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Developing a Comprehensive Understanding of Community and Town Councils in Wales

Evidence Review for the Welsh Government

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Introduction

This report reviews currently available evidence concerning the structure and operation of community and town councils in Wales. The specific objectives of the review are:

- to identify the changes in community and town councils since the publication of the Aberystwyth Study in 2003;
- to provide up-to-date information around the composition and demography of community and town councils, their democratic function, financial management arrangements and other key themes as elicited through conducting the evidence review;
- to provide an understanding of community and town councils as providers of services and amenities;
- to provide an understanding of processes of engagement between community councils and communities; and
- to provide an understanding of processes of partnership working between community councils and local authorities, the voluntary sector and other bodies.

There are currently 735 community and town councils in Wales, serving populations ranging from 179 (Ganllwyd, Gwynedd) to 45,145 (Barry, Vale of Glamorgan). More than two-thirds have a population of less than 2,500 people, however the proportion of councils with populations of less than 500 has fallen from 20.2% in 1991 to 17.8% in 2011. Since 2003 there has been a net decrease of two in the number of community councils: two new councils have been created in communities that did not have them previously, one council has been dissolved, four councils have been abolished through the amalgamation of communities, and one new council has been created by the division of a community.

The relatively small number of new councils created in comparison with England can be explained by: (i) the more extensive coverage of existing community councils in Wales (70% of population compared with 37% of the population in England), (ii) limited promotion of opportunities to create new councils in Wales in comparison with England, and (iii) lack of clear understanding of benefits of creating a community council.

Councillors and elections

More than two-thirds of community councillors returned in 2012 were elected without a contest (around 5,000 individuals), and contested elections were held in less than a quarter of community council wards. Between 12 and 15% of council places were left vacant following the 2012 elections and have been filled through co-option. These figures have remained broadly consistent in elections since 1999.

The consistently low level of contestation of community council elections indicates that the size of councils may be too large relative to their electorate. The overall ratio of electors to community councillors in Wales is 207:1, but as low as 110:1 or less in Anglesey, Ceredigion and Gwynedd, which have some of the lowest proportions of contested elections.

Members of community councillors are disproportionately male, aged over 50, retired, highly educated and with a background in professional public sector employment, in comparison with the population of Wales. However, community councillors are more likely than principal councillors to be self-employed and to work in the private sector. The proportion of community councillors who are women has increased from 28% in 2002 to 32% in 2012, but women remain under-represented relative to the population. The proportion of community councillors aged over 60 has increased from 40% in 2002 to 60% in 2012.

Evidence on the effectiveness of measures introduced to widen participation on community and town councils is incomplete. There is anecdotal evidence of specific cases of the appointment of youth representatives and election of councillors aged between 18 and 21 following legislative changes, but these do not appear to be widespread to date. The uptake of new allowances designed to off-set financial costs of council membership to encourage wider participation also appears to be limited to date.

Finance and Management

The aggregate precept for community and town councils in 2013/14 is in excess of £30 million. The mean precept is approximately £40,000 and the median precept approximately £10,500. A quarter of councils set a precept of less than £5,000, but one in 10 set a precept of more than £100,000. Three councils set zero precepts for 2013/14. Two of these have consistently set zero precepts due to alternative income from car parks and property. The largest precept is set by Llanelli Rural Community Council at £959,930.

Precepts increased by an average of 88% in the 10 years between 2002/03 and 2012/13. The precepts for almost a third of councils more than doubled over this period. The average increase in precept between 2012/13 and 2013/14 is 3%. More than two-fifths of councils have set the same precept in 2013/14 as in 2012/13, and 12% of councils have set a lower precept. Councils' willingness to increase the precept to pay for additional service provision is limited by a number of issues, including concerns about double taxation.

No detailed information has been collected on other income to community and town councils since the Aberystwyth Report. This found that in 2002, the precept contributed 77% of all income to community councils. Other sources of income included rents and lettings, investments, trading fees and charges for recreational facilities.

