



**Cyfoeth  
Naturiol**  
Cymru  
**Natural  
Resources**  
Wales

## **White Paper: Public Services Staff Commission**

### **Natural Resources Wales Response**

January 2015

#### **Q: How best should the Workforce Partnership Council and the Public Services Staff Commission work together?**

As the Workforce Partnership Council is already in place we would recommend that WPC is, as suggested, engaged on a regular basis to ensure consistency of approach.

#### **Q: Are the public bodies listed in paragraph 49 the appropriate bodies to be included in a public service wide remit?**

Natural Resources Wales recognises the workforce issues arising from proposals to merge local authorities and the need for authoritative advice during this period. We appreciate that this will be the initial priority of the non-statutory Staff Commission.

However, it is unclear to us what benefits would accrue from including Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies (WGSBs), and possibly other organisations, within the remit of a Staff Commission:

- a) The focus of the Commission will be on local authorities. While there is benefit in mutual learning across the whole of the public service it should not be assumed that 'one size fits all' - what works for local authorities will not necessarily work for other public service bodies.
- b) The nature of the relationship between WGSBs and Welsh Government (WG) is very different from local authorities. WGSBs operate within a Governance Framework which is determined by WG; WG agrees the corporate plans of each WGSB; WG issues an annual Remit Letter to each WGSB to set out its priorities; WG determines the annual pay remit of WGSBs, and sets delegation limits; each WGSB is subject to specific legislative requirements. The governance arrangements, including those covering workforce issues, are already tightly specified for WGSBs, unlike local authorities, and can be amended by Welsh Ministers. We are therefore unsure what additional value a Staff Commission would bring.
- c) The size of many of the organisations listed are significantly larger than Natural Resources Wales (and other WGSBs). There is a risk that some initiatives would not be suitable for our organisation and make it difficult for us to continue in the way we want to grow and operate.

- d) We fully support the development and dissemination of good practice workforce arrangements across public services in Wales. Academi Wales is already doing excellent work in this area, and we would support an expansion of its role if necessary. It is unclear to us the additional benefit that a Staff Commission would provide in this area.

We already work closely with other Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies and public sector organisations on areas of common interest, and we would wish to continue with this. We would be delighted to share our experiences with local authorities and other organisations as and when required.

Our recommendation, therefore, is that WGSBs are not brought under the remit of the Staff Commission. An alternative approach would be not to include WGSBs at this stage of a non-statutory Staff Commission, and give further consideration to any proposals when legislation for a statutory Staff Commission comes forward.

**Q: Is the approach outlined in paragraphs 50 to 55 the appropriate approach?**

For the purpose of overseeing the merger of the local authorities this seems the right approach. As stated above, the governance arrangements on workforce issues are already prescribed for WGSBs by Welsh Ministers.

**Q: Do you have any views about the timing of the establishment on the non-statutory Staff Commission?**

We recognise the issue of getting the Staff Commission in place quickly to support the reform of local government.

**Q: Do you have any further comments on the functioning of the non-statutory Staff Commission?**

It is not clear how the proposals for the Staff Commission will impact on the work of Academi Wales. Natural Resources Wales has found the remit and contribution of Academi Wales of immense value and would not wish to see the position of Academi Wales weakened through this development. It appears that some of the functions of the Staff Commission would replicate those of Academi Wales.

**Q: Are the skills and experience identified in paragraph 57 correct?**

Based on NRW's experience, the skills and experience identified appear to be appropriate; direct experience of leading and managing organisational change is particularly important.

**Q: Are there any skills and experience which the non-statutory Staff Commission requires which is not included in the list?**

It may be beneficial to consider how the voice of the customer is heard in the Commission's deliberations – the workforce is there to serve the customer. Another skill set that may be required is programme / project management in order to support the Commission with the reform programme.

**Q: Are the proposed communication processes outlined in paragraphs 59 to 62 appropriate?**

Yes.

**Q: Are the proposed links between the non-statutory Staff Commission and the IRP appropriate?**

Yes.

**Q: Are there other priority workforce issues the non-statutory Staff Commission should be engaged with?**

Another requirement would be strategic workforce planning for the merging authorities.

**Q: Will making statutory provision for the Staff Commission in the second Local Government Bill to be introduced into the National Assembly for Wales in the autumn of 2016 enhance the standing of the Commission?**

Yes.

**Q: Should the Staff Commission be given powers to issue guidance in its own right, or should it only be able to make recommendations to the Welsh Ministers about issuing guidance?**

For clarity of purpose we would recommend that should only be able to make recommendations to the Welsh Ministers about issuing guidance.

**Q: What powers will the statutory Staff Commission need in order to provide accurate and authoritative advice?**

The retrieval of key staffing information in order to provide accurate and authoritative advice is critical.

**Q: Are the powers described in paragraphs 71 and 72 the right ones?**

We would suggest that any statutory guidance is issued through the Welsh Government rather direct from the Staff Commission.

**Q: What other powers may be required?**

The powers outlined in the document seem appropriate.

**Q: What additional powers might Welsh Ministers need to effectively support the work of the statutory Staff Commission, for example, powers of direction or guidance?**

The powers outlined in the document seem appropriate.

**Q: Should the statutory Staff Commission be time limited and phased out at the end of the current reform programme?**

Yes - given the essence of the Staff Commission is to oversee the local government mergers.

**Q: If not, why not and what would its function be upon completion of the Reform Programme?**

N/A

**Q: How could the statutory Staff Commission best support the embedding of the social partnership approach?**

The Welsh Partnership Council would be best placed to oversee this work.