

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016-2017

COUNCIL

15TH MARCH, 2017

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC
SERVICES**

Agenda Item No. 10

**WELSH GOVERNMENT
CONSULTATION – WHITE
PAPER**

**“REFORMING LOCAL
GOVERNMENT: RESILIENT
AND RENEWED”**

Author: Ms.Karyl May, Head of Democratic Services (Tel.No.01443-424045)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Purpose of this report is to advise Members of the comments of the Working Group in respect of the Welsh Government’s Consultation Document – White Paper “Reforming Local Government : Resilient and Renewed”, which needs to be responded to by the 11th April, 2017.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Take into consideration the comments of Members of the Working Group and that these, in addition to any further views (as appropriate) expressed at the meeting be submitted to the Welsh Government by the 11th April, 2017 .
- 2.2 Members be invited to respond directly to the proposals contained within the White Paper on matters of specific detail thereby reflecting their individual views.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will recall that at the last Council Meeting held on the 1st March, 2017, it was agreed that a Working Group be established to consider and make comment on the Welsh Government’s White Paper “Reforming Local

Government: Resilient and Renewed” which was published on the 31st January, 2017 and responses to be made by the 11th April, 2017.

Below is the link to the consultation document:-

<https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/reforming-local-government-resilient-and-renewed>

3.2 Members of the Working Group comprising County Borough Councillors P. Baccara, D.R.Bevan, (Mrs.)M.E.Davies, G.Hopkins, C.Leyshon, M.J.Powell, L.Walker, M.Weaver, M.Webber and E.Webster met on Monday, 6th March, 2017. The meeting was Chaired by Councillor Webber and to assist Members in making their comments to the 33 questions posed by the Welsh Government, the Director, Legal & Democratic Services, used PowerPoint slides which related to each of the sections of the White Paper.

4. COMMENTARY ON THE WHITE PAPER

4.1 In summary the sections, for comment within the White Paper are:-

- Regional Working
- Voluntary Mergers
- A Framework for Local Leadership
- Leading Localities
- Community Councils
- Elections and Voting

4.2 Before going into detail to each of the sections of the White Paper, it is useful to note that in producing the White Paper, the Welsh Government has responded to many of the concerns and views expressed by Councils during the consultation on the draft Local Government (Wales) Bill, which would be welcomed by Councils and include:-

- The omission of Compulsory Mergers
- The omission of Improvement requests
- The omission of the requirement to have Area Committees of the kind expressed in previous provisions. For those local authorities which might wish to operate or continue to operate Area Committees, views are sought on any changes that are required under the current provisions.
- An elected Member of a principal Council can still be able to serve on a Community Council
- Retain the proposal to enable the appointment of deputy Cabinet Members
- Duty to facilitate discussions with constituents in private, rather than holding surgeries as per the original proposal

- 4.3 However, some areas of concern that were conveyed during the consultation on the “Bill” are to remain within this White Paper and include:-
- Requirement for local authorities to have arrangements for remote attendance at meetings.
 - Broadcasting of meetings will be a statutory requirement
 - Recall of Councillors
- 4.4 At the meeting of the Working Group, Members did not wish to respond to each of the 33 questions, but wished to give a general overview to each of the sections as listed in paragraph 4.1 above and outlined below.
- 4.5 Members broadly welcomed the principles outlined within the White Paper and felt it offered an important opportunity for local authorities to examine how they deliver services to local people, how local people are represented and how decision making is accountable to local residents.
- 4.6 This response will provide the Council’s broad agreement with the rationale contained within the White Paper and in the time given to respond Members preferred to discuss the broad principles by which they approached the questions rather than provide detail in each case.
- 4.7 **Regional Working**
- 4.7.1 Members agreed with the rationale for increased regional working and that local authorities should, in future, aim to work together in all areas unless there were good reasons for this not being practicable.
- 4.7.2 There was a general support for regional working based upon the evidence that has been seen in many service areas in which this Council has begun to work with partners in other local authorities and other public bodies. It was noted that this Council is already engaged in extensive collaboration in this area.
- 4.7.3 Members commented that there would need to be sound arrangements for scrutiny in order to guarantee lines of accountability and to demonstrate transparency to local people in order that they could have confidence in the probity of regional decision making.
- 4.8 **Voluntary Mergers**
- 4.8.1 It was agreed in principle that this Council should continue to support the rationale of voluntary mergers subject to this approach being flexible in order to always deliver best outcomes to the advantage of the citizens of this county borough.

4.9 **A Framework for Local Leadership**

4.9.1 In order to progress the principles set out in the White Paper, Members noted that a full understanding of the difficulties of setting common standards across different authorities would need to be fully appreciated and comprehensively embedded in any future legislation.

4.10 **Leading Localities**

4.10.1 Members welcomed the recognition of the important role elected Members play in leading local communities but did note that there was little emphasis or recognition of the important role played by Councillors in representing and supporting their communities.

4.11 **Community Councils**

4.11.1 Members broadly agreed with the proposals for Community Councils.

4.12 **Voting and Elections**

4.12.1 Members broadly agreed with the proposals for Voting and Elections although it was noted that given the breadth of the areas covered within the White Paper individual responses would be more appropriate given the likely variety of opinion.

5 **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Members hoped that this White Paper represents the beginning of a meaningful dialogue between Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities given the level of detail and the breadth of the issues to be covered.

Members agreed that given the broad remit of the topics covered by the White Paper, and the likelihood for there to be a variety of differing views on certain specific topics, the Council would put in a generic response whilst individual Members should be encouraged to reply on matters of particular detail when submitting their own views.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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**WHITE PAPER – REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: RESILIENT AND
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Background Papers

Report to Council – 1st March, 2017

Presentation to Working Group – 6th March, 2017

Contact: Ms.Karyl May, Head of Democratic Services (Tel.No.01443-424045)