The major areas of expenditure for community and town councils include salaries and wages for the clerk and other employees; maintenance of village halls and community centres, playing fields, parks and playgrounds, cemeteries and footpaths; lighting, seating and bus shelters; grants to local organisations; and insurance and other administrative costs. The most significant items of expenditure are consistent between the Aberystwyth Report and a small survey of rural community councils by the Wales Rural Observatory in 2010, but no detailed information on amounts spent has been collected since the Aberystwyth Report.

No detailed information on community council employees has been collected since the Aberystwyth Report, which found that of councils employed staff other than the clerk, including ground staff, caretakers and secretarial staff. The number of clerks employed full-time has remained constant between 2002 and 2010 at around one in 20, as has the number employed for less than 10 hours a week.

The Wales Audit Office has identified a number of concerns about the financial management and audit procedures of a minority of community councils, particularly smaller councils. These include issues concerning the timeliness of audits, the preparation of accounts, regulatory compliance, risk management, electors' rights to inspect accounts, and the need for corrections to accounts. It notes that corrections are required to the accounts of nearly one in 10 councils following audit, and that auditors issued qualified audit opinion about 17% of councils. However it also notes that 'as councils increase in size, their management and governance arrangements become more mature and although they are subject to more detailed audit procedures, a smaller proportion receive qualified audit opinions'.

The provision of training for community council members and employees has been significantly improved over the last decade with the formation of the National Training Advisory Group and the adoption of a National Training Strategy. An extensive range of training courses are now available to councils and have been important in driving the modernisation and professionalisation of the sector. Members from 70% of councils responding to a One Voice Wales survey 2012 had participated in training courses with a very high satisfaction rating.

However, there are concerns about the depth of commitment to training. Only 32% of councils surveyed by the Welsh Government in 2010 stated that councillors regularly attend training courses. Only between a third and two-thirds of councils have a budget for training, and in most cases the budget is less than £250 per year. There is no formal training requirement for community council clerks, and take-up of the professional CiLCA qualification has been low, with only 16 clerks from Wales registered by May 2013, although numbers are reported to have increased subsequently.

There is support from stakeholders in the sector for the adoption of a formal accreditation scheme, similar to the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme in England, as a mechanism for improving quality of processes and procedures, but with the caveat that there would need to be substantive benefits from participating in the scheme. Opinion among councils is more ambivalent, with 29% supporting an accreditation scheme in the 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey against 16% disagreeing.

Service delivery and amenity provision

The services and amenities most commonly provided by community and town councils include playing fields and open spaces, village halls and community centres, cemeteries, street lighting, noticeboards, seats and shelters, and maintenance of footpaths and war memorials. Some more distinctive and innovative examples of amenity provision include playschemes, a community orchard, and free milk for primary school children. Nearly two-thirds of community councils provide grants to local organisations to support the running of amenities, organisation of events or to help local residents in need.

Around 16% of community councils have a service level agreement with their principal authority to deliver delegated services. Amenities and functions that have been delegated include playgrounds, footpaths, street lighting and public conveniences, and the funding of youth workers. Interest in the delegation of services has increased with the prospect of funding cuts to principal authorities, but One Voice Wales has warned of the risks of community councils taking on amenities or assets without due diligence or appropriate funding.

There is limited evidence that the 'power of wellbeing' introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 has made a significant difference to the activities of community councils. This has been attributed by sector stakeholders to the restriction of spending under the power in Wales to the same limits as previous spending under Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act, confirmed by guidance in May 2013. There is equally limited evidence that lifting the spending limit would significantly extend activities by community councils, with the Aberystwyth Report finding that very few councils were spending close to the limit for Section 137 expenditure in 2002.

Community engagement and accountability

Nearly all community councils consider that they have a good relationship with the local community and a good understanding of local needs; and 9 in 10 report that members of the community readily approach the council with queries. The most common issues raised include local problems, planning, funding, community council services, but also principal council services such as refuse collection.

There is a strong opinion, especially from smaller community councils, that effective engagement comes from informal connections between members and residents, rather than more formal mechanisms. Face-to-face contact and telephone are the most frequent means by which local residents contact councils or their members.

