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Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Local Government (Wales) Bill: Stage 1

Response from: Estyn

**Response to The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
consultation on the Local Government (Wales) Bill**

The terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry are:

To consider:

1. The general principles of the Local Government (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation to:
 - enable preparation to be made for a programme of local government mergers and reform;
 - allow Principal Local Authorities to merge voluntarily by April 2018;
 - amend provision in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 relating to the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales and the survey of councillors and unsuccessful candidates for election as councillors;
 - amend provision in the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 relating to electoral reviews.

The general principles appear to be sound and the legislation is necessary.

2. Any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and whether the Bill takes account of them,

None that have not already been taken into account.

3. Whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill,

One unintended consequence of allowing voluntary mergers could be that applications for ad hoc mergers might not conform to an agreed national vision for local government re-organisation.

The Welsh Government currently requires local authorities to work together in regional consortia to provide school improvement services through its National Model for Regional Working, although the statutory responsibility remains with individual local authorities. If local authorities across more than one consortium merge this could create unhelpful complexity in the system. The role of the National Model for Regional Working in delivering school improvement is raised in the consultation paper with reference to a national model for education service delivery but there is little expansion of this line of thinking.

4. The financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum,

In addition to the costs identified in the Explanatory Memorandum, there may be short-term costs if the regional consortia for school improvement are reorganised or stood-down as a result of the emergence of the new principal authorities.

5. The appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the Explanatory Memorandum).

No comment.