

# Next steps to strengthen local government announced

In March he published 'Strengthening Local Government – Delivering for People' – our Green Paper consultation aimed at invigorating the debate on the future of local government in Wales.

The Green Paper set out a vision for stronger, more empowered councils which can provide bold, determined and focused local leadership. The Green Paper offered three possible ways of achieving this: voluntary mergers; phased mergers; and comprehensive mergers at the earliest opportunity.

The Cabinet Secretary today published the responses to that consultation, and announced he was establishing a new group to take forward the reform programme which would enable councils to merge voluntarily and which will design new structures and ways of working which will deliver on a new vision for empowered local government.

Alun Davies said:

“For a great deal of time many groups and individuals, including local government leaders, told me that the current system and structures for local government were not sustainable.

“I want to work with local government on a shared vision for the future, and to jointly develop solutions to the challenges they face. Those challenges – about how we maintain progressive public services in the context of long-term austerity – are not going to go away.

“The consultation responses suggested there was an appetite amongst local government to work together to progress voluntary mergers and increase and improve regional working. I therefore intend to introduce the Local Government (Wales) Bill early next year to legislate to enable this to move ahead at the earliest opportunity.

“Therefore I also intend to establish, in partnership with the WLGA, an independent working group to drive a shared approach which will shape the future of local government in Wales.”

Derek Vaughan has agreed to lead this work and will chair this working group. The membership of the working group will be drawn largely from local government and supported by a joint Welsh Government and WLGA secretariat, taking into account the broad range of views and ideas expressed during the consultation.

The group will be asked to identify common ground and to propose a way forward on structures, additional powers, flexibilities and support for change. They would be tasked with creating a plan for change, which would include proposals for voluntary mergers driven by local government and how those mergers might best be supported.

Councillor Debbie Wilcox – Leader of the WLGA stated:

“This approach to taking forward the issue of local government reform is to be welcomed. The WLGA’s position is clear. We are supportive of any councils who desire to merge voluntarily and are committed to working collaboratively to deliver services and this group will consider the potential support that might be available should councils choose to merge.”

“The key point is that sustainability is not achieved by structures but resources and service transformation. The formation of this joint working group is therefore timely to address such issues, and strengthens the democratic base and powers available to councils.”