.

## Chapter 8

### Financial Framework

**8.1** The Local Government Policy Statement “A Shared Responsibility” set out the Assembly Government’s plans for developing a financial framework that enables collaborative working. A close working relationship is essential given the key role local government has in promoting shared responsibility and cross-sectoral working as the “Making the Connections” agenda gathers pace.

**8.2** The work of the Local Government Settlement Expenditure Sub-Group and the Settlement Distribution Sub-Group, both fora of the Consultative Forum on Finance, involves close and constructive liaison between officials of local government and the Assembly Government. They have as their objectives a common understanding of the expenditure pressures that impact on local government and agreement on the formula by which the vast majority of unhypothecated revenue and capital resources are distributed between local authorities.

**8.3** The Welsh Local Government Association and the Assembly Government are working together to introduce three year revenue and capital settlement settlements from 2008-09 in order to give local government greater certainty in forward financial and strategic planning.

**8.4** Effective collaborative working is also essential to the delivery of other key commitments made in “A Shared Responsibility” of which local government in Wales are supportive:-

- the development of a strategic approach to major capital investment within the Welsh public sector;
- the development of budget pooling arrangements to facilitate more flexibility in the planning and delivery of cross-sectoral services; and
- promoting greater understanding on the part of the public on the way local government is funded.

**8.5** When the Assembly Government proposes new initiatives which may add to or reduce the financial responsibilities on local authorities, it will consult, where practicable, on the cost of implications of these with the bodies representative of local government in Wales and take their views into account.



## Chapter 9

### Liaison and Consultation with Local Government

**9.1** The Welsh Assembly Government will seek to ensure frequent and timely liaison between all parts of the Assembly and local government at elected member and officer levels. In addition to formal arrangements through the Partnership Council, this will entail:

#### Frequent and Open Consultation

**9.2** As soon as practicable and within the constraints of proper confidentiality the Assembly Government will consult the representative associations of Welsh local government (that is the Welsh Local Government Association, One Voice Wales - and bodies and representatives of the police, fire and rescue and national park authorities) on all matters of common concern affecting local government (with the exception of matters relating to national security and proposals which affect only particular authorities). On major issues of policy the Assembly Government will also consult individual authorities, including community councils, on matters relating to their functions with the prior agreement of the representative associations.

**9.3** The consultation process will be full, open and transparent. The Assembly Government will have full regard to the views of local government and will value the benefit of its experience in making decisions that affect local government. Normally twelve weeks will be allowed for consultation. However there may be circumstances, for example where the Assembly Government is constrained by legislative or other timetables, when a shorter period is necessary. The Assembly Government will endeavour to keep such instances to a minimum, but if this is not possible, an eight-week period could be considered realistically achievable. In the interests of promoting wider engagement and understanding all consultations will include an executive summary designed to enable an opinion to be formed on the core content of the document.

**9.4** Where the associations representative of local government are consulted on a confidential basis, the Assembly Government will expect them to honour the limits of such confidentiality.

- 9.5** There will be consultation about:
- i. financial issues relevant to local government, including the arrangements and guidelines for the distribution of grants to local authorities and other financial arrangements;
  - ii. preparation and planning for the implementation of the new Assembly legislation, including legislation on local government functions;
  - iii. Westminster and European legislation and policy issues of direct relevance to local government, where the government is required to form a view in international forums; and
  - iv. appointments of representatives of local government to other bodies, whether at the Wales, UK or international level.

## The Exchange of Information

**9.6** The Assembly Government, subject to any inescapable constraints of confidentiality and data protection, wishes to encourage the free flow of information between itself, its agencies and local government.

**9.7** The Assembly Government will seek the assistance of local government in producing advice and guidance to local government, and in devising practical measures to enable authorities to implement new legislation effectively and consistently. The Assembly will look to the representative associations of local government to assist in compiling information required for policy purposes relating to government and in the dissemination, reviewing and updating of information about policy and operational changes.

**9.8** The Assembly Government will seek to inform the associations of local government of its activities, proposals and policies. Local government undertakes similarly to inform the Assembly Government. Where proposals and policies are founded upon consultants' or research reports each will, wherever practicable, provide copies of these reports and other factual analysis to the other.

## Co-operation between Officials

**9.9** The Assembly Government and Welsh local government will share in the process of policy review and development through working groups of officers. Such groups provide invaluable opportunities for sharing experience and expertise. They are not to be regarded as a means of formal consultation or as means of gaining political agreement between the Assembly Government and local government. There is a shared commitment to respecting the confidentiality of information.



## The Sharing of Public Announcements

**9.10** The Assembly Government will seek to share news releases and public statements concerning local government with the associations representing Welsh local government in advance of the media. If it is not possible to share fully the text of any such pending release or statement, the Welsh Assembly Government's press office will liaise with counterparts in the relevant association to provide advance notice of the imminence and likely content of a release or statement.

**9.11** News releases and public statements directly concerning an individual local authority or its geographical area will be shared with the press officer or other appropriate officer of that authority in advance of the media.

**9.12** Where public announcements regarding co-operation on policies, publications or projects take place, a joint statement incorporating comments from the Assembly Government and the relevant association may be used when appropriate in place of complementary press releases.

**9.13** Associations representing Welsh local government will adopt reciprocal arrangements with the Welsh Assembly Government.

## Visits by Assembly Government Ministers

**9.14** Where an Assembly Minister is to undertake a visit in an official capacity to a local authority owned premises such as a school, the authority's chief executive or relevant chief officer will be notified in advance.

## Building a Shared Appreciation

**9.15** The Assembly Government and the bodies representative of local government will work together to promote co-operation and a closer understanding between the Assembly Government and local government through, for example:

- co-operation on Local Service Boards;
- formal and informal consultations and discussions;
- joint working on specific projects and through the Partnership Council for Wales and its working groups;
- staff exchanges;
- joint conferences and training sessions for members and officers;
- the dissemination of good practice and government initiative; and
- exchanges of information consistent with data protection and confidentiality requirements.



## Chapter 10

### Reviewing the Local Government Partnership Scheme

**10.1** The Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Welsh Ministers to publish an annual report of how the proposals set out in the local government scheme were implemented in that financial year and lay it before the National Assembly for Wales.

**10.2** Welsh Ministers in conjunction with the local government associations will keep the scheme under periodic review and will consider whether it should be revised or remade.



Further copies of this scheme are available from:

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