

Doc 3 – CSFLG & CSLGPS meetings with WLGA

Note of CSFLG and WLGA meeting 2 June 2016

NOTE OF CABINET SECRETARY FOR FINANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEETING WITH THE WELSH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (WLGA) ON THURSDAY, 2 JUNE 2016

1. Present

Welsh Government

Mark Drakeford AM
Debra Carter
Lisa James
Stephen Phipps

WLGA

Cllr Bob Wellington
Cllr Andrew Morgan
Steve Thomas
Chris Llewelyn

2. Purpose

2.1 Introductory meeting to enable the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (“the Minister”) to hear the views of the WLGA relating to local government reform and other matters, following the meeting of the WLGA’s Coordinating Committee on 27 May 2016.

3. Introduction

3.1 The Minister was pleased to have an early meeting following his appointment and was keen to hear the WLGA’s views on the points identified, which were of common interest. Over the coming weeks and months he aimed to develop a constructive relationship with local government based on trust, mutual respect and understanding that, whilst there would not always be full agreement, there should continue to be dialogue and recognition of the legitimacy of the differing views and agendas of each interested party.

3.2 Cllr Wellington and his colleagues congratulated the Minister on his appointment. The WLGA did not intend going into detail on the issues that had been identified for discussion at the meeting, but saw it as an initial opportunity to discuss the approach to relations between the Welsh Government and local government going forward. The Minister’s positive comments and the manifesto commitment to change the relationship with local government were, therefore, welcomed.

4. Local Government Reform

4.1 The Minister had taken the opportunity when in North Wales the previous week to meet three of the authorities there and hoped to meet over half before the WLGA’s annual conference.

4.2 The key message he wanted to get across about the reform programme was that the problems had not gone away and some authorities would struggle to withstand austerity over the coming 5 years. The reality of the Assembly election

results was that a change in approach was necessary. The Welsh Government had previously led the way in putting forward specific proposals for restructuring local government, but accepted it would not get agreement to those proposals in the Assembly. The Minister intended to look at other options. Local government leadership had a clear role to play in that and he was open to consider any ideas they wished to put forward over the coming months.

4.3 Cllr Wellington said there was consensus amongst local authority leaders that change was necessary. However, local government was already working through a range of collaborative arrangements which they considered could be built upon going forward.

4.4 Cllr Morgan said previous proposals had focused too much on structural change. The initial approach should be to determine the desired service outcomes for citizens, with governance arrangements being shaped subsequently to deliver those. He cited City Deal as an example of an approach which was intended to improve services and outcomes on a regional basis, with the governance arrangements being designed to deliver that. He noted that this was being undertaken without legislation.

4.5 Chris Llewelyn pointed to the education consortia which had been established to make quick improvements in service quality, recognising that wider local government reform might lead to changes further down the line.

4.6 Steve Thomas said within the context of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, local authority leaders were exploring the operation of other regional collaborative arrangements and were going to Manchester to look at the delivery of health and social care there.

4.7 Whilst maintaining an open mind on the way forward at this point, the Minister said there were two precursors to regional collaboration:

- i. Greater willingness by all parties to commit to a set number of regional groupings across services; and
- ii. Clarity on accountability, e.g. how would the citizen hold a combined authority to account?

4.8 Steve Thomas mentioned work being undertaken by the WLGA to map services being undertaken on a regional / national basis. Leaders had agreed future such arrangements would include elected member involvement.

4.9 The Minister said he was attracted to the National Adoption Service approach, whereby the local authority was the point of contact for service-users.

4.10 In closing this part of the discussion, the Minister said that he understood the concerns about timing and clarity. However, he wanted to take time over the summer to take the views of local government and other stakeholders, before making a statement in the autumn on the way forward. He said there was a stark choice between agreeing a planned way forward, or change would happen in an unplanned way as services fail.

4.11 Whilst much of the public debate had been about structures, the Minister reiterated that the majority of the Draft Bill was about wider reforms aimed at improving governance and the quality of services. Steve Thomas said there were a number of aspects of the Draft Bill that local authority leaders wished to see progressed, including the general power of competence, the improvement regime reforms and certain aspects relating to members.

