Overview

This briefing gives an overview of recent developments in policy which are of particular relevance to Welsh local government. The primary focus is on the output of the Welsh Assembly Government and National Assembly for Wales but the work of other bodies, such as the Wales Audit Office, is also incorporated.

It is divided into sections in line with the Assembly Government's Ministerial responsibilities. Access is provided to online sources wherever possible.

A development of particular interest includes:

- details of the new Assembly Committee scrutiny inquiries which address a number of challenging, and controversial issues, including carbon reduction, private finance and voluntary sector funding.

Briefing in full

CABINET

Shortly before the Assembly’s summer recess, Ministerial appointments to the new coalition cabinet were finalised with a substantial reallocation of responsibilities and a policy ‘blueprint’, One Wales, agreed for the coming four years (LGiU briefing attached).

Counsel General Carwyn Jones is encouraging a debate amongst the legal community on the sustainability of a single ‘England and Wales’ jurisdiction and the viability of a separate criminal justice system for Wales in the context of any further devolution of law-making powers.

Wales in Figures 2007 is now available providing a statistical overview of the nation’s population, health, employment, housing, education, transport, crime and local government finances.

CHILDREN, EDUCATION, LIFE-LONG LEARNING and SKILLS

News

Estyn, the schools’ inspectorate, has published its autumn newsletter providing information on its approach to inspection and role in relation to such issues as healthy living initiatives, raising standards and tackling workload, and sustainable development and global...
citizenship.

*Shared Planning for Better Outcomes* provides statutory guidance under the *Children Act 2004* for local authorities and their partners setting out the scope, underlying principles, development considerations and workforce planning needs of Children and Young People’s Plans.

The Assembly Government’s input to the *School Teachers’ Review Body* has been published and sets out its priorities and key programmes for education in the coming year.

A major recruitment drive has been launched to ensure sufficiently skilled workers in the childcare, play and early years sector which will see significant expansion with the introduction of such initiatives as the Flying Start programme and new Foundation Phase.

**Consultation**

An interim report from the *National Behaviour & Attendance Review* describes the current situation in Wales and seeks to prompt wider and further debate from which to build practical recommendations.

**ECONOMY and TRANSPORT**

**News**

The *2007-13 Structural Fund programmes* for West Wales and the Valleys have been formally adopted by the EU enabling a total additional investment of around £3 billion in the Welsh economy from 2007 to 2013.

*Building Companies, Building Skills* examines the business and skills issues affecting the construction industry and identifying a need for improved procurement and business processes and a modernised image in order to strengthen competitiveness.

*Towards a New Mixed Economy* explores the relationship between social enterprise and the private sector, specifically micro, small and medium enterprises, and recommends possible pathways and working practices to create greater opportunities for integration between sectors.

The *Community Transport Concessionary Fares Initiative* has been allocated a further £900,000 to enable it to continue supporting free community transport for severely disabled people until March 2009.

**ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY and HOUSING**

**News**

Minister, Jane Davidson AM, has detailed her response to the increased incidence of *flooding* and the strategic shift away from the “*traditional defense dominated approach*” to one based on risk management, making more effective use of natural resources, placing greater emphasis upon ‘consequences management’ and engaging the public.

A new *Wales Resilience website* provides the emergency planning community with a central source of information on civil contingencies at pan-Wales, Local Resilience Forum
and individual agency levels in addition to providing information for the Welsh public on what to do during an emergency.

A new Wales Audit Office report, *Delivering the Home Energy Conservation Act in Wales*, finds evidence of improvement in the energy efficiency of Welsh housing but weaknesses in performance and partnership working and sees the need for a new and innovative approach to meet future challenges.

Four young *Climate Change Champions* are being sought to act as ambassadors for a year, attending events across Wales and Europe, discovering and promoting effective means by which people can reduce their carbon footprints.

A number of recently published reports address various aspects of waste management - in terms of both performance and the potential for development:

- the Environment Agency Wales has confirmed that, for the third successive year, every local authority has met Assembly Government limits on the amount of *biodegradable waste* it can send to landfill sites;
- a new *Survey of Funding of Municipal Waste Management Kerbside Collection in Wales* shows wide variation in the financial costs of waste collection, suggests that household-sorted recycled material is more cost effective than ‘co-mingled’ collection and points to the community/not-for-profit recycling sector as providing the most cost effective method of collection;
- the *Fortnightly Collection of Residual Domestic Waste* by the Members Research Service (MRS) draws together evidence from around Wales and the UK;
- the *Environmental Protection and Waste Management Legislative Competence Order*, also from the MRS, details current legislation, policy and stakeholders relevant to the proposed new powers.

Newly published study, *Evaluation of the Processes used to Develop National Planning Policy in Wales*, supports the current Planning Policy Wales framework but suggest that capacity must be increased and communications improved in order to improve engagement with planners and non-planners and ensure alignment with other national strategies.

*Planning: Delivering Affordable Housing* sets out, in report form, a series of seminars held earlier in the year which updated recent national policy developments, outlined the basic ‘building blocks’ needed for delivery and allowed practitioners to debate the key issues and share good practice.

*Accommodation for older people in Wales - the foundations for the future* reports on the current provision, category and distribution of sheltered housing and other specialised accommodation for older people in Wales in order to establish a baseline from which to plan, commission and provide for future needs.

