

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please find below responses from Mawr Community Council to the Inquiry into the role, governance and accountability of the community and town council sector.

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

Community Councils play a vital role as the closest link between citizens and governance. The small areas mean that, when done right, they are able to engage with constituents far more than other representative bodies would do. Additionally, their relatively smaller size allows for nimbler decisions that are more tailored to local need.

Whether the sector is fit for purpose in an evolving local government landscape;

Whilst many town and community councils do well, there is always room for improvement and they suffer from a disparity in coverage around the country. In most counties, there are areas both with and without community councils. This means that county councils are predisposed to spend on areas without community councils whilst expecting those with to pay for similar facilities, this is to the overall detriment of town and community councils as people are effectively paying twice for these services. A system whereby there was overall coverage by community and town councils would therefore make a lot more sense.

Governance and scrutiny arrangements and its impact on accountability and transparency;

Governance and scrutiny has been improving over recent years. However, gaps still remain. As further responsibilities have been given to town and community councils, there has been no corresponding level of support. In addition to this, as these councils are by their nature small, there is no culture of people working their way up into roles. New clerks almost always struggle in the early days and even the best councils will provide training some time after they have joined. This has implications for the smooth running of councils, GPOC adherence and more. However, the financial constraints and low supply of qualified clerks leads to few alternatives. Support at current comes from bodies such as SLCC and OVW, this is welcome but material support from higher bodies would be welcome too.

Scope of digital and new technology to improve decision-making, service provision and participation in local democratic processes;

Digital technology is, on balance, good. It has increased access for various stakeholders which could be expanded in future. In theory, it is now much simpler for elected representatives of higher authorities to interact with councils and for officers of the principle authority to attend relevant meetings. It may be worth looking into how this is done more to encourage a more holistic approach.

How new powers and responsibilities for this tier of government are utilised to support communities.

New powers have already been used by many authorities and these have been well referenced in the OVW response. More support would be welcome around helping town and community councils to attain GPOC status and there could also be greater clarity around how to deal with losing and reattaining that.

Additionally, Mawr Community Council endorse the response of One Voice Wales.

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Arthur Rogers
Temporary Clerk