4.12 The Minister said he was keen on peer review, but it needed to incorporate an appropriate degree of robust challenge. He would also be talking to officials over the coming weeks about how a more balanced approach to the rights and obligations of citizens within the context of co-production models could be reflected in the language used in the Bill.

4.13 Steve Thomas said that in relation to alternative delivery models local government was making progress with community trusts, but was encountering a hard stance from the Unions which saw them as outsourcing of services. The Minister said he was interested in models which moved delivery closer to citizens, and wished to understand more about the impact where services had transferred to other providers.

4.14 Cllr Morgan asked about the current position on electoral arrangements reviews by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. Directions could not be given until the policy position was clear and the Minister would try to provide early clarity before the autumn if possible.

4.15 The Minister accepted an invitation from Cllr Wellington to attend the WLGA's Annual General Meeting on 1 July. Steve Thomas indicated that the WLGA conference was being rearranged for September.

5. Finance

5.1 Steve Thomas said that the Finance Sub Group was due to meet on 7 July. He flagged up a number of issues which the WLGA wanted to discuss in more detail at that meeting, ie:

- i. The implications of the 'Living Wage';
- ii. Potential cost of the apprenticeship levy; and
- iii. The non-domestic rates proposals in the party election manifestos.

5.2 On non-domestic rates, Cllr Morgan pointed to the implications of any change to rates retention for funding arrangements under City Deal. He also pointed to concerns about the operation of the apprenticeship levy and asked whether authorities would be able to offset contributions against local programmes. On the latter, Debra Carter clarified that the levy was a UK Government proposal. Discussions were ongoing, but the basic principle was that 0.5% of the wage bill would be collected by HMRC, with the debate focusing on the need for a mechanism to distribute revenue back to the devolved administrations to decide how it would be used.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Minister thanked the WLGA for attending the meeting and looked forward to further discussions in future.

**Local Government Democracy Division
3 June 2016**

Note of WLGA Council Meeting. CSFLG attended

Note of WLGA Council Meeting

1 July 2016

City Hall, Cardiff

Present: Professor Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government

Lisa James, Local Government Democracy, Welsh Government

Alex Rawlin, Special Advisor, Welsh Government

Presiding Officer WLGA, Councillor Mel Nott (Bridgend County Borough Council)

WLGA Council Members

WLGA Officers

The Presiding Officer welcomed the Cabinet Secretary and congratulated him on his appointment.

The Cabinet Secretary outlined his view that good local government is fundamental to people's day to day lives. He would like to develop a conversation in Wales where there is a celebration of the role local government plays and its successes. It must be recognised that there are difficulties but we should not fall into the trap of these being treated as the 'norm'. They should be treated as the exception not the rule. The Cabinet Secretary would like to have a positive, high trust, mature relationship with local government, this does not mean that there will always be agreement about everything, there must be 'grit', but the relationship must be about shared agendas and a spirit of mutual respect. It must be about shaping consensus, meeting and sharing ideas and finding common ground.

The Cabinet Secretary set out the wide range of issues contained in the draft Local Government Bill. It is important not to lose sight of the consensus around many of these such as the general power of competence, the new improvement regime and the strengthening of the community representation role of local councillors.

He stated that he is open minded on structures and it will be important to form a consensus on this if a bill is to come forward to deliver the other reforms in the draft bill which local government supports. He said there would not be a Bill in the first year of the legislative programme but that this would give time for a way forward on structures to be developed. He would like to be in a position to introduce a bill in the second year of the programme if a consensus can be reached. He would like to outline the broad parameters of a way forward in September and use the autumn to discuss and develop the details of the approach. There would only be one opportunity for local government legislation in this Assembly term and it would be important to get it right. This would be a key part of building a new relationship between Welsh Government and local government, moving to a position

where there is mutual respect for Welsh Government's role to set outcomes but giving local government the latitude to determine locally how things were to be delivered.

On a slower time frame, the Cabinet Secretary said he would like to discuss the relationship between local government and the people it serves. He would like a relationship which recognises people's strengths and supports them to be independent; the ultimate aim should be to reach a point where no on-going intervention is needed. He noted that there is lots of good work across Wales and he is keen for this to be systemised and learnt from.

