



(response to Welsh Government Consultation)

Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for people

Consultation Questions

Your Name Organisation (if applicable)

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CHAPTER 3

Question 1

In Chapter 2, we restated our commitment to regional working in key areas but recognised the need for this to be supported by further change. In chapter 3, we set out the broad options for moving toward fewer, larger local authorities and summarise features of the process which would be common to each option.

- a) What practical steps could the Welsh Government take to make current regional working easier and more effective, for example in relation to education consortia, social services and the City Regions and City and Growth Deals?**

Wales is over governed already. There is no justification for both Welsh Government and 22 County Councils for a population of just 3m. There should be no regions (another level of government not needed) and the County Councils should be abolished. The Welsh Government should take responsibility for strategic services (including social services and education) with local councils (approx. the size of the old Boroughs in 1972) to deliver all other services locally.



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The whole process has taken far too long and has cost the taxpayer an inordinate amount of money. By progressing with legislation quickly it will create what is needed and will give certainty.

In any event the Town and Community Councils should take a larger role in delivery of local services away from the larger authorities.

b) What are your views on the common elements to the process of mergers we outline in this section?

The process needs to be backed with legislation. Otherwise the process is accepted.

c) What are your views on the options for creating fewer, larger Authorities which we have set out?

In principle we agree. There has been much discussion over many years costing a great deal of taxpayer's money. We no need to 'get on with it'.

d) Are there other options for creating fewer, larger authorities we should consider?

The principle of the proposals to reduce the number of local authorities is accepted although the preference is to abolish them completely. However, Powys is not sustainable left on its own and should be merged.

e) Do you have evidence on costs, benefits and savings of each option which can inform decision-making? If so, please provide details.

As an Association we do not have the experience to answer this question.

Chapter 4

Question 2

Chapter 4 has explained the need for clarity on the future footprint for local government and the range of factors which should be taken into account to determine a new configuration. It sets out a suggested future footprint for local government, which could be reached via each of the options set out in the previous chapter.

a) Do you agree that providing clarity on the future footprint of local government is important?

It is not important, it is essential.

b) Do you agree with the factors we have identified to inform our thinking?

In principle yes. However, Powys as a stand-alone authority (even with the Health Authority) is not sustainable financially and also has many management issues.



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Would you change or add any?

Powys should not be a stand-alone county but divided into two with the Old Montgomeryshire going north and the Brecknockshire/Radnorshire area going to the south west. This is far more sustainable financially.

c) What are your views on the new areas suggested in this section?

See (b) above.

The new Council areas would work financially, however there needs to be localised delivery of services which area accessible to the public without travelling great distances. This includes area planning and development committees.

c) Do you have alternative suggestions and, if so, what is the evidence to support these as an alternative?

No alternatives are offered – just a plea to ‘get on with it’.

d) In the context of these proposals, are there other ways we should simplify and streamline joint working arrangements at regional level and among public bodies within the new authority areas? If so, what are they?

There is no justification for regions and County Councils. Wales is over governed already.

Chapter 5

Question 3

Chapter 5 sets out the proposed approach to transition and implications for establishing Transition Committees and elections to Shadow Authorities under each option.

a) Do you agree with the proposed process of transition: namely establishing Transition Committees and ensuring elections to Shadow Authorities can be held ahead of vesting day for the new authorities?

The principle is accepted; however it needs to be efficient in its delivery.

b) Do you agree that, if option 1 were pursued, we should set a date by which voluntary merger proposals should come forward in each electoral cycle?

We do not support option 1 – mergers should be legislated for to ensure it happens as soon as possible if the proposal is to proceed. However see Q1 for the overall view of the Association. This will save money and remove uncertainty.

c) Do you have any other thoughts on the proposed process?

Not that has not already been stated in earlier question.



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Question 4

The consultation suggests holding any local government elections in June 2021. Are there any reasons why June 2021 would not be a suitable date? If so, please suggest an alternative date with the reasons why that would be more suitable.

There is a raft of reasons why May 2021 should be used as the election date for the new authorities. May is the usual election date and we can see no reason to change this.

There should be no reason for not meeting this date for implementation.

Political interests should not stand in the way of this programme.

Question 5

The Welsh Government recognises that there are some plans or assessments, for example the preparation of assessments of wellbeing by Public Service Boards, which are linked to electoral cycles.

We will make provision to make sure these tie into any new electoral cycles going forward. Are there any other plans or matters which might be tied into the electoral cycle which we need to consider?

There is reason why plans cannot be combined to create single documents as a priority when the Council are merged.

Current plans can be implemented on an area by area basis until any new plan is in place.

