

Local Government Reform White Paper unveiled by Mark Drakeford

The White Paper, which is out for consultation until the beginning of April, is the result of months of discussions between the Welsh Government, local authorities and others on how to strengthen council services in the face of future challenges. It seeks views on proposals for mandatory regional working to deliver a range of services, address workforce issues, and implement electoral reform including allowing voting at 16. It also calls on members of the public to become active participants in local democracy and in the design and delivery of services.

Amongst the proposals are a mandatory economic development footprint that would also cover certain planning functions and transport.

Councils would have some flexibility over what footprint they use to share responsibilities for other mandated services including education improvement, social services, additional learning needs, public protection and promotion of the Welsh language.

Councillors would make up the membership of new, enhanced joint committees which would oversee these services and make decisions on behalf of their respective councils. Funding arrangements would work on the existing practice of pooled budgets.

The local government workforce is an essential part of these proposals and the Welsh Government will consider, through the Workforce Partnership Council, how to support the transition over to the new arrangements, using statutory guidance where necessary.

Councils would still have the option of merging under the new plans and, where there is local agreement for this, the Welsh Government would work with them to make it a reality.

The White Paper also calls for a different and more equal partnership between people and the public services they use. This would see the development of a new set of principles recognising people as the best experts in how to manage their own lives and putting in place small interventions earlier to resolve issues before they escalate further.

The proposals strike a new balance between clear and unavoidable objectives for local government with flexibility for councils to determine how those shared objectives are best delivered locally. Thus the White Paper proposals provide councils with powers to choose between operating a Cabinet or Committee system and to decide how the activities of councillors are best reported to the electorate. Similarly, views are invited on enabling local authorities to adopt either 'first past the post' or 'single transferable vote' election systems. Following passage of the Wales Bill, further conversation will take place on a wider set of measures to reform electoral

arrangements in Wales to improve both voter registration and turn out at elections.

In line with the new proposals, the Cabinet Secretary also announced that he would be considering how the wider local government finance system could be reformed – ensuring a fairer and more sustainable system to support local authorities in the future.

Setting out the proposals for consultation, the Local Government Secretary said:

“This White Paper is not about change for change’s sake. Our councils are working against a backdrop of extraordinary austerity and some services are facing a great deal of pressure. Local government reform is essential if we’re to make these services stronger and more resilient to cope with the demands of the future.

“The new regional arrangements will bring councils together to work more effectively in the interests of people and their communities.

“We want to see a new relationship between councils and their communities where public services support people to live independent lives and intervene only when necessary and only for as long as is required.

“We also want a new relationship between the Welsh Government and our councils; one that is based on mutual respect for the important, and different, roles we each play.

“Underpinning all of these new arrangements will be effective scrutiny and accountability, where councillors act as the champion, advocate and guide for people who elect them.

“I want to thank local authority leaders and others for their help in forming a serious and credible set of proposals. I look forward to working alongside them further following the local government elections in May.”

The consultation will close on 11th April 2017 and is available to view on the Welsh Government’s website: consultations.gov.wales.

[News story: CMA reviews FirstGroup bus](#)

undertakings in Bristol

From:

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The CMA is to review long-standing undertakings covering FirstGroup and local authority tendered bus services in the Greater Bristol area.

The undertakings followed the 1989 merger of local bus companies Badgerline and Midland Red West which was investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC). The MMC ruled that the merger would remove competition for bus services contracted by the former Avon County Council. Local authorities tender for – and subsidise – unprofitable bus services in order to maintain important transport links for residents.

The merged company was therefore required to sign up to a number of restrictions, including a cap on the amount they could receive from the local authority for running a tendered service – and a requirement to return any excess profit from such services.

These undertakings were amended in 1996 following a subsequent bus merger where both operators became part of FirstGroup.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has now decided to review the undertakings to see if there has been a change in circumstances which justifies their removal or variation.

The CMA is seeking views in particular from local authorities, bus operators and bodies representing bus passengers in the Greater Bristol area. It wants to hear about whether the ability of local authorities to attract competitive bids has changed in the intervening years, whether the growth of other operators has increased competition for tendered bus services and the practical impact of the undertakings.

Responses are invited via the review [case page](#).

The CMA has also today published its [final advice](#) to the secretary of state recommending the removal of remedies in 2 merger cases that followed investigations carried out under the Fair Trading Act.

Today's actions result from the CMA's ongoing programme of work on remedy reviews, initially set out in the CMA's [2015/16 annual plan](#), with the aim of reducing burdens on business by assessing whether past merger and market remedies should be removed or varied when they are no longer necessary. Since its creation in 2014, the CMA has launched 96 remedy reviews, around two-thirds of which have resulted in the removal of the remedy.

For more information see the [remedies review case page](#).

[Press release: Thousands officially pardoned under 'Turing's Law'](#)

From:

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31 January 2017

Thousands of gay and bisexual men convicted of now abolished sexual offences have today been posthumously pardoned.