The Cabinet Secretary then moved on to the financial outlook. He said there were significant new challenges arising from the EU referendum. The Welsh Government would be doing all it could to engage with the Commission and Whitehall whilst looking to maximise the benefits from the current funding round.

The announcement of a budget in the autumn was also significant and was likely to result in further cuts to public services funding. It was important that Welsh Government and local government work together to tackle these challenges.

The Cabinet Secretary was asked on his views on the way forward with health and social care integration. He explained that it was not the position of the Welsh Government that structural change was needed to address this. Social services are seen as a core local government service but more was needed to ensure good integration of services. He felt there were some good examples emerging from the Integrated Care Fund which should be rolled out. It was also important for Welsh Government and local government to have a meaningful and effective dialogue and this should be built systematically into their relationship.

A further question related to the points in the Williams Commission Report on complexity across the public services and the large numbers of partnerships and boards which exist across Wales. The Cabinet Secretary said he was in favour of tackling this but it must be recognised this would need compromise from both Welsh Government and local government. He suggested that in principle every one is in favour of fewer partnerships and less complexity until it is suggested that it is their arrangements which need to be changed and then the argument is for flexibility. He suggested there needs to be a stronger collective determination to tackle this issue. In response to a suggestion that there should be a £20m transformation and capacity fund he stated that this was a question of priorities and did this 'trump' other things which were also priorities.

The Cabinet Secretary was asked what are the arrangements in Wales for dealing with EU exit and how can local government feed in. The Cabinet Secretary thanked the WLGA for the paper already provided as part of the papers for today's meeting and said he would welcome further papers and discussions. He said the First Minister had already written to the Prime Minister and there were also on-going discussions with the other devolved administrations. The FM is looking to strengthen Wales' presence in Brussels and is expecting to be involved in discussions at Whitehall.

The Cabinet Secretary was asked a question about the possibility of two or three year settlements for local government, some direction for local government and extending the debate to be about the future of public services. He replied that he understood the importance of a longer financial planning horizon but in the current circumstances that would be very challenging as the public finances are so

fluid. He suggested local authorities should work to create a shared sense of direction amongst themselves and with Welsh Government. This is about local government setting out the it could make to improving Wales and outcomes for people. It was about shared leadership and ownership of tackling problems, not passing them on to the next 'level'.

It was suggested that the planned revaluation of local authority pension funds should be postponed in light of recent events. Some discussions had been held with the Secretary of State for Wales on this issue and the Cabinet Secretary was asked for a view. He replied that wherever possible we should look to avoid self inflicted consequences of the referendum vote and would be prepared to support the suggestion.

The recent increase in incidents of racial abuse across the country following the EU referendum was noted with concern. The Cabinet Secretary said it was important everyone made it absolutely clear that this behaviour would not be tolerated. He said those in public office such as councillors and AMs have a particular duty to provide support and community leadership to people feeling vulnerable at this time.

The Cabinet Secretary was asked his view on recent events in England where the prioritisation of funding for social care had been called for. He suggested that England was in a very different position because of the severe reductions in local authority funding in recent years. The picture was very different in Wales. DToCs are at a low level and the ICF and the 2014 Act provide a firm foundation for taking social care forward in Wales.

The Presiding Officer thanked the Cabinet Secretary for his contribution.

Local Government Democracy Division

July 2016

Note of CSLF meeting with WLGA executive re white paper consultation. – resilient and renewed.

**Note of meeting with WLGA Executive
21 December 2016
Ty Hywel**

Present:

Professor Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government
Alex Rawlin, Special Advisor
Councillor Bob Wellington, Leader, WLGA
Councillor Aaron Shotton, Deputy Leader, WLGA
Councillor Andrew Morgan, Deputy Presiding Officer, WLGA
Councillor Brendon Toomey, Chair of the Labour Group, WLGA
Ian McGill, Political Assistant to the WLGA, Labour Group
Lisa James, Local Government Democracy Division, Welsh Government

Actions

- The WLGA Executive to send in examples of existing shared and joint local authority services.
- The WLGA Executive to consider whether an option should be provided in any future legislation for the creation of combined authorities.
- Leaders to support and encourage local government officers to share knowledge of existing joint governance and funding arrangements with Welsh Government officials.

