

LGF 11

Bil Cyllid Llywodraeth Leol (Cymru)

Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Tref Aberystwyth

Response from: Aberystwyth Town Council

Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill Consultation – Aberystwyth Town Council response.

Aberystwyth Town Council (ATC, or, the Council), agrees with the general principles of the Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill (the Bill), and believes that there is a need for the stated purpose and intended effect of the legislation – that is;

- **Effective Local Government and its funding**
- **The need to ensure that financial contributions made to local government are fair and calculated on the basis of current circumstances**
- **That the process is transparent and reliable.**

The specific provisions are, in the view of the Council, necessary changes to the law, notably;

- **The reformation of non-domestic rates in Wales**
- **Flexibility in reference points for banding**
- **A single national Council Tax Reduction Scheme**
- **More frequent revaluations for both non-domestic rates and council tax bands**
- **Replacement of requirement to publish in Newspapers with a requirement to publish on the website.**

Other named proposals are welcomed, but are not in the scope of the consideration of the Council, or will be specifically discussed in this response.

The Council agrees with the specific provision to retain the one-adult discount, and the intention to de-link the one-adult discount from the empty property discount.

The Council agrees with the implementation of a national “Council Tax Reduction Scheme”, but hopes that County Councils will be consulted on the implementation, and any subsequent changes.

The Council welcomes point 9.29 “Rural Proofing” of the Explanatory Memorandum, but hopes that the Welsh Government will consider provisions that protect the Welsh Language in the national “Council Tax Reduction Scheme”, as well as ensuring extra provisions for affordability of housing – as in some instances Council Tax may be the additional compounding factor that creates unaffordable housing.

The Council has identified that any publication of information on council websites should be accessible to citizens unable or unwilling to access the internet, but also hopes the Welsh Government will require the published information to be easily accessible on any county council website, and that finding the information is not overly burdensome on citizens.

The Council believes that the majority of barriers to the implementation of the Bill are adequately explored in the Explanatory Memorandum.

The Council notes there may be unintended consequences arising from the Bill:

The Explanatory Memorandum includes an estimated cost saving of between £330,000 and £385,000. While cost savings are to be welcomed, the saving in this case may lead to local papers seeing decreased advertising revenues – forcing unsuitable financial decisions, such as “selling up” to larger conglomerates, or cessation of publication. Decreased revenues from advertisement from local authorities may also mean the ‘passing on’ of costs to local businesses in the form of higher per-advert costs in newspapers. The Council notes that a provision requiring or encouraging local government to publish in local newspapers, but not national newspapers, may alleviate some of these concerns, as well as assisting with the requirement to ensure information is accessible to citizens with lack of access to digital information. Using data provided in point 8.223, around £55,000 may be funnelled into local newspapers in this way over 10 years, possibly enabling local papers to continue.

Subordinate Legislation:

The Council agrees with the provisions for ministers to make subordinate legislation, but notes that some ministerial powers have not been used to their full effect in the past. The Council hopes that powers provided to Ministers in this bill are used to their full effect to ensure a sustainable local government funding model, and effectiveness and affordability for citizens.

The Council, overall, agrees with the need for the Bill, and with the provisions drafted in order to meet the need. The Council believes the legislation is compatible with the EHCR and that the Senedd is competent to legislate on this matter. The Council overall believes that more information should be contained on the face of the bill, or that any subordinate legislation will have requirements to consult in an adequate manner with County and Community Councils on changes affecting them. The Council sees no issues in the quality of the legislation, but hopes that changes are conveyed in more accessible and understandable format to citizens. The Council sees no constitutional or other implications of the Bill.