

Mark Drakeford sets out timetable for local government reform

Local Government Secretary Mark Drakeford has set out a clear timetable for talks on local government reform and called on councils to use the next eighteen months to prepare for the harder choices that lie ahead.

Thursday 03 November 2016

In a speech to the WLGA's Annual Conference, the Local Government Secretary called on councils to keep working with the Welsh Government and keep up the momentum for a new Local Government Bill.

Mark Drakeford said:

"I have listened carefully about the corrosive impact that uncertainty has had on our councils and I'm mindful of the fact that we've not been able to agree a way forward in the past.

"I've now set out a new set of proposals based on an enhanced level of systematic and mandatory regional working. I think we're all aware that there is a real reputational risk to local government if we can't move forwards on these proposals. We simply can't afford to step back. That's why I will be meeting with you all over the coming weeks so we can reach a consensus by the end of the calendar year.

"This will be followed by formal consultation in January, concluding before the local government elections next year. If we get the process right, then we'll be able to move quickly towards a new Local Government Bill that provides Local Government with the means to address the significant challenges of continuing austerity, rising demand for certain services, higher public expectations and Brexit which lie ahead.

"Looking at the bigger picture, we need to remember why reform is so important and the reason is this: local government makes a real difference. Councils provide the services which touch everybody's lives, every day; whether it's educating our children, looking after our elderly, disposing of our waste or lighting our streets. That is why we need to create a new relationship between the public and their local councils.

"If we're going to do this, then we need to see a cultural shift. The reforms I'm proposing may appear challenging but if we look back over the working lives of the people in this room, we've seen enormous cultural shifts in the way our councils work. For example, thirty years ago nobody would have thought Wales would be recycling at the levels we see today. If we succeed in making these regional arrangements work then that not only makes services more sustainable but sets a future precedent for doing things differently and in a much better way.

“In the meantime, I want local authorities to use the next eighteen months to think about the future pressures they are going to face. The aim of last month’s Local Government settlement was to provide some much-needed stability in challenging times; a platform from which to plan for the harder choices that lie ahead. That’s why there was the first cash increase in the local government settlement since 2013-14. Under the funding floor we introduced, no council will have to manage on less than 99.5% of the cash provided to them last year.

“I want to thank local authority leaders for the constructive conversations we’ve had over the past few months. I want to see a new beginning in our relationship with local government and for us to move forward together. In order to do this we must develop trust, a willingness to work together and to compromise, as well as a mutual appreciation of our respective but distinctive roles in improving outcomes for people in Wales.”