

Ymgynghoriad ar rôl, llywodraethiant ac atebolrwydd y sector cyngorau tref a chymuned

Consultation on the role, governance and accountability of the community and town council sector

Ymateb gan: Dienw

Response from: Anonymous

[REDACTED] responses to the consultation on the role, governance, and accountability of the community and town council sector in Wales

The role and value of community and town councils in Wales.

The unique role and value of community and town councils in Wales are indispensable to our local governance. Often referred to as the 'grassroots tier,' we play a pivotal role in representing and serving our communities. By actively listening to local needs, we can deliver tailored services that significantly impact well-being and foster environmental sustainability. Our collaborative work with various groups and organisations strengthens our ability to engage with and meet the diverse needs of our community.

Our commitment to value for money is reflected in our proximity to the communities we serve, enabling us to respond effectively to their unique concerns. Initiatives such as play days during school holidays, weekly 'Coffee with Friends' sessions, and the creation of warm hubs during the winter months are not just examples of our direct support during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis but also a testament to our effectiveness. For instance, during the February half-term, we provided 734 free lunches alongside activities, and during the summer holidays, this rose to 974 free lunches, demonstrating our commitment to addressing food poverty. These efforts not only provide essential services but also strengthen the social fabric of our local areas.

Environmental sustainability is another key area in which we are making a difference. Projects like [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are excellent examples of how we are fostering environmental stewardship within our communities. These initiatives demonstrate our ability to inspire action and education, especially by engaging the younger generation in understanding the importance of sustainability.

Are Town and Community Councils Fit for Purpose in an evolving local government structure?

Town and Community Councils are well-positioned to adapt to an evolving local government landscape. Our flexibility and ability to act swiftly on issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where we set up a prescription and food delivery service, environmental concerns, or public safety, set us apart from larger governance bodies, which can be slower to respond due to more complex bureaucratic structures. Town and Community Councils have increasingly stepped in to fill these gaps with austerity measures and budget cuts affecting more prominent local authorities' capacity to deliver services. Whether through partnerships with higher-tier councils or by taking direct responsibility for services such as managing parks, public spaces, and community events, we can maintain and improve the quality of life for residents.

Governance, Scrutiny and its impact on accountability and transparency.

Governance and accountability remain critical pillars of our success. Organisations like One Voice Wales are instrumental in supporting our councils, but it is essential also to consider the

needs of Clerks and staff. A dedicated Welsh body to support Clerks and staff and mandatory Councillor training would strengthen governance by ensuring that all parties are adequately informed and supported. The Finance & Governance Toolkit for Town and Community Councils offers practical guidance to improve governance standards and financial management. Expanding access to tools like this would enhance councils' ability to meet governance and accountability standards effectively.

The One Voice Wales Practice Development Notes are another welcome resource. They provide additional guidance and best practices for councils to follow. These notes help councils stay up to date with evolving regulations and ensure consistency in how governance and accountability are approached across Wales.

Audit regulations should also be reviewed to create a more proportionate process that reflects councils' diverse financial scales. Currently, councils with minor precepts undergo the same audit process as those with much larger budgets, which can be burdensome and inefficient.

Behavioural standards within councils are also vital. Introducing a disciplinary process for councillors would create accountability and protect staff. Updating governance resources and offering training for both councillors and staff would further enhance the effectiveness of our councils.

Scope of digital/new technology to improve decision-making, service provision and participation.

Integrating digital technology has been a positive step in improving decision-making and public engagement. Hybrid meetings have successfully broadened participation and attracted a wider demographic. Expanding access to digital training and tools would ensure that councils continue evolving and representing our communities' full spectrum.

How new powers and responsibilities are utilised to support communities.

Introducing new powers, such as the General Power of Competence, allows councils to support their communities further. However, councils must be given the resources and support needed to meet these new responsibilities, mainly related to audit compliance and accreditation, as many councils have been unable to declare GPOC due to the backlog of audits.