Independent strategic review of the governance and management of the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP)

Executive Summary & Recommendations

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This strategic review has been undertaken in partnership with Newport City Council
Background

The asylum, refugee and migration agendas across the UK, remain dynamic – not least around key areas such as:

- The Syrian Resettlement Programme
- National Transfer Scheme of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)
- Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme
- Unaccompanied refugee children in Europe
- Extending dispersal areas
- Community Sponsorship

The potential increasing scope of demands and responses from local government, and from the wide range of other organisations involved with the agendas across Wales, will inevitably continue to pressure existing resources. In Wales of course, there are also the additional complexities of delivering a multi-faceted, non-devolved agenda in a devolved nation. There is also a new and sensitive political dynamic following the Brexit vote with the need to ensure continuity of political support moving forward despite a growing “anti-immigration” sentiment that goes beyond the freedom of movement for EU workers and which has been manifested in a rise in hate crimes. All these factors demand reflection on how the current approach to dealing with migration is delivered which is currently “underpowered” in terms of resources and profile.

In this current dynamic environment, the need for an effective, focused and responsive mechanism that provides a framework for strategic engagement and leadership, helps local planning, facilitates advice and shared learning, and coordinates activity amongst stakeholders and organisations remains compelling – and was strongly endorsed by those providing perspective to this review.

Many aspects of that mechanism have been provided by the WSMP, previously funded by both the Home Office (as a non-devolved function) and Welsh Government. Funding currently is solely provided by the Home Office as part of an annual grant process and the WSMP is overseen by a widely-drawn stakeholder board and with a small staff complement. It is expected that the WSMP will also gain a new function in providing a single point of contact and co-ordination role for Wales in relation to the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP), along with some additional associated resource. Discussions are also on-going in relation to another potential new function in relation to vulnerable refugee children with some additional funding to support this work.
Overall conclusions

Overall conclusions from the overview have been brought together under the following key headings:

- Changing the overall governance model/business ethos
- Refreshing underlying governance and management arrangements
- Enhancing reputation and raising strategic awareness

1. Changing the overall governance model/business ethos

There is an understandable and broad perception emerging from the review that the WSMP is providing a valued supporting, coordinating and informing function – but primarily at an operational level. It does not at present have (and is not seen to have) a strong, strategic catalysing role in helping shape policy or shape integrated and inclusive responses to the emerging agenda.

Linked to that, current arrangements and perceived responsibilities for leading those strategic responses to the emerging agenda between the WSMP (both at board and staff levels) and the WLGA – particularly as the role of local government expands – is creating significant confusion and tensions, with blurred accountability lines. This is unsustainable as the agenda evolves, and there is a strong acknowledgement of these issues from those involved.

Understandably, many from local government see the WLGA, given its representative role, as the legitimate provider of the framework to enable effective strategic leadership at political and senior levels across local government, and the organisation to first approach/discuss strategic impacts. This in part is a consequence of not only a wider lack of awareness of the role and function of the WSMP at those senior levels, and its current mainly operational focus, but also an over-reliance on the reputation of the Chair and informal networks/contacts rather than any systematic planned approach to enhancing that awareness. The fact that as a representative body WLGA can access local governments’ strategic political and officer leadership is an advantage going forward in light of political dynamics previously highlighted. Indeed there is already a perception that the Partnership is within and run by WLGA in some quarters.

An alternative model of overall governance and management for the Partnership, such as that which currently exists in Scotland, should be explored and considered as an alternative. This model, where the partnership operates within the overall governance of COSLA, has a strong potential to enhance that strategic focus, resolve that lack of clarity and responsibility, and simplify accountability lines. A move to that model would of course clearly require the WLGA to
consider if it wanted to absorb that responsibility and the staff, and would highlight concerns regarding on-going confidence in the external funding being maintained.