**HEALTH and SOCIAL SERVICES**

**News**

A *Health Living Centre Evidence Summary Paper* seeks to promote the Centres’ services and highlight the impact of their approach on health improvement and regeneration more widely.

Two research bulletins have been published on *Families*.
and Public Health drawing together a broad range of evidence and addressing the family's role in relation to specific health issues.

Consultation

Central to the newly launched Welsh Food Debate, the Quality of Food Strategy, seeks views on improving the national diet and the way in which food is produced, supplied, marketed and consumed. (Deadline: 31 December.)

Consultation is underway on the future direction of the Strategy for Older People. (Deadline: 26 October.)

HERITAGE

The Arts Council of Wales is finalising its draft Arts in Health and Well-being Strategy which has been developed in tandem with and affects health, education, local government, the arts and the Assembly Government.

Gwyl Llyfrgelloedd Cymru 2007/Libraries Festival Wales 2007, a month-long celebration of libraries in Wales is now underway to showcase the increasingly wide range of facilities and services on offer in local libraries and increase their community usage.

RURAL AFFAIRS

News

The Sustainable Farming and Environment: Action Towards 2020 Group has presented its report on longer-term options for supporting the sustainability of farming and the countryside proposing a vision in which farming is connected to the market, delivers environmental goods and services, and contributes to the sustainability of rural communities – including becoming carbon neutral by 2020.

SOCIAL JUSTICE and LOCAL GOVERNMENT

News

Wide consultation has been promised during 2008/9 on Communities Next, the follow-on to Communities First, which is likely to see a new focus on demonstrable outcomes and practical activities following interim programme findings and wider community development experience.

A Child Poverty Targets Expert Group has been appointed to provide evidence based expert advice, challenge and feedback to the Assembly Government on progress towards its cross-cutting targets of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020.

Fuel Poverty in Wales 2004 uses Living in Wales Survey data to analyse fuel poverty levels, evaluate the impact of rising energy prices and project fuel price, income and energy efficiency scenarios to 2010.

A Regeneration Summit is being planned in order to ensure best use of resources and skills to assist Wales’ most disadvantaged communities and forge a new approach for regeneration which emphasises the contribution of private sector partners and investors.
Making Legal Rights a Reality in Wales sets out the next steps for the development of the Community Legal Service in Wales, taking into account the principles outlined in Making the Connections, Delivering Beyond Boundaries and Legal Aid Reform: The Way Ahead.

The summer e-bulletin provides a round-up of news from the Assembly Government's Local Government Division whilst the latest update from the Making the Connections Team on the development of Local Service Boards (LSB) details of LSB development projects including emerging scrutiny models, local structures and thematic partnerships in addition to learning network events and stakeholder group meetings.

Partnership in the context of LSB and community planning developments is the subject of two newly published papers:

- a Partnership Rationalisation Advice Note - Community Strategy Working Group guidance centred around a core principle of 'fitness for purpose;
- Navigating the Partnership Maze: the role of the co-ordinator - an informal report of discussions, ideas and experiences shared in a workshop held earlier in the year.

Papers to a recent meeting of the joint Assembly Government/WLGA Consultative Forum on Finance included assessments of the financial pressures on Welsh Unitary Authorities and the three Fire and Rescue Services in 2008/11, and a Distribution Working Group report on the funding formula and proposed arrangements for the first cycle of three year funding settlements.

The annual Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics has been published from the various financial returns made by local authorities and cover revenue and capital expenditure, non-domestic rates and council tax.

Consultation

Local Vision - Preparing Community Strategies takes account of experience to date and developments in the context of the Making the Connections agenda and Beecham reforms, to set out new guidance and a framework for the delivery of key national and local policy priorities. (Responses by 23 November.)

A Shared Community - relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils highlights the opportunities for joint working to deliver better local outcomes. (Responses by 30 November.)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Scrutiny Inquiries

Prior to the Assembly's summer recess, the new Committees identified subjects for scrutiny. A number have confirmed their terms of reference and are already gathering evidence:

- the Communities and Culture Committee - the funding of voluntary sector organisations in Wales including Assembly Government funding policy, policy directions to other funding bodies, procedures for monitoring outcomes, 'gender budgeting' issues and access/barriers to funding;
- the Equality of Opportunity Committee - the accessibility of polling stations in the context of concerns as to electoral turn-out;
- the Finance Committee - the potential value and scope of Public Private Partnerships,
including the Private Finance Initiative, in Wales, and potential need for policy change and guidance necessary to enabling the public sector to take effective advantage of any such arrangements (a briefing on PPPs and their controversial reputation has already been provided by the Auditor General for Wales);

- the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee - the effectiveness of current workforce planning arrangements in health and social care spanning sectoral and geographical boundaries;
- the Sustainability Committee - carbon reduction in Wales, addressing specific issues spanning residential, transport, industry/public bodies, electricity generation, rural land use and the role of the planning system, in order to assess the Assembly Government’s contribution to UK targets and proposals to meet One Wales targets.

Additional Information

Covers

- Wales

Question

Send Feedback for this briefing

Related links

- Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
- National Assembly for Wales
- Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
- Welsh Assembly Government

Related briefings

- One Wales : a progressive agenda for the government of Wales

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