Meeting Note

The Cabinet Secretary set out the timeline for the consultation on the White Paper, explaining it would be issued at the end of January with the consultation period closing as the local authority pre-election period commenced. He would be reflecting on the responses during the election period but would make no further announcements until the new Council leaderships are in place. He would then, subject to agreement on the proposals, pursue a Bill in the second year of the legislative programme.

He explained that following his statement on 4th October he was now undertaking a further round of engagement with local government and other stakeholders. One issue had come to light which was different to his statement relating to the LHB footprint. There remained a consensus that the economic development footprint should be mandated but a call was now emerging for there to be greater flexibility around the second footprint within it. This would allow for existing collaborations such as education consortia, the Gwent SRS service and the Vale regulatory services to be consolidated and built upon. It was agreed the Executive would provide further examples of existing shared and joint services.

The WLGA Executive welcomed this approach and felt it offered the best compromise between simplicity and flexibility on the one hand and additional complexity on the other. It was agreed that actions would be needed to guard against the unnecessary build up of complexity if this approach was adopted.

The WLGA Executive agreed that an enhanced joint committee with a 'rule book' would be the most appropriate governance vehicle as this put elected members at the heart of decision making. It was felt pooled budgeting would be the most appropriate funding approach to accompany the joint committee. The Executive agreed that local authority officers should be supported and encouraged by Leaders to share their knowledge of existing joint governance and finance arrangements with Welsh Government officials.

The option of providing for the creation of combined authorities in the future was considered and the Executive agreed to give this further thought and respond to the Cabinet Secretary on this matter as part of the submission on regional arrangements which is being prepared.

The chairing of PSBs was raised as some members of the Executive felt this should be undertaken by the local authority leader as so as to ensure democratic accountability. The Cabinet Secretary noted this perspective but outlined how several PSBs had successfully adopted alternative chairing arrangements such as independent chairs and the LHB chairing and that on this basis he would not wish to remove this option.

Finally the transparency and accountability of the regional arrangements were discussed. It was agreed that ward councillors would have an important role to play going forward. They will guide citizens through the new arrangements and hold those making decisions regionally to account.

Local Government Democracy Division January 2017

Note of CSFLG & WLGA Leader meeting 2 June 2017

NOTE OF A MEETING WITH THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR FINANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COUNCILLOR DEBBIE WILCOX, LEADER ELECT OF THE WLGA: 22ND JUNE 2017

Attendees:

Mark Drakeford, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government
Councillor Debbie Wilcox, Leader Elect of the WLGA
Steve Thomas, Chief Executive, WLGA
Reg Kilpatrick, Director for Local Government, Welsh Government

The Cabinet Secretary welcomed Cllr Wilcox and congratulated her on her new position. He explained that the relationship between the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) was high on his agenda and critical to making sure that the delivery of public services in Wales was as good as it could possibly be.

Cllr Wilcox replied that she was looking forward to a much closer relationship with the Welsh Government under her leadership, with a regular dialogue which would be based on frankness and honesty. She had a strong team of portfolio leaders behind her who had a new level of ambition to engage and to lead local government in Wales. She, and they, saw the primacy of local government and were committed to establishing a political leadership which would be prepared to take difficult decisions.

The Cabinet Secretary welcomed Cllr Wilcox's comments and said that he was prioritising speaking to the new Council Leaders and had already started a series of meetings and telephone calls. He would continue those in the run-up to the summer break.

Cllr Wilcox raised the likely impact of Brexit on local government and Wales more generally. She stressed it would be important for there to be a consistent and consensus view around its impact on Wales. She wanted local government to be at the forefront of the discussions and dealing with the implications of Brexit, especially those arising from the potential for changes in regional policy. The Cabinet Secretary explained he had been having conversations with Whitehall which was getting into gear on Brexit and preparing for the forthcoming Great Repeal Bill.

The Cabinet Secretary talked about the local government reform and the proposals in the recent White Paper. His approach was very much based on providing local government with the tools and the structure to take its own decisions about issues and how it ran rather than Welsh Government setting out a number of highly prescriptive solutions.