Discussions with a number of the Strategic Migration Partnerships in England suggested a mix of models, some where the partnership (and staff) exist within the regional Local Government Associations, and some where a specific local authority host model more like Wales still exists. There was a strong indication that clarity of function has been helped where partnerships operate within the LGA regional networks.

A different business model can also be the catalyst for enhancing other opportunities for change, not least concerning:

- **Creating greater strategic joint involvement** At board level, the WSMP has been (and seen to be) primarily to date a mechanism for meeting and sharing information, and not a strategic partnership forum for planning collective stakeholder integrated responses and exploring scope for joint resourcing/delivery. The WSMPs work on coordinating the SRP for example did facilitate key strategic partner engagement but overall the review suggested a strong consensus that there is much greater scope for the Partnership to evolve that strategic function, perceived potentially by funders as supporting a more holistic, persuasive response to the emerging agendas in Wales.

- **“Squaring the Circle”** The WSMP needs to demonstrate more effectively and transparently not only that it uses its experience and collective knowledge to be seen as an active participant in policy debate and development at national level, but also that it uses the knowledge and evidence gained from its work to help inform discussion on the implementation of those policies both for the Home Office and the Welsh Government.... and future policy development as a consequence.

- **Creating degrees of funding autonomy** The WSMPs only funding source is currently the Home Office and resource limitations have prevented devoting resource internally to proactively evaluating available external funding streams and the rights or ability of the Partnership to bid for/access them to help create some funding autonomy or additional funding streams - and create greater flexibility in determining strategic work programmes.
2. Refreshing underlying governance and management arrangements

The review has concluded that the WSMP is seen to provide a range of support and advice, specific facilitation and training across that agenda, seen by most stakeholders as:

- providing (through the Partnership Executive Board) a helpful mechanism for sharing intelligence and collective emerging challenges, and supporting local stakeholder planning as a consequence
- providing particularly a range of helpful toolkits and planning aids, and inclusive, specific, operationally-focussed fora and delivery groups to help coordinate activity, stimulate inter-organisational contact, and share learning and practice
- valuable and accessible, by those at an operational level who are involved with and understand the work of the partnership
- aligning in the main with the broadly expressed expectations of the Home Office - but responsive and adapted to national circumstance in Wales (and Welsh Government perspective) where possible

It is evident however that there are issues that require addressing these include:

- The existing resource and moving demand is creating huge pressures
- The absence of a pragmatic risk – based approach to resource planning and realistic deliverables
- The consequent impacts that the above factors are having an increasingly detrimental impact on the ability of the staff to continue to provide the governance and management “architecture” commensurate with that which would normally be expected with a partnership of this type – and which were in part previously in place (and valued)

A number of key opportunities have been highlighted by the review, notably:

- **Focusing on a smaller number of key strategic support/improvement areas** This is a fundamental change area for the WSMP and was a significant and consistent feedback issue from stakeholders. The current work-streams and wide range of networks etc are well received but are leading to a view amongst key stakeholders of an organisation with limited capacity spread too thin and trying to be “all things to all people”. This in part is “optics” as well as practical application but was a consistent issue raised by stakeholders. Resources are limited. It will be vital to introduce more realistic planning, by developing more transparent, strategically-focused outcomes and strategic engagements for the partnership.
These will need to link fundamentally, and more obviously, into the policies, duties and legal frameworks that are focusing attention across local government in particular the *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* and the *Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act* - and also into the associated established statutory partnership mechanisms nationally, and regionally across local government, that need to be engaged with e.g. Public Services Boards, Safeguarding Board(s), as well as others such as Education Consortia, Regional Leadership forums and other strategic regional partnerships/footprints etc.

The impact of the asylum, migration and refugee agendas will have a significant influence on the strategic considerations at those statutory planning levels, and within new duties such as well-being assessments. In that environment, the WSMP needs a clear strategic targeting and engagement strategy, linked to good data analysis, to help shape and influence debate at that level and access the necessary leverage points.

This would also be fundamental in helping generate the greater strategic engagement (particularly with members and senior management across local government), that is needed – both outside the Partnership Board but also within its business and membership.

