
REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

WHITE PAPER – REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: RESILIENT AND RENEWED

Reason for this Report

1. To enable the Committee to consider provisions of the Welsh Government White Paper consultation document on Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed
https://consultations.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultation_doc_files/170130-white-paper-en.pdf published on 31 January 2017, in so far as they concern matters within the remit of this Committee.
2. To advise the Committee that the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 March 2017 will consider the Council's corporate response to the questions contained in the White Paper, and that this Committee has an opportunity to inform Cabinet of any comments it wishes to be included.

Background

2. The White Paper 'Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed' is the Welsh Government's statement of intent about the future of Local Government in Wales which follows detailed discussion between the Assembly Minister and Local Authorities and partners since the Welsh Assembly Election of May 2016, and feedback received on the second Local Government (Wales) Bill.
3. The proposals in this White Paper set out arrangements for regional working; describe a strengthened role for councils and reaffirm the provisions from the second Local Government (Wales) Bill in relation to the role of councillors; provide a framework for any future voluntary mergers; and sets out the role of community councils.

Issues

4. Section 5.2 of the White Paper refers to Leading Localities and provisions for the role of Councillors and set out below are the provisions that fall within the remit of this Committee.

5.25 We propose to retain the provisions from the Draft Bill which would require Local Authorities to produce strategies explaining how the public can understand how decisions are made and how they can participate in the process. In addition, we intend to make

broadcasting of Council meetings – already widely practised – a statutory requirement and Councils will be required also to allow Members to attend Council meetings remotely if they have domestic, business or travel difficulties preventing them getting to the main meeting place.

5.26 *New duties for Leaders of political groups to ensure high standards of conduct amongst their members will add to a package designed to make life as a Councillor more attractive and to encourage a more diverse range of people to consider involvement in the future.*

5.27 *Councillors are the voice of their communities. The previous White Paper and Draft Bill sought views designed to provide clarity as to what local people can expect from Local Authority Councillors. This included holding regular surgeries, responding to correspondence in set timescales, publishing reports on their activities. In the light of the Jo Cox tragedy and other representations, we intend to modify the need to hold surgeries with a provision which requires that Councillors must provide opportunities for their constituents to be in contact with them, there will be a menu of choices that Councillors will be able to choose from to best suit their local communities.*

5.28 *The Draft Bill included some proposals which we now consider to be too rigid. Leaders were to be required to hold annual public meetings. All Councillors were to be required to produce annual reports. Instead we intend to bring forward proposals that offer Leaders and Councillors a menu of how they might improve, where necessary, their interaction with the public. The important point will be that they engage consistently – and make themselves available to the public – and provide regular information as to how they have done this.*

5. The White Paper Consultation Question 22 in relation to the provisions set out above is as follows:

The Welsh Government believes there should be minimum expectations on Councillors for interacting with their local constituents.

Do you agree or disagree? If so, what should these minimum expectations be?

6. The Committee after considering these provisions may wish to provide feedback to the Cabinet for inclusion in the final response on the White paper to be considered at the Cabinet on 16 March 2017.
7. The deadline for responses to the White Paper consultation is 11 April 2017, and Political Groups and individual Members are able to respond direct to the consultation if they wish.

Legal Implications

8. The relevant legal provisions are set out in the White paper. There are no other direct legal implications arising from the content of this report.

Financial Implications

9. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Note the provisions of Part 5 of the White Paper Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed that fall within the remit of this Committee and provide any comments as appropriate;
- 2) delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair to prepare a response to the consultation on behalf of the Committee to be submitted to Cabinet on 16 March 2017.

GEOFF SHIMELL

Acting Head of Democratic Services

28 February 2017

Background papers

White Paper - Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed

Link:

https://consultations.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultation_doc_files/170130-white-paper-en.pdf