Nonetheless, he was clear that the principles of systematic and mandatory were central to his approach to regional services and would be applied – once Local Government had agreed a way forward.

The Cabinet Secretary explained he hoped to publish a consultation paper on electoral reform in July for a 12-week consultation. Alongside providing the opportunity for Councils to change the method of their election, there are some other very exciting proposals including reducing the voting age to 16, enabling staff who work for Councils to stand for those Councils and a number of other measures to open up the democratic process and make it far more modern and responsive to people's needs. He understood not all proposals would be popular but having the debate and giving a choice was essential.

The Cabinet Secretary reported on a conversation he had recently had with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and confirmed that £3.5 billion in other cuts had yet to be made by the UK Government. The financial outlook was therefore still highly uncertain and no more positive than before the General Election. Nonetheless, public services, including local government, were the Welsh Government's priority and if additional funding was to become available then the Cabinet Secretary and his colleagues would be keen to support local government.

Cllr Wilcox acknowledged the challenging financial situation and underlined the range of budgetary pressures and demand issues which local government continued to deal with. She also raised the issue of joint budgets in social services and that local government was finding it difficult to put in place meaningful arrangements by the April 2018 deadline.

Cllr Wilcox thanked the Cabinet Secretary for the opportunity to have this open discussion and said that she looked forward to a productive working relationship between them.

R KILPATRICK

14.07.17

Emails between WG and WLGA re Finance Sub Group and legislation

From: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 16.29
To: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Subject: RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

Fine. I will have a word with private office to alert them to the possibility of the meeting. Who should they liaise with at your end?

From: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 13.28
To: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Subject: RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

No worries – again the only issue here is Hugh Evans who again would probably video conference in?

From: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 13.24
To: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Subject: RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

Sorry, I meant the four Group Leaders - Wilcox, Dole, Evans and Fox.

From: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 13.22
To: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Subject: RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

Just to clarify he means the labour leaders? I am sure we can get Debbie, Andrew and Rob together by the 6th Aaron possibly on the video conference? Perhaps we should start with his salary and then work around that.

From: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 13.19
To: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Subject RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

Thanks. Spoke with the Cabinet Secretary this morning who agreed that the FSG is probably not the most effective group for these purposes. However, he thought the WLGA Leaders group would be a good solution and would like to have the first meeting this month (or certainly by 6 February) – is there a meeting already scheduled that we could adopt?

From: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
Sent: 16/01/18 07.47

To: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
 Subject: RE: FSG and Local Government legislation

Very much welcome the Cabinet Secretary's approach although I wonder whether the finance subgroup is right mechanism particularly if we want to meet more frequently during the construction of the legislation? A couple of alternatives could be meeting the senior office holders of the WLGA who are Councillor Wilcox as Leader, our two deputies Councillor Stewart and Councillor Shotton and the Presiding officer Councillor Andrew Morgan?

Alternatively, if the Cabinet secretary required a more cross-party approach another mechanism is our 4 group leaders. These are Councillor Wilcox (Labour), Councillor Emlyn dole (Plaid), councillor Hugh Evans (Ind) and Councillor Peter Fox (conservative). Both groupings would be able to report to the wider leadership of councils through WLGA. these would probably also give a little bit more flexibility in terms of meeting schedules etc.

From: WG (*names and email addresses redacted*)
 Sent: 15/01/18 17.03
 To: WLGA (*names and email addresses redacted*)
 Subject FSG and Local Government legislation

The Cabinet Secretary is keen to establish a joint Government/Local government group to consider the development of our local government reform legislation. He mentioned it when meeting the Leader of the Vale last week and I understand has spoken to Cllr Wilcox as well. This will be a key set of meetings that will help shape the final Local Government Bill which we hope to introduce this year. It follows that the membership brings the right individual and collective interest, breadth of experience and ability to constructively evaluate a set of proposals.

The Cabinet Secretary has suggested that we expand the Finance Sub Group next week to include Legislation and add to the agenda so that it includes an item on the provisions of the elections element of the Local Government Bill; provisions relating to the local government element; and something on structures and the future.

The FSG makes an important contribution to the finance agenda and has some key leaders around the table so grateful for your thoughts on whether this would be an effective forum; or on potential alternatives.