A clear articulation of the limitations associated with funding allocations is also needed as part of this process.

- **Developing a costed 3-year strategic plan** which identifies overall vision and key strategic outcomes (and better linked to external programme timelines) designed to demonstrate longer term strategic responses needed across the agenda and better supports longer-term funding discussions /commitments. Crucially it can also potentially be the catalyst for better integrated planning/resource allocation with other stakeholders and agencies currently engaged with the agenda and members of the WSMP Executive Board.

The WSMP is currently seen as too reactive, building work/activity programmes annually, in response to funding allocations by the Home Office, rather than longer-term strategic visioning/planning. Planning is also characterised by a continuing effort to absorb and respond to increasing need with existing limited staffing levels and diminishing grant levels. Whilst perhaps commendable, this approach is also unsustainable, and will increasingly diminish impact, effectiveness and reputation of the WSMP.

Annual funding cycles are typically not conducive to effective planning and create significant uncertainly at a
number of levels but longer-term planning should still be introduced even if current Home Office grant funding timelines remain annualised. The creation of a more inclusive, longer-term strategic plan would hopefully also provide the catalyst for the Home Office to consider extending its funding timeframes and commitments to match.

- **Re-introducing a more proactive, inclusive annual planning/plan process** with more pro-active engagement and consultation with stakeholders, partners and service recipients as part of work planning. Being seen to do it, and being seen to take account of a broad base of stakeholder perspective can be crucial elements for establishing the relevance and credibility of collaborative partnerships such as the WSMP involved in providing advice and guidance. This core aspect of planning has been valued, and a more evident part of established practice in the past, but stakeholders acknowledged it had become less structured now. There is scope for a more structured and demonstrable consultation or development process to be set up to share and test outline work plans externally, and seek contributions from a broader potential interested audience.

- **Reviewing Executive Board role and composition** The current Executive Board of the Partnership has over 30 individuals and organisations listed as members. This by any standards is large for an executive function. It has grown over time, designed to adapt to the changing agenda and provide an inclusive a mechanism as possible for national and local government, the NHS and the wide range of other sector organisations and charities engaged within the agenda. A clear need to re-focus WSMP planning advocated in this paper will by its very nature need to lead to a review of the Executive Board role and membership, and would hopefully more effectively stimulate senior leaders and elected members’ involvement and interest from local government.
3. Enhancing reputation and raising strategic awareness

These issues are explicitly linked to the clarification of the strategic roles for the WLGA and the WSMP and the consideration of a new model for the Partnership, but the following recommendations have emerged from the review that apply regardless of any eventual model, i.e.

- **Reviewing the existing wide range of forums and working groups that currently exist, and WSMP facilitation of/ participation within them** It is periodically important to evaluate the range of forums, their continuing purpose, any overlap and duplication, and deliverables, in order to establish their ongoing currency, and the scope that may exist for other stakeholders to administer and drive operational groups rather than the WSMP. This was a common theme emerging from feedback from stakeholders. A move to a more strategically-focused planning framework, by its very nature would also of course necessitate that type of review to ensure associated forums/working groups align. But the need to maintain responsiveness to emerging issues is also acknowledged.

- **Establishing a more structured approach to knowledge management** through developing a more systematic approach for the capture of relevant information and intelligence (both internal and external), its distillation and analysis, and its subsequent use to inform strategic and operational planning and to disseminate to interested parties.

- **Developing a communication strategy** understood by the board and designed to enhance understanding and awareness of the work and impact of the WSMP, and its “reach” particularly into the strategic decision-making mechanisms within local government, including increased use of the website and social media (as appropriate).

There are a number of key requirements and fundamental opportunities to reconstruct how the Partnership plans, manages and positions its role. These would potentially strengthen strategic, collective impact and response to the agenda, clarify and streamline both its function and its underlying governance, management and accountability arrangements, position itself to better identify, seek and attract additional funding, extend influence, and also raise awareness of its role to a wider audience at a senior strategic level in Wales.

