Annex C: Consultation Questions

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| Your Name | Victoria Winckler |
| Organisation (if applicable) | Bevan Foundation |
| E-mail / Telephone | 01685 350938 |
| Your Address | 145a High Street, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8DP |

You can find out how we will use the information you provide by reading the privacy notice in the [consultation document](https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2018-03/180320-strengthening-local-government-consultation.pdf).

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| **Chapter 3** |
| Consultation Question 1  In Chapter 2, we restated our commitment to regional working in key areas but recognised the need for this to be supported by further change. In chapter 3, we set out the broad options for moving toward fewer, larger local authorities and summarise features of the process which would be common to each option. |
| 1. What practical steps could the Welsh Government take to make current regional working easier and more effective, for example in relation to education consortia, social services and the City Regions and City and Growth Deals? |
| We do not accept that ‘regional working’ is the best way forward because of the significant democratic deficit that it creates in terms of transparency, accountability and accessibility of their representatives to ordinary people. The democratic deficit is especially acute for the people who are most reliant on public services but are least able to navigate complex consortia arrangements. We therefore do not support ‘practical steps’ to increase ‘regional working’. Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. What are your views on the common elements to the process of mergers we outline in this section? |
| We do not agree that there has been a sufficient case in respect of strengthening local democracy to warrant a process of mergers. Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. What are your views on the options for creating fewer, larger authorities which we have set out? |
| We do not support the any of the options for creating fewer, larger authorities. We do not accept that the main driver of change should be service efficiency, not least because there is no evidence that larger authorities are better providers of services than smaller ones.  Instead, the driver of reform should be strengthening democratic engagement and participation in local government. If the boundaries of local authorities are to be redrawn, they should reflect the everyday lives of the citizens they are supposed to serve. This means boundaries that correspond with travel-to-work patterns and people’s sense of identity, even if that means radical changes in the footprint of local authorities.  Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. Are there other options for creating fewer, larger authorities we should consider? |
| No, see above. |
| 1. Do you have evidence on costs, benefits and savings of each option which can inform decision-making? If so, please provide details. |
| The costs will be a loss of democratic accountability – something which cannot be put into a balance sheet in the short term but in the long-term will be far more damaging to Wales’ economy, society, culture and governance than any cash savings. |

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| **Chapter 4** |
| Consultation Question 2  Chapter 4 has explained the need for clarity on the future footprint for local government and the range of factors which should be taken into account to determine a new configuration. It sets out a suggested future footprint for local government, which could be reached via each of the options set out in the previous chapter. |
| Do you agree that providing clarity on the future footprint of local government is important? |
| This is a leading question. In our view the basic question of strengthening democratic participation and representation should be addressed before considering ‘footprints’. |
| 1. Do you agree with the factors we have identified to inform our thinking? Would you change or add any? |
| No, because these are about supposed service efficiencies and boundaries. We would add as the primary factors questions of:  Will people understand who takes decisions that affect them?  Does the geographical footprint of local authorities reflect how people live and work, and their sense of identity?  Do the proposed arrangements encourage people from all backgrounds, including people on low incomes and with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010, to participate in local government as voters and by other mechanisms?  Are the proposed arrangements likely to attract a diverse mix of prospective councillors?  Will the proposed arrangements increase transparency in decision-making and enable electors, including people on low incomes and with protected characteristics, to hold authorities to account?  Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| What are your views on the new areas suggested in this section? |
| In our view the new areas suggested in this section do not meet the additional criteria we have outlined above. We are concerned that in proposing some areas that bear little relationship to people’s everyday lives and that cover large areas with poor geographical access across them, people will be further confused and disengaged from decision-making.  Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| Do you have alternative suggestions and, if so, what is the evidence to support these as an alternative? |
| There needs to be a fresh, wide and public debate about reinvigorating local democracy rather than efficiencies and boundaries.  Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. In the context of these proposals, are there other ways we should simplify and streamline joint working arrangements at regional level and among public bodies within the new authority areas? If so, what are they? |
| Joint arrangements should be the exception rather than the norm. They should be adopted only in the case of specialist services or those which require a wider strategic overview. There is a strong case, for example, for joint arrangements in respect of regional transport, land-use planning and economic development provided that decision-making is transparent and accountable.  Any arrangements to ‘streamline’ joint working must not be at the expense of the fundamental principles of transparency and accountability. |

