

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all local authorities determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA also appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
4. The WLGA works closely with and is often advised by professional advisors and professional associations from local government, however, the WLGA is the representative body for local government and provides the collective, political voice of local government in Wales.
5. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee inquiry into Historic Environment.
6. Local authorities have, in general, welcomed the Historic Environment (Wales) Act and the resulting new duties. Together with the legislation, Cadw has issued a suite of guidance which again is broadly welcomed. Responding to the consultations on these guidance documents has been a significant undertaking for LAs and NPAs (National Park Authorities). Officer time is also spent understanding the guidance and considering the implications on service delivery. There are still further guidance documents to be issued by Cadw.
7. The issue of resources within local authorities and national parks to implement the new duties is very real. The number of officers employed to

work on historic environment matters has declined in the last few years and local authorities and national park authorities are having to prioritise the reactive legislative/case work rather than the proactive regeneration/tourism focused work.

8. Duties in relation to listed buildings across local authorities vary depending on whether an officer within a local authority/national park authority has been given delegated status by Cadw to determine Grade II LBC without reference to Cadw. Monmouthshire, Carmarthenshire, Wrexham, Pembrokeshire Coast, Brecon Beacons, Vale of Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire all have delegated status. The number of listed buildings within the local authority/national park will also have a bearing on the resources required.
9. Cadw, WLGA and local authorities are very aware of the resilience issues facing this sector and are considering alternative models of delivery. As a result, a couple of interesting pieces of work are ongoing. The seven North Wales LPAs (inc Snowdonia NPA) recognised that specialist services such as the built heritage services within local planning authorities were under strain. A project was established to review and redesign Built Heritage Services in North Wales including exploring the potential of a regional set up. This has involved the Cadw, LA Conservation Officers and the two Archaeological Trusts operating in North Wales in determining where improvements can be made to service delivery and a number of proposals have emerged. These include streamlining local policies, pooling resources to improve capacity and resilience, reviewing the timing of advice from Cadw and promotion of the service. Also as part of this work a number of proposals relating to listed building consent are under consideration ranging from improving the quality of the LBC applications received through to increasing numbers of LPAs that have delegation from Cadw and the role of local government and Cadw in enabling this to happen.
10. Alongside the North Wales work, a Cadw led Task & Finish group (with WLGA and local authority representation) has been established to consider broadly similar issues to the North Wales LPAs but for all Wales. Learning from the work taking place in the North, this group is due to report to the Cabinet Secretary shortly and is likely to include recommendations relating to LBC.
11. In addition to this review work, informal collaboration between authorities continues on a regular basis. Sharing knowledge, skills and case studies is

facilitated through the Conservation Officers forum meetings held in North and South Wales and more basically through email requests for sharing advice, real life examples and supporting each other.

12. There are some positive examples of local authorities undertaking proactive work and developing buildings at risk strategies which has resulted in the saving of several key buildings. However, with a reduction in available resources in local authorities and national parks, this proactive work is likely to decrease.
13. With their wider role, local authorities are well placed to promote heritage tourism. The importance of heritage in its widest sense on tourism is not always fully appreciated. A recent report by the Historic Environment Group – Heritage Counts (<http://cadw.gov.wales/about/partnershipsandprojects/aboutpartners/histenvgroup/?lang=en>) – has usefully quantified the benefits of heritage to Wales and there may be opportunities in the future to widen this exercise to include the contributions made by other stakeholders such as local government. Local authorities through their tourism function work with Cadw to promote heritage tourism and maximise tourism spend in the area and at the specific heritage assets.
14. The WLGA supported the report by Baroness Andrews on how culture and heritage bodies can contribute to reducing poverty and worked with the Welsh Government and other partners to implement the report recommendations including the establishment of Pioneer Areas. The WLGA also supported the subsequent and related work of Professor Dai Smith on the Arts in Education and again has worked with the Welsh Government and partners like the Arts Council for Wales in taking this work forward. Most recently, the WLGA has supported the work of Welsh Government in developing the new curriculum – ‘A Curriculum for Wales a Curriculum for Life’ – following the Donaldson Review. The Association has welcomed in particular the focus on the “expressive arts” as an Area of Learning and Experience within the new curriculum. These developments all build on the work of Baroness Andrews and it is important that they develop further in complete alignment and coordination. At a time when financial resources are under pressure it is important that they are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.

15. Many local authorities have been successful in securing Heritage Lottery funding to improve heritage assets within our towns through the Townscape Heritage Initiative. Many of these town centre buildings are in private ownership and through collaboration and financial incentive, local authorities have been able to secure investment in these properties. Local authorities work with private owners of heritage assets in a number of different ways – through the consenting process, offering advice and guidance, identifying funding, promotion of the asset if appropriate.
16. The WLGA maintained a good working relationship with Cadw officials during the legislative process preceding the Historic Environment Act and there continues to be regular dialogue albeit less than during the Bill stages. At a local level, officers work closely with the relevant Cadw officials.
17. With any service reconfiguration as referred to in earlier paragraphs, the WLGA has suggested to Cadw that funding should be made available to assist local authorities with implementing change. The WLGA has also suggested that there should have been training funded by Cadw to accompany the suite of legislative changes and accompanying guidance documents. Financial restrictions have been offered as one of the reasons for this not happening. The WLGA would like to see a specific budget within Cadw to be used to support local authority change activity relating to the historic environment. Cadw's impact is curtailed by resource pressures and unless additional resources are identified this will continue to be an issue.