The range of recommendations for changing or enhancing existing governance and management approaches and helping enhance the awareness and
reputation of the role of the WSMP, highlighted in this report, are important improvement step changes. They are commensurate with a partnership approach of this type and size. **They also remain relevant regardless of the wider consideration of a change in the fundamental model of governance for the WSMP.**

They also require a resource commitment, at least in the short term, in order to provide the capacity to implement them at a time where the review suggests existing commitments are not sustainable. A more pragmatic approach advocated here to re-balancing work plans to provide a more strategic focus, and to link those to available funding in the future will be vital here to support that, as will the anticipated additional funding from the Home Office to help provide a single point of contact and co-ordination role for Wales in relation to the SRP and the potential additional resource for unaccompanied and refugee children.

But with existing funding streams and the scale of an increasing agenda, it is likely that a wider discussion with all WSMP stakeholder/board members will be needed about funding contributions in the future if a collective, wider-Wales partnership response is to be realized more effectively.
**Appendix 1**

**Independent strategic review of the governance and management of the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP)**

**Recommendations summary**

**Changing the overall governance model/ business ethos**

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<tr>
<td>Create a more strategic role for the WSMP, ensuring its role is clearer to stakeholders and well understood</td>
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<td>Consider putting in place an alternative business and staffing model, taking into account other models used across the UK</td>
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<td>Clarify management and accountability arrangements, and in particular the relationship and responsibilities between WSMP and WLGA</td>
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<td>Create greater strategic, joint and more senior level involvement through stronger, more apparent collective “partnership” responses and potential resourcing for programmes and actions</td>
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<td>“Squaring the Circle” through more proactive engagement with policy development and use of collective intelligence to inform policy implementation analysis</td>
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<td>Helping secure additional funding autonomy by devoting resource internally to proactively evaluating available external funding streams and the ability of the partnership to bid for/ access them</td>
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**Refreshing underlying governance and management arrangements**

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<td>Focusing on a smaller number of key strategic support/improvement areas, that more realistically reflect resources (and Home Office requirements) and better align with, and create stronger engagement with, statutory national and regional planning mechanisms that already exist</td>
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<td>Developing a costed 3-year strategic plan rather than the current reactive process that responds to annualised funding cycles</td>
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<td>Developing a more proactive, inclusive annual planning /plan process and reporting on progress and outcomes achieved</td>
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<td>Reviewing Executive Board role and composition to help ensure it reflects and aligns to refocused strategic priorities of the WSMP and obtain more senior and elected member level support and involvement</td>
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<td>For the Home Office - Consider extending funding timeframes and commitments to align with WSMP longer-term strategic plans</td>
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Enhancing reputation and raising strategic awareness

- Reviewing existing fora and working groups that are currently facilitated by WSMP, as well as participation within external fora to ensure continuing alignment to refocused strategic planning and priorities
- Establishing a more structured approach to Knowledge Management (KM), including ensuring currency of the website
- Developing a communication strategy, including better use of the website and social media (as appropriate)
Appendix 2

Organisations interviewed / providing external perspectives for the review of the WSMP:

- **Local Authorities:**
  - Caerphilly County Borough Council
  - Wrexham County Borough Council
  - Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
  - Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
  - Isle of Anglesey Council

- **Dispersal area teams** (Newport, Wrexham, Cardiff and Swansea)

- **Newport City Council** (in capacity as Lead Organisation for WSMP)

- **Welsh Government**

- **Home Office**

- **WLGA** (Welsh Local Government Association)

- **WSMP Staff and WSMP Chair**

- **UK Strategic Migration Partnerships**
  - COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)
  - 3 Regional SMPs in England

- **Welsh Refugee Council**

- **Clearsprings**

- **Community Cohesion coordinators**

**SURVEY ORGANISATIONS**
The review also included considering survey responses from a range of organisations including current members of the WSMP Executive Board.