



WLGA

Corporate Strategy

2019-22

June 2019

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About Us

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales.

Our aim is to **promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government** and the interests of local authorities in Wales.

We are a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. The WLGA is a membership organisation that represents all 22 local authorities in Wales, the 3 fire and rescue authorities and the 3 national park authorities as associate members.

We believe that services are best provided within a democratic framework of local accountability and that the people who use public services should have as much of a say in the way they are organised, managed and funded as possible. Local government is seen as being the tier of government closest to service users and best able to respond to their needs. We support the role of the Welsh Government in setting the strategy for public services nationally but believe that it is down to local government to interpret strategy to deliver services based on local circumstances and local priorities.

Originally established in 1996, primarily as a policy development and representative body, we have since developed into an organisation that also provides improvement support, leads on employment issues and hosts a range of partner bodies supporting local government.

How we work

We are a cross party organisation and our decision-making arrangements are politically balanced, reflecting the combined political composition of the members appointed by local authorities.

We are a member-led organisation and our activities and priorities are agreed through our main decision-making bodies, the **Council** - comprising 71 members proportionately representing the populations, they serve – and the **Executive Board** - comprising the 22 council leaders. Through these mechanisms, there is a direct link between our governance arrangements and every individual voter in Wales. Electors vote for their councillors in the local government elections; the elected councillors in turn form governing administrations and elect a leader, and those leaders and councillors are elected on to the WLGA Council and Executive Board. The WLGA includes, as Associate Members, the National Park Authorities, Fire and Rescue Authorities and other local government bodies in Wales. They are all valued members and form part of the WLGA's governance arrangements.

Elected members are at the heart of policy and decision making within the WLGA. Through the Executive Board and Council, members determine our priorities and activities and agree an annual Business Plan and receive an Annual Report.

Although Labour forms the largest group within the WLGA and holds the post of Leader and Deputy Leaders, we operate on the basis of consensus across the political groups

including Independents, Conservative and Plaid Cymru. Leaders and other WLGA Council Members act as **Spokespersons** for the WLGA covering a range of local government services or portfolios. These portfolio areas cover all aspects of local government service ranging from finance, education and social services to libraries and leisure and we share the collective ambition to provide excellent online digital services to the people and businesses of Wales.

We are recognised under the statutory **Local Government Partnership Scheme** derived from the Government of Wales Act 2006 as the negotiating body representing local government. Thus, WLGA Spokespersons represent the whole of local government in discussions and negotiations with the Welsh Government, the UK Government and all other national partners in their particular service areas. In addition, a small team of officers provide professional expertise and support to assist in the lobbying, improvement and policy development process.

Much of our work is focused on the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Government and other national stakeholders and partners. We also liaise with the Wales Office and UK Government and works closely with the LGA in London in seeking to influence non-devolved policies and legislation and, in particular, responding to developments around Brexit. Whatever the future holds, the WLGA will continue to monitor and respond to developments within the European Union and work with partner organisations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) across Europe.

Our work involves engagement with Ministers, National Assembly Members, and other national and governmental organisations. We promote the important role of local government to Assembly Members and seek to enhance and protect councils' reputation and secure positive change to legislation. The WLGA's lobbying work is therefore extensive.

Our key areas of work on behalf of local government include:

- Bilateral meetings between WLGA Spokespersons and Ministers;
- Pre and post-legislative scrutiny with the National Assembly for Wales, UK Parliament and the European Parliament;
- Policy development and joint working with the Welsh Government and UK Government;
- Championing, promoting and sharing council's contributions, achievements and innovations;
- Engaging with the workforce unions and professional networks and associations;
- Working with the various Inspectorates in Wales;
- Providing Improvement Support including Peer Review and Member Development and Training and promoting good practice;
- Arranging conferences, seminars, workshops and training events;
- The publication of reports, guidance documents and on-line resources; and

- Communications, press work, and social media.

We also host and deliver a range of national programmes or services on behalf of local government, many of which are funded through Welsh Government or UK Government grants. These include the National Exercise Referral Scheme, Service Children in Education Project, School Holiday Enrichment Programme, Waste Improvement, Autism Spectrum Disorder Team and the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership.

Our Values

Our primary purposes are to promote better local government, to promote its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

In working towards its primary purposes, we seek to be:

- **Ambitious** in our expectations and in our vision for local democracy and local services
- **Accountable** to our members and member authorities
- **Proactive** in our defence and promotion of local democracy, our policy development and our engagement with members
- **Receptive** through listening to and considering the range of views of our membership, partners and stakeholders
- **Responsive** through our services and support to our members and member authorities
- **Collaborative** in our approach to governance and partnership working with Welsh Government and other stakeholders

We also work towards upholding and promoting equality, diversity and human rights; including promoting diversity in democracy and supporting councillors in their role as democratically elected local representatives.

