

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT! WELSH COUNCIL COLLABORATION



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Mark Drakeford was appointed Welsh Assembly Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government in May 2016, from his role as Minister for Health and Social Services. His brief includes fostering effective collaborative working between local government.

But maybe, it's who he replaced that is more significant. His predecessor, Public Services Minister, Leighton Andrews, was adamant that the 22 Welsh councils should be reduced to either eight, or nine.

Promoting his draft Local Government Bill of November 2015, Mr Andrews stated that: "There is a real opportunity here for local government to make significant savings for taxpayers and if councils work together, plan well and involve their staff, there is the opportunity for savings even greater than the £650m we have identified... This means more money for frontline public services, more money to invest in communities and more money to support local economic prosperity."

Unfortunately for Mr Andrews, his local electorate replaced him with Plaid Cymru leader, Leanne Wood in May 2016.

New Minister Mark Drakeford, has proposed all 22 councils remain with an 'enhanced level of mandatory and systematic collaborative working'.

The journey of Welsh local government collaboration

An initial focus point for shared services in Wales was the publication of "Making The Connections" in October 2004, which "heralded a distinctive approach to public services based on collaboration rather than competition".

¹ Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government (2004) *Making The Connections: Delivering Better Services For Wales*.



*Welsh Assembly Minister
Mark Drakeford is leading
on collaborative working
between Welsh local
authorities*

Building on the 2004 report, Sir Jeremy Beecham's 2006 review of local service delivery sparked the Welsh government into "...using existing and new legislative powers to strengthen the duties on public bodies to co-operate, removing barriers to collaboration...²".

The integration of relationships was also developed in the *Government of Wales Act (2006)* which established *Cyngor Partneriaeth Cymru* - the Partnership Council for Wales³. This fostered relationships between both central and local authorities⁴ and an environment for collaborative working.

Politicians 'walking the walk'...

*One Wales*⁵ (2007) was the collaboration exercise by politicians to develop coalition leadership in the Welsh Assembly. Within the agenda, of almost 200 commitments, was an ambition to build on the *Beecham Report* and pool the budgets of local service boards⁶.

² Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *Making the Connections - Delivering Beyond Boundaries*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Unit

³ Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *Government of Wales Act 2006*. Section 72 (1)

⁴ For the purposes of this section of the bill, local authorities in Wales include county, borough and community councils, national parks, police, fire & rescue and others 'specified for the purposes' by Welsh ministers.

⁵ Labour Party Wales and Plaid Cymru (2007) *One Wales: A progressive agenda for the government of Wales*. Cardiff: Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government

⁶ public services boards in Wales are similar to Local Strategic Partnerships in England.

There would be no change to the existing number of local authorities, but the Welsh Government would support voluntary mergers. The focus for reforming local government at the principal level hinges around regional collaboration.

Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru published a review of collaboration and shared service activities across the country in their 2008 paper *Working Together*¹.

A paper remembered for its opening line, “Sex, suggested Philip Larkin with his usual sarcasm, was discovered in 1963.” It evidenced, across sixteen service deliver areas, a wide number of existing collaborations covering:

- shared information
- joint regional planning
- shared procurement
- joint service delivery

The following year, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru delivered their austerity paper, *Better Outcomes For Tougher Times*². It stated: “We are committed to meeting the needs of citizens through collaboration, rather than competition.”, “...with leaders and managers being collaborative”, “...and collaborative service delivery and improvement.”

Enshrining collaboration in law...

A “duty to collaborate” was introduced in the *Local Government (Wales) Measures 2009*.

Under section 9, collaboration powers were given to improvement authorities: *This section confers on Welsh improvement authorities’ broad powers to enable them to collaborate with each other and with other bodies, for the purpose of discharging or facilitating the discharge of the duties under section 2(1), 3(2) and 8(7).*

In the meantime, the *Simpson Report* was published³ which set out the ‘Big Offer’ drawing together the potential for collaboration on social services, education, mineral planning services, procurement, regulatory services and emergency planning.

This would be achieved through, “A *Compact detailing the development of collaborative and national services delivery...*”, between the Assembly Government and the WLGA which was jointly signed on 5 December 2011.

¹ WLGA (2008) *Working together: Case Studies in Welsh Local Government*. Cardiff: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru/Welsh Local Government Association

² Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government (2009) *Better Outcomes For Tougher Times: The Next Phase Of Public Service Improvement*. Cardiff: Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government

³ Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government (2011) *Local, Regional National, What Services Are Delivered Where?* Cardiff: “Local, Regional National, What Services Are Delivered Where?”

In July 2014, Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government & Government Business added a white paper on reforming local government. However, ten years on from the initial thinking, little tangible reform was happening.

Where are we now?

Fast forward to January 2015 and Minister Leyton Andrews published an *Explanatory Memorandum* to the Local Government Bill Wales⁴. Its opening lines are: *The provisions of the Local Government (Wales) Bill are intended to allow for certain preparatory work to enable a programme of local government mergers and reform and includes provisions to facilitate the voluntary early merger of two or more Principal Local Authorities by April 2018.*

Minister Andrews also requested that the 22 local authorities develop a map of their ambition for merger. Then in May 2016 he lost his Welsh Assembly seat and Minister Drakeford took over the collaboration reigns.

The Society of Local Council Clerks⁵ captures the next stage succinctly: *In an update to Assembly Members at the Senedd on 4 October 2016, Mr Drakeford outlined proposals on how local authorities would work together to deliver key services. There would be no change to the existing number of local authorities, but the Welsh Government would support voluntary mergers. The focus for reforming local government at the principal level hinges around regional collaboration.*

Repeating the known mistakes...

I hope local government colleagues in Wales will use the SSA toolkits, project library and this magazine to draw on the case studies of successes, mistakes and heart-aches English councils have experienced over the last few years in developing their approaches to collaborative working.

It will accelerate the Welsh collaboration journey and probably assure more successes than failures.

⁴ *Explanatory Memorandum to the Local Government Bill Wales (26-01-2015) Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government.*

⁵ <http://www.slcc.co.uk/news-item/wales-local-government-reform/1296/>