Happy to discuss.

Note of CSLGPS Local Government reform reference group meeting 1 February 2018.

Note of the First Meeting of the Local Government Reform Reference Group on Thursday 1 February 2018 at the Welsh Government, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay

Present

Welsh Government

Alun Davies, AM, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services
 David Costa, Special Adviser
 Claire Bennett, Local Government Department
 Lisa James, Local Government Department
 Stephen Phipps, Local Government Department

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

Cllr Debbie Wilcox, WLGA Leader and Labour Group Leader
 Cllr Emlyn Dole, Plaid Cymru Group Leader
 Cllr Hugh Evans, Independent Group Leader (via video link)
 Cllr Peter Fox, Conservative Group Leader
 Steve Thomas, Chief Executive
 Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy (Improvement and Governance)

Item 1 – Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Cabinet Secretary thanked the local government representatives for attending the meeting.

1.2 The Cabinet Secretary said that since his early conversations with leaders and attendance at the WLGA seminar following his appointment in the autumn, he had been reflecting on how local government might be empowered and strengthened. His intention was to work with local government, including through this Group, in developing shared proposals to deliver reform. He anticipated the Group would meet monthly until June / July. To support discussion within the Group, papers would be shared on a confidential basis and members were asked to respect that confidentiality. **[Action: Welsh Government]**

1.3 The Cabinet Secretary believed there had been insufficient progress over the decade or so since Beecham had reported. The imperative now was to move forward quickly to ensure local authorities were empowered and strengthened and thus better able to withstand the continuing financial pressures faced by public services.

1.4 He wanted to develop a mature relationship, respecting the respective mandates of the Welsh Government and local government. He did not consider it appropriate for the Welsh Government to involve itself in matters for which local authorities were rightly responsible and accountable to their electorates. Following Cllr Wilcox's call for greater freedom and flexibilities in November, the Cabinet Secretary had written to local authority leaders inviting their suggestions for new powers and tools to support the creation of sustainable local government. He proposed to bring a paper on the response to that letter to the Group for consideration. **[Action: Welsh Government]**

1.5 On behalf of the WLGA, and with the support of the other attendees, Cllr Wilcox welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's intended approach to engagement and dialogue. She acknowledged that the Cabinet Secretary and local government were unlikely to agree on everything, but their aim would be to forge an acceptable way forward, drawing on local government's experience of what was likely to work in practice.

1.6 Cllr Evans welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's approach to engagement on reform and hoped this could be replicated in respect of other pressing matters, including the implications of more constrained funding for local authorities' financial planning.

1.7 The Cabinet Secretary recognised the difficult financial position faced by local authorities. He would be pressing their case with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to address both the short and long term financial challenges. He was content for the matter to be placed on the agenda for discussion at the Finance Sub Group.

[Action: Welsh Government]

1.8 The Cabinet Secretary said he was reviewing the proposals for a Local Government Bill developed by his predecessors. Work on the development of mandated and systematic regional working by local authorities had been paused, whilst he went through that process. Alternative options were being developed for consideration with his Cabinet colleagues with the intention of moving forward with minimal delay. Subject to the outcome of consultation on any changes of policy, introduction of the proposed Bill into the National Assembly would be postponed from the summer to the autumn of this year.

Item 2 – Local Government Electoral Reform (Paper (1)1)

2.1 The Cabinet Secretary said that consultation on proposals for electoral reform had been initiated by his predecessor last year. Timing pressures had precluded discussion with the Group prior to his statement on the way forward earlier that week.

2.2 The Cabinet Secretary said he believed there should be a common electoral system for local and National Assembly elections. He had raised this with the Presiding Officer and would continue to promote this when the Assembly considered its electoral reform proposals.

2.3 The Cabinet Secretary gave a brief outline of the proposal set out in his recent statement. He noted that whilst votes for 16 and 17 year olds had made the media headlines, the franchise would also be extended to include all resident foreign nationals and all but the most serious offenders amongst Welsh prisoners. Proposed powers would enable the piloting of innovative voting methods, such as electronic voting and counting. He was keen to pursue an all-Wales register of voters. He had not formulated a view on which body should maintain it, but it should be a public body in Wales, not the Welsh Government.