The proportion of community councils with websites increased from less than a fifth in 2002 to nearly half in 2010. This figure is likely to have increased further since 2010, supported by additional public funding. Websites are most commonly used to publicise council minutes and agendas, and only a fifth or less of websites include more interactive content such as consultations, surveys and web forums.

Partnership working and external relations

Charter agreements between principal authorities and community councils have now been approved – or are in the process of being approved – in 13 of the 22 local authority areas in Wales (plus the Brecon Beacons National Park). The charters provide a framework for more effective relationships and partnership working between the two tiers of local government. However, there is still scepticism within local government towards charters, which is likely to militate against the comprehensive adoption of charters across Wales.

Nearly three-quarters of community councils consider that they have a good relationship with their principal authority. However, just under half agree that the community councils' comments on planning applications are taken into consideration by principal planning committees, with over a quarter disagreeing. Opportunities for the more effective engagement of community councils in the planning process have been created by Local Development Plans and an expectation of earlier involvement of community councils in formulating LDPs. This approach has been supported by training developed by Planning Aid Wales and is reinforced by the conclusions of the Independent Advisory Group on Planning. The Brecon Beacons National Park is identified as an example of good practice in engaging community councils in the preparation of the LDP.

Areas of partnership working by community and town councils with external organisations include initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development. The involvement of community councils in sustainable development has been successfully promoted by the Strong Roots project led by Cynnal Cymru, with examples of good practice including Gelligaer Community Council's funding of a school's environmental competition and a community woodland, Llandough Community Council's local biodiversity plan, and St Dogmaels Community Council's projects to tackle invasive weeds.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion of the review is that whilst evidence relating to community and town councils in Wales is not comprehensive, with unevenness in geographical coverage and the coverage of different aspects of council structure and activity, there is sufficient evidence to support the identification of key strengths and weaknesses of the sector. The identified strengths re-affirm the 'key benefits' of community and town councils outlined in the Aberystwyth Report, including local responsiveness, representation of local interests, mobilisation of community activity, additionality in service and amenity provision, accountability to the electorate, stability and continuity, tax-raising powers and the promotion of public service.

Notable weaknesses in the current structure and operation of community and town councils that can be posited from analysis of the available evidence include the range in size, setting, budget and activities of councils, which makes it difficult to generalise about the sector or to introduce measures relating to the whole sector; statutory and self-imposed restrictions on financial capacity; risks relating to inconsistent compliance with guidance and legal obligations by a minority of councils; a variable electoral mandate, with a large number of uncontested elections; discrepancies in the representativeness of councillors relative to the socio-demographic profile of the communities they serve; and short-comings in the knowledge and understanding of the local government system of some councillors and clerks.

Progress has been made in addressing these weaknesses through measures introduced since 2003, notably the significant strengthening of the structural and legislative framework for community and town councils, which has promoted the modernisation of the sector, and enhanced opportunities for councils to grow their role in service provision and community leadership. However, available evidence suggests that this potential has not been fully realised. The key limitations identified from the analysis of evidence reviewed for this report are: (i) restricted funding and resources, including controls on spending under the power of wellbeing and lack of clarity on double taxation; (ii) limited resources and leadership to support programmes and initiatives to promote capacity-building in community councils, including promoting creation of new councils; and (iii) a culture within some community councils that is suspicious of change and cautious about the professionalisation of the sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Community and town councils are the most local level of government in Wales, existing in 735 communities in rural, small town, suburban and urban parts of the country. They are statutory authorities, with powers defined in legislation in relation to the provision of certain local services and amenities, and have a right to consultation in areas such as town and country planning. Community and town councils have the power to raise a precept, and are elected bodies, with members accountable to the public through the ballot box. Collectively, community and town councils in Wales engage some 8,000 individuals in voluntary service as councillors, and are responsible for managing an aggregate annual budget in excess of £40 million.

