

NEATH PORT TALBOT PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD
WELSH GOVERNMENT REPORTS
REPORT OF THE PSB CO-ORDINATOR, NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Purpose

Welsh Government has recently published the following reports which require consideration by Public Services Boards

1. Wales Audit Office Review of Public Services Boards
2. Wales Audit Office NPT Annual Improvement Plan 2018-19 (Local Government Services to rural communities)

Points to Consider

1. Wales Audit Office Review of Public Services Boards – October 2019

The report concludes that **‘Public Services Boards are unlikely to realise their potential unless they are given freedom to work more flexibly and think and act differently.’**

The following recommendations are directed at PSB members:-

R1 Current practice is insufficient to provide assurance that the needs of people with protected characteristics are fully considered when reviewing choices and the voice of citizens is not sufficiently influencing decisions. **We recommend that PSBs:**

- **conduct formal assessments to identify the potential impact on people with protected characteristics and the Welsh language and review agreed actions to ensure any adverse impacts are addressed;**
- **improve transparency and accountability by making PSB meetings, agendas, papers and minutes accessible and available to the public;**
- **strengthen involvement by working to the guidance in the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales; and**
- **feedback the outcome of involvement activity identifying where changes are made as a result of the input of citizens and stakeholders.**

R2 In Part 2 of the report we review arrangements for PSB scrutiny and conclude that there are shortcomings and weaknesses in current performance and practice. **To improve scrutiny, we recommend that:**

- **PSBs and public bodies use the findings of the Auditor General for Wales' Discussion Paper: Six themes to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future' to review their current performance and identify where they need to strengthen oversight arrangements and activity; and**
- **PSBs ensure scrutiny committees have adequate engagement with a wider range of relevant stakeholders who can help hold PSBs to account.**

R3 Part 3 of the report summarises the difficulty of developing, implementing and resourcing PSBs and the challenges of managing multiple partnerships that can often have overlap and duplication. **To help build capacity, consistency and resourcing of activity we recommend that:**

- **PSBs take the opportunity to discharge other plan and strategy obligations through the Local Wellbeing Plan;**

It is also recommended that Welsh Government enables PSBs to develop flexible **models of working including:**

- merging, reducing and integrating their work with other forums such as Regional Partnership Boards; and
- giving PSBs flexibility to receive, manage and spend grant monies subject to PSBs ensuring they have adequate safeguards and appropriate systems in place for management of funding; effective budget and grant programme controls; and public reporting, scrutiny and oversight systems to manage expenditure.

2. Wales Audit Office NPT Annual Improvement Plan 2018-19 (Local Government Services to rural communities)

In the NPT Annual Improvement Plan 2018-19, Wales Audit Office has considered the national report Local Government Services to Rural Communities (attached at Appendix 2) and produced the following recommendation which applies to Public Services Boards.

R2 **The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales (see paragraphs 2.2 to 2.9 and 2.28 to 2.31). We recommend that PSB public services partners respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:**

1. assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Governments Rural Proofing Tool and identify and agree the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability; and
2. ensuring the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for 'place' with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges.

Recommended

WAO Review of Public Services Boards

- The PSB consider the recommendations in the WAO Review of Public Services Boards report and agree a response based on the following:-
- The majority of the recommendations have already been met or we are making progress towards them
- In terms of citizen engagement and involvement there is ongoing work around utilising existing arrangements and avoiding duplication. It is recommended that a small task group be brought together to review and revive the existing PSB Engagement Strategy.
- The challenge is noted around the complexity of arrangements in regard to agencies attending several PSBs
- We highlight the joint workstreams taken forward with Swansea PSB and commit to continuing with this approach where possible.

WAO Local Government Services to Rural Communities

- The PSB consider the recommendation arising from the Local Government Services to Rural Communities report and agree a response.

Appendix 1

Review of Public Services Boards, Auditor General for Wales – October 2019

Appendix 2

Local Government Services to Rural Communities, Auditor General for Wales – November 2018

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