2.4 The Cabinet Secretary said he intended to stop the practice of councillors serving as Assembly Members. Cllr Fox queried whether the position of dual-hatted county / community councillors was also being considered. Lisa James advised that whilst this had been considered at an earlier stage, the issue was being held in abeyance pending the outcome of the independent review of the community council sector. The Cabinet Secretary added that he had asked the review panel to report earlier than previously planned, so there was an opportunity to consider the possibility of including provision in the proposed Bill.

2.5 The Cabinet Secretary confirmed his intention to provide a power for local authorities to adopt the Single Transferable Vote election system, subject a two-thirds majority of members being in favour.

2.6 Consideration was still being given to the question of employees being able to become a member of their authority. Whilst the Cabinet Secretary was not generally in favour, he was aware of certain employment arrangements – such as local authority funded third party posts - where concerns about conflicts of interest may not exist. In other cases, the rules could be changed so that the requirement to resign a post would only take effect if a candidate was elected.

2.7 Cllrs Dole pointed to a possible inconsistency in allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote, whilst not allowing them to stand for election. It was accepted in discussion that arguments could be made either way. Cllr Wilcox expressed the view that the obligations associated with being a councillor could adversely impact a young person's ability to attend to their education or training. The Cabinet Secretary said he held no strong view and was content to discuss the issue further.

Item 3 – Proposed Local Government (Wales) Bill (Paper (1)2)

3.1 The Cabinet Secretary said that in reviewing the Welsh Government's proposed approach to reform, his dual aim was to avoid unnecessary complexity and micro management of local authorities. The paper identified a number of proposals which, following consultation, it was proposed to drop. The list was not definitive and the Cabinet Secretary invited further suggestions from the Group.

3.2 Steve Thomas said that Annex 1 to the paper included 14 new duties on local government, the need for which was questionable. One of the more controversial aspects was the requirement to publish member contact details, given the potential for councillors to be subjected to personal threats and abuse. Lisa James clarified that the provision was intended to ensure all members were contactable by their constituents and the publication of an 'official' (not private) correspondence address and email would be sufficient to comply with the proposed legislation.

3.3 The Cabinet Secretary said that beyond the current reform proposals, he was also considering with his Cabinet colleagues opportunities for removing complexity in areas like land-use planning where there was a combination of requirements under the Environment Act and planning legislation where there might be scope to simplify..

3.4 Whilst accepting there were no proposals currently from local government to establish combined authorities, Cllr Fox suggested it might be helpful to retain the proposal to seek a power for the Welsh Ministers to establish them, if appropriate, in future. The Cabinet Secretary said that combined authorities had been proposed as an extension to the proposals for regional working. He was concerned they would be remote from local residents and thus lack democratic accountability. Also, he would not want, and it was not appropriate, to bring forward legislation which was unlikely to be used.

3.5 Referring to the proposals on public participation, Cllr Evans said there was a range of existing good practice across Wales. He expressed concern that any proposals for public participation at meetings should not create an imbalance with the role of members who were elected to represent their communities.

3.6 The Cabinet Secretary invited the local government representatives to set out a shared view on the proposals in the paper for further consideration. He also invited suggestions for the agenda for the next meeting. **[Action: WLGA]**

4. Other Business

4.1 Steve Thomas raised the issue of the European Charter on Local Self-Government and asked whether the Welsh Government would consider becoming a signatory to the Charter. The Cabinet Secretary invited the WLGA to write to him with the proposal. **[Action: WLGA]**

Local Government Department Welsh Government

February 2018

Summary of Actions

1.2	Monthly meetings of the Group to be scheduled	Welsh Government
1.4	Group to receive a paper on the response to the Cabinet Secretary's letter to leaders on powers and flexibilities.	Welsh Government
1.7	Finance Sub Group to discuss the challenges facing local authorities' financial planning.	Welsh Government
3.6	WLGA representatives to submit a shared view on the proposals for legislation in Paper 1.	WLGA
	WLGA to suggest agenda items for the next meeting of the Group.	WLGA
4.1	WLGA to write to the Cabinet Secretary about becoming a signatory to the European Charter on Local Self-Government.	WLGA