We are committed to equality and fairness and although we are not a statutory body, we operate in the spirit of legislation such as the Equalities Act, Freedom of Information Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Within this context, the WLGA is committed to creating a resilient environment and low carbon economy in Wales. We champion and promote the Welsh language and are subject to Welsh Language Standards.

Our Aims and Priorities

Our priorities are underpinned by our core aims to secure:

- **Reform, continuous improvement and a commitment to partnership**
 - we believe in local government reform and seeking continuous improvement as a process for delivering better outcomes and services for the people of Wales, and in ensuring that resources are used as effectively and as efficiently as possible. A continued commitment to partnership working in Wales is

essential to ensure that local government and the Welsh Government work together, based on clear principles of mutual respect and understanding, in order to deliver better outcomes for the people of Wales. We lead and support collaborative local public service reform and improvement and ensure that the governance of regional services is democratically accountable and, wherever possible, streamlined;

- **Fair and flexible funding** – councils need greater fiscal autonomy and flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. Specific grants should be transferred into the settlement, after an agreed period of time, and the Welsh Government should fully cost and fund any new national initiatives and/or legislation and should commit to multiyear financial settlements, so councils can plan more effectively;
- **Commitment to the principle of Subsidiarity** – the Welsh Government and the National Assembly should commit to the European Charter of Local Self Government and the principle of subsidiarity, where the presumption is that power is transferred to the level of government closest to the people. The Welsh Government has a clear national strategic role, but councils want to see momentum behind the devolution of powers beyond Cardiff Bay to local government and to local communities.

We will also:

- **Promote the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders**, emphasising their equal democratic mandate with national politicians.
- **Ensure maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance** where councils and regions have flexibility in determining regional priorities, services and governance arrangements.
- **Promote sector-led improvement**, with an emphasis around digital and innovation, supporting authorities in sharing best practice, developing workforce skills and developing a new corporate peer review programme.
- **Encourage a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity** and enhanced democratic engagement and supporting councillors' development and training.
- **Support authorities to effectively manage their workforce** through our role as the Employers' Organisation.

An Organisation that is fit for purpose

Continued austerity and sustained budget cuts are all placing council services under huge financial pressure. Austerity has also impacted on our organisation. Whilst we have been able to maintain the staffing levels necessary to continue to deliver on our work, capacity for organisational development has reduced and management and back office functions have been streamlined.

The WLGA has always placed a strong emphasis on doing things efficiently and delivering value for money and we will continue with this approach. We will also look to align existing capacity as closely as possible to the business needs of the organisation and we will make further efficiencies in our processes, in particular, using new and emerging technologies.

Accountability and transparency are core principles of the WLGA. Our formal meetings are held in public and all corporate documents, such as our budget, pay policy statement, members' allowances and all meeting documents are available publicly, where appropriate.

The members of the WLGA Management Sub Committee oversee the organisation's management in relation to financial, legal and contractual matters. The members of the WLGA Audit Committee have overall responsibility for monitoring the integrity of the financial statements of the organisation and for overseeing internal control and risk management systems.

To be successful in delivering on the WLGA's values, aims and priorities, we will be rigorous and tireless in everything that we do. A renewed focus on campaigning, lobbying and public affairs along with a continuing adherence to the needs and priorities of local authorities and other members will shape and inform our work. This will inevitably require us to be agile and responsive, reflecting the dynamic policy setting and the continuous but changing pressures impacting on local government and its partners across Wales.

We will continue to be a member led organisation, always reflecting the priorities and interests of local government and our member organisations. When appropriate, we will seek and encourage collaborative approaches to meeting the campaigning, policy development and service needs of local government and its partners. The WLGA has a long and valued reputation for effective representation and lobbying and meaningful interventions at all levels of government. This will continue, and we will maintain and develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise across the fullest range of local government services and priorities to support this work.

Our Staff

Our staff continue to be important to us as an organisation and key to the delivery of the ambitions set out in our Corporate Strategy. Our performance appraisal processes will support staff to continually develop on an individual basis while our induction process, Staff Forum and Policy and Information Exchange Group are significant vehicles for collective staff development and engagement. Collective intelligence is vital to us and we value every staff member's contribution to the continued success of the organisation.

We will therefore encourage and support staff in achieving their individual personal goals, in improving their skills and knowledge because they are intrinsic to the organisation's wider success.

The term of this Strategic Plan will see us recruiting new staff, both to fill-vacancies as they arise but to refocus resources to support new priorities as the develop in the delivery of our Strategic Plan. Building resilience and limiting reliance on individuals is always a challenge in a small organisation but we will seek to align these challenges with the commitment to be agile and responsive to the needs of members and other partners.

Continued austerity and sustained budget cuts are all placing council services under huge financial pressure and these pressures have also had an impact on the WLGA. We have always placed a strong emphasis on doing things efficiently and delivering

value for money, and this will continue under the scrutiny and guidance of our members.
