Dear Debbie,

Thank you for your letter of 11 June updating me on your recent discussions with Local Government leaders. I welcome their response and their continued commitment to taking forward our shared agenda for local government and note their concerns in taking forward the Statutory Joint Committee model.

On the 18 June I gave an oral statement to the National Assembly updating members on the positive and constructive debate we have been having in the Local Government working group. I also updated members on the actions and recommendations of the working group and the proposed next steps to take forward the recommendations to help secure the future of local government in Wales.

The local government working group recognised that there was already significant collaborative work being undertaken across Wales, and this is to be welcomed. However the working group also recognised that the collaborative landscape was complex and this complexity was potentially limiting the effectiveness and efficiency of these arrangements. Considerable time and effort is absorbed in creating and recreating the practical working arrangements for joint working. The Statutory Joint Committee model will provide a single consistent, simplified and straightforward vehicle for democratically accountable regional working.

It is my intention that the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill will provide an enabling power to create Statutory Joint Committees by regulations. It is through the regulations setting up each Statutory Joint Committee that the details of how each will operate will be determined, such as membership, governance, scrutiny, funding, relevant functions and so on. I agree that ensuring local democratic accountability, oversight and scrutiny is key.

My intention is to work with local government through the new Partnership Council sub group to work through what the regulations will need to cover. I would also intend to co-develop any regulations establishing Statutory Joint Committees with the local authorities involved. This co-development approach will enable us to explore and address the questions raised by local government leaders.
Local authorities will be able to request the establishment of a Statutory Joint Committee where they wish to work together on the basis of shared interests and mutual benefit. This can be in relation to any service which local authorities believe can be delivered more efficiently and effectively in this way.

Welsh Ministers will also be able to require local authorities’ functions to be delivered through a Statutory Joint Committee. Our intention however is to focus on those areas where the Welsh Government has already put in place regional arrangements (either statutory or voluntary) or where provision to make regional arrangements already exists. On this basis in my oral statement I indicated the potential establishment in service areas such as planning, transport and economic development. The emphasis is on providing a more effective, efficient and beneficial way of carrying out the relevant functions.

As we take this work forward through the new Partnership Council sub group it is my hope that we will continue the positive relationship we have developed based on mutual respect and a shared agenda to deliver the best outcomes possible for the people of Wales. The work of the sub group will be vital in addressing and taking forward the detailed work required to inform the development of the Statutory Joint Committee model.

Yours sincerely,

Julie James
AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government