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| **Chapter 5** |
| Consultation Question 3  Chapter 5 sets out the proposed approach to transition and implications for establishing Transition Committees and elections to Shadow Authorities under each option. |
| 1. Do you agree with the proposed process of transition: namely establishing Transition Committees and ensuring elections to Shadow Authorities can be held ahead of vesting day for the new authorities? |
| Lessons need to be learned from the processes adopted in 1996, for which there is as yet no firm evidence. |
| 1. Do you agree that, if option 1 were pursued, we should set a date by which voluntary merger proposals should come forward in each electoral cycle? |
| No comment. |
| 1. Do you have any other thoughts on the proposed process? |
| No comment. |
| Consultation Question 4  The consultation suggests holding any local government elections in June 2021.  Are there any reasons why June 2021 would not be a suitable date? If so, please suggest an alternative date with the reasons why that would be more suitable. |
| No comment |
| Consultation Question 5  The Welsh Government recognises that there are some plans or assessments, for example the preparation of assessments of wellbeing by Public Service Boards, which are linked to electoral cycles. We will make provision to make sure these tie into any new electoral cycles going forward. Are there any other plans or matters which might be tied into the electoral cycle which we need to consider? |
| No comment. |
| Consultation Question 6  What are your views on the approach which should be taken to determining the parameters of electoral reviews? |
| No comment |

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| **Chapter 6** |
| Consultation Question 7 |
| 1. How can councils make more effective use of their elected members knowledge of, and connections in, their communities? |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. How could we better recognise the level of responsibility involved in being a local councillor? What changes to the remuneration and support councillors receive would enable a wider range of people to become involved in local democratic representation? |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| Consultation Question 8 |
| 1. Are there other powers which local government should have? If so, what are they? |
| There is considerable scope to enhance the powers of local government. The Welsh Government has established numerous quangos or similar bodies that it funds and directs, despite the supposed ‘bonfire’ ten years ago. Examples include Transport for Wales, Natural Resources Wales, Qualifications Wales, Health Education and Improvement Wales to name but a few, as well as numerous charities.  There has been no wide public debate about whether the creation of arms-length bodies accountable to Welsh Ministers is better than vesting some powers in local government or indeed retaining them within Welsh Government itself.  Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. Are there other freedoms or flexibilities which local government should have? If so, what are they? |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| Consultation Question 9 |
| 1. Which areas offer the greatest scope for shared transactional services? |
| No comment |
| 1. How might such arrangements be best developed? |
| No comment |
| Consultation Question 10 |
| 1. In ensuring we deliver a consistent approach across Wales, where consistency is important, how do you think the advice and support on each of these matters could be best provided? |
| No comment |
| 1. Are there any other challenges or opportunities from structural change or providing additional powers and flexibilities that have not been identified above? If these areas require support, what form should this support take? |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| 1. Which of the issues identified above or in your response should be prioritised for early resolution? |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |
| Consultation Question 11.  We would like to know your views on the effects that the proposals within this consultation would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. |
| 1. What effects do you think there would be? |
| No comment |
| 1. How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated? |
| No comment |
| Consultation Question 12  Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy within this consultation could be formulated or changed (if required) so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. |
| No comment |
| Consultation Question 13  The Children’s Rights Impact Assessment published alongside the consultation outlines the Welsh Government’s view of the effect of the proposals contained in the consultation on children and young people. The Welsh Government seeks views on that assessment. |
| 1. Are there any positive or adverse effects not identified in the assessment? |
| No comment |
| 1. Could the proposals be reformulated so as to increase the positive effects or reduce any possible adverse effects? |
| No comment |
| Consultation Question 14  The Equalities Impact Assessment published alongside the consultation outlines the Welsh Government’s view of the effect of the proposals contained in the consultation on protected groups under the Equality Act 2010. The Welsh Government seeks views on that assessment. |
| 1. Are there any other positive or adverse effects not identified in the assessment? |
| We do not regard the assessment as an adequate appraisal of the impact of the proposals on people with protected characteristics. |
| 1. Could the proposals be reformulated so as to increase the positive or reduce any possible adverse effects? |
| There needs to be a radical rethink based on the principles of strengthening local democracy including increasing the representation of and participation by people with protected characteristics. |
| Consultation Question 15  Please provide any other comments you wish to make on the content of this consultation. |
| Our paper attached provides more detail. |