Question 6

What are your views on the approach which should be taken to determining the parameters of electoral reviews?

The Boundary Commission for Wales should be looking to create Councils of approx. 60 members – the wards will need to be compatible with any Town and Community Council reviews.



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Chapter 6

Question 7

- a) How can councils make more effective use of their elected member's knowledge of, and connections in, their communities?

The best way of using member's knowledge is to have a structure as follow:

Full Council – Precept, Budget and over Policy.

Cabinet – has to be overall and balanced (ie Councillors from Towns and Villages – not one or the other)

All other Committees – area based.

However, see Q1 for overarching view.

- b) How could we better recognise the level of responsibility involved in being a local councillor? What changes to the remuneration and support councillors receive would enable a wider range of people to become involved in local democratic representation?

Although it is recognised that County Councillors should receive a remuneration this should be commercially based. For example the Local Authority Pension Scheme is not sustainable and is more than many of their constituents will have.

The remuneration should be based upon a salary with a number of hours (minimum), a basic pension scheme (commercial) and limited expenses.

Question 8

- a) Are there other powers which local government should have? If so, what are they?

The issues surrounding Principle Authorities relate to the reliance on Welsh government Grants. The system of allocation of these grants needs to be reviewed and not based upon population but delivery of services costs.

No further powers should be passed on without a clear funding stream to pay for them.



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Welsh Government needs to finance Social Services properly and take full responsibility for it.

- b) Are there other freedoms or flexibilities which local government should have? If so, what are they?

If the County Councils are to be combined they should be left to manage their areas with little interference from Welsh Government although it is accepted that a Wales Wide Strategic Plan should be in place.

Question 9

- a) Which areas offer the greatest scope for shared transactional services?

There is no proven case for shared services, the bigger the departments get the less efficient they are and the delivery of services suffer.
The new authorities are large enough not to need shared service delivery.
View expressed in Q1 should be considered as the best way forward.

- b) How might such arrangements be best developed?

They should not be developed.

Question 10

- a) In ensuring we deliver a consistent approach across Wales, where consistency is important, how do you think the advice and support on each of these matters could be best provided?

Consistency is important; a set of rule and guidance should cover this without the need to make it more complicated.

Clarity in such guidance should mean that advice would only be needed in a limited number of instances. Advice should be given by a single group at Welsh Government to ensure consistency of advice given.

- b) Are there any other challenges or opportunities from structural change or providing additional powers and flexibilities that have not been identified above? If these areas require support, what form should this support take?



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No.

- c) Which of the issues identified above or in your response should be prioritised for early resolution?

The first priority should be the 'structure', everything else will follow.

Question 11

We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposals within this consultation would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

- a) What effects do you think there would be?

The Welsh Language is important culturally. However, in times of limited funding there needs to be a balance.

Funding for priority services such as social care must be taken forward.

There also needs to be a sensible approach to employing top management, ability to do the job must take precedence over language issues.

- b) How positive effects could be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

A realistic approach would be to issue documents in both languages but in separate documents. This will then enable the right number of each version to be produced saving a mound of paper wasted to date.

Question 12

Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy within this consultation could be formulated or changed (if required) so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

As we have already said a realistic approach would be to issue documents in both languages but in separate documents. This will then enable the right number of each version to be produced saving a mound of paper wasted to date.



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Question 13

The Children's Rights Impact Assessment published alongside the consultation outlines the Welsh Government's view of the effect of the proposals contained in the consultation on children and young people. The Welsh Government seeks views on that assessment.

- a) Are there any positive or adverse effects not identified in the assessment?

We are not sure of the relevance to this consultation. All Principle Authorities should be required to comply with the Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

- b) Could the proposals be reformulated so as to increase the positive effects or reduce any possible adverse effects?

See (a) above.

Question 14

The Equalities Impact Assessment published alongside the consultation outlines the Welsh Government's view of the effect of the proposals contained in the consultation on protected groups under the Equality Act 2010. The Welsh Government seeks views on that assessment.

- a) Are there any other positive or adverse effects not identified in the assessment?

Again, not sure this is relevant to the consultation. All principle authorities should comply with the Equality Act 2010 in any event.

If ward boundaries are drawn taking into account electorate and local conditions no one should be disadvantaged.

- b) Could the proposals be reformulated so as to increase the positive or reduce any possible adverse effects?

No.



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Question 15

Please provide any other comments you wish to make on the content of this consultation. Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: *The respondent is happy for any of the content of this return to be made public.*

Information

The North and Mid Wales Association represents 36 Town and Community Councils from Mid and North Wales.

This consultation was prepared for discussion at the quarterly meeting of the Association held in April 2018.

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Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

April 2018