The historic moment comes after the Policing and Crime Bill today (31 January 2017) received Royal Assent – enshrining, in law, pardons for those convicted of consensual same-sex relationships.

The new law, made possible following government intervention, will also see statutory pardons granted to the living. However, this will only apply in cases where offenders have successfully applied through the Home Office's disregard process to have historic convictions removed.

Justice Minister Sam Gyimah said:

This is a truly momentous day. We can never undo the hurt caused, but we have apologised and taken action to right these wrongs.

I am immensely proud that 'Turing's Law' has become a reality under this government.

'Turing's law' has been a longstanding government commitment, in order to build on the case of World War II hero and Enigma codebreaker Alan Turing.

Turing, who committed suicide in 1954 following his conviction for gross indecency, was posthumously pardoned by Her Majesty the Queen in 2013.

Notes to editors

- The new law was made possible through amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill which received Royal Assent today.
- The amendments were first tabled by Lord Sharkey, Lord Cashman and Lord Lexden with government support.
- As well as posthumously pardoning gay and bisexual men, this law will

also provide pardons for the living in cases where convictions have been deleted through the disregard process. This will ensure that due diligence is carried out and prevent people from claiming to be cleared of offences that are still crimes – including sex with a minor and non-consensual sexual activity.

- For example, under the disregard process, the Home Office has rejected several applications where the activity was non-consensual and others where the other party was under 16-years-old.
- An applicant is only eligible for a 'disregard' if the Secretary of State decides that it appears that the other person involved in the conduct which constituted the offence consented to it and was aged 16 or over at the time, and that the conduct would not now constitute the offence of sexual activity in a public lavatory. In other words, the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the conduct is no longer criminal.
- The new law mirrors both the existing disregard process and the new pardon arrangements in Northern Ireland.
- For more information call the MOJ press office on 020 3334 3503 or 020 3334 3529

[Guidance: Algal blooms: advice for the public and landowners](#)

Algae naturally occur in inland waters, estuaries and the sea. Blooms can form when their numbers become excessive. This guide describes the features of algal blooms, how they can affect you and what you should do if you see one.

[News story: Policing and Crime Bill receives Royal Assent](#)

The government marked a major milestone in its police reform agenda today (Tuesday, 31 January) as the Policing and Crime Bill received Royal Assent.

The [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#) will enhance the democratic accountability of police forces and fire and rescue services, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency services through closer collaboration, and build public confidence in policing.

It will strengthen the protections for persons under investigation by, or who come into contact with, the police; ensure that the police and other law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to prevent, detect and investigate crime; and further safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

This act is another major milestone in our far-reaching police reforms over recent years.

The measures in the act give greater protections for the vulnerable, ensure the police have the necessary powers to keep our communities safe, and overhaul the police complaints and disciplinary systems to increase accountability and improve police integrity.

We have also sought to ensure forces have the right people and skills to cope with the changing nature of crime, improve efficiency and effectiveness of our emergency services through greater collaboration and end the injustice of individuals spending extended periods on pre-charge bail.

I look forward to continuing to work with the police and stakeholders as the measures in the act are implemented.

The act includes provisions which will:

- reform pre-charge bail to put a stop to people remaining on bail for lengthy periods with no independent judicial scrutiny of its continued necessity
- better enable chief officers to make the most efficient and effective use of their workforce by giving them the flexibility to confer a wider range of powers on police staff and volunteers (whilst for the first time specifying a core list of powers that may only be exercised by warranted police officers) and conferring a power on the Home Secretary to specify police ranks in regulations, thereby affording the flexibility to introduce a flatter rank structure
- place a new duty on police, fire and rescue and emergency ambulance services to collaborate where it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness and enable police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to take on responsibility for the governance of fire and rescue services, where a local case is made
- improve the response to those in mental health crisis – including stopping those under 18 from being detained in a police station – and restricting such detention for adults – by reforming police powers under sections 135 and 136 of the [Mental Health Act 1983](#)
- reform the police disciplinary and complaints systems to ensure that the public have confidence in their ability to hold the police to account, and that police officers will uphold the highest standards of integrity

- increase in the maximum sentence for stalking involving fear of violence from five to ten years' imprisonment
- amend the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\)](#), including to ensure that 17-year-olds who are detained in police custody are treated as children for all purposes, and to facilitate the increased use of video link technology
- amend the firearms acts to better protect the public by closing loopholes that can be exploited by criminals and terrorists, and by issuing statutory guidance to ensure that the robust processes we have in place for assessing suitability to hold a firearms certificate are applied consistently
- confer pardons, subject to conditions, for individuals living or deceased who were convicted of now abolished gay sex offences
- improve protection for victims of forced marriage and give them more confidence to come forward by providing them with lifelong anonymity

Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, Brandon Lewis, said:

Police reform is working and crimes traditionally measured by the survey have fallen by a third since 2010 to a record low.

I am delighted this act has now received Royal Assent and, in close collaboration with police and fire stakeholders, we will work hard to implement the act's provisions to further improve the effectiveness and accountability of our emergency services.

Read [more information on the Policing and Crime Act](#).