1.2 However, knowledge about the structure and workings of community and town councils continues to be limited in comparison with other parts of the local government system. In 2003, Aberystwyth University was commissioned by the then Welsh Assembly Government to undertake a *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*, which was the first comprehensive study of the sector in Wales. The evidence assembled in the 'Aberystwyth Report' has informed the subsequent development of policy and practice for community and town councils in Wales, including provisions introduced in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. Yet, the Aberystwyth Report is a snapshot of the community and town council sector at a particular point in time. Elements of its research have been replicated in more recent studies, including the Welsh Government's *Community and Town Councils Survey* (2010) and *Local Government Candidates Survey* (2012) and reviews of elections to community and town councils by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales, but in many other respects the Aberystwyth Report remains the most recent source of data on community and town councils in Wales.

1.3 The purpose of this review is to synthesise existing evidence on community and town councils in Wales, with the aim of developing an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the sector. The review is intended to inform future policy development on community and town councils as well as the work of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery. In particular, the remit of the review includes the following key objectives:

- to identify the changes in community and town councils since the publication of the Aberystwyth Study in 2003;
- to provide up-to-date information around the composition and demography of community and town councils, their democratic function, financial management arrangements and other key themes as elicited through conducting the evidence review;
- to provide an understanding of community and town councils as providers of services and amenities;
- to provide an understanding of processes of engagement between community councils and communities; and
- to provide an understanding of processes of partnership working between community councils and local authorities, the voluntary sector and other bodies.

Sources of information and evaluation of evidence

1.4 In addition to the research mentioned above, the review draws on a range of existing datasets and documents, including surveys and reports produced by One Voice Wales, the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, the Independent Advisory Group on Planning, and the Wales Audit Office; guidance documents and information materials produced by bodies including the Welsh Government, One Voice Wales, Society of Local Council Clerks, Welsh Local Government Association and Planning Aid Wales; evidence presented to the National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee in relation to the Local Government (Wales) Measure; publicly available information from

community and town council and principal authority websites; and privately collated information provided by stakeholder organisations. The collection and analysis of these data has been complemented by a small number of interviews with representatives of key stakeholder organisations, including the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, One Voice Wales, Planning Aid Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks and the Welsh Local Government Association. Sources of information are identified in footnotes, with full bibliographic details in the list of references at the end of the report.

1.5 Part of the remit of this review has been to assess the robustness and reliability of the evidence available relating to community and town councils. The overall assessment is that the available evidence is uneven, with inconsistencies in geographical coverage and variable detail in respect of different aspects of council structure and activity. In particular, there are limitations in the robustness and coverage of statistical evidence relating to the delivery of services by community councils and especially the delegation of services by principal authorities, partnership working by community councils, the extent and nature of training undertaken by councillors and clerks, the adoption of Welsh language schemes, the participation of community councils in local council forums, and the impact of provisions introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, including the power of wellbeing, youth representatives and changes to arrangements for community meetings and community polls. There is also an absence of detailed, research-based evidence on the recruitment of councillors/candidates and motivations for standing for community councils, processes of community council decision-making, including setting precepts, the dynamics of interactions between community councils and principal authorities, and the opinions of councils and councillors towards recent and prospective changes affecting the sector.

1.6 The two broadest sources of evidence are research for the Aberystwyth Report, undertaken in 2002-03 (and especially the postal questionnaire survey of community and town councils in 2002), and the Community and Town Councils Survey undertaken by Welsh Assembly Government Social Research in 2010. These two surveys have generated substantial datasets and both are methodologically robust in their design. However, a number of cautionary observations can be attached to both surveys. Firstly, the surveys had response rates of 60% (Aberystwyth Report) and 56% (WAG survey) respectively and are therefore not comprehensive datasets. Whilst these response rates are relatively high for questionnaire surveys,[1] and whilst analysis of councils responding to the Aberystwyth Report survey revealed no systematic bias in terms of council size or location,[2] it might be postulated that councils responding to the surveys were also more likely to be active in other aspects of their work, and as such it is possible that the survey results slightly over-state activity levels across the sector. Secondly, in both cases questionnaires were sent to council clerks and the extent to which council members were consulted in their completion is unknown. This should not have affected the accuracy of factual information provided, but may have a bearing on the evaluative questions contained in the 2010 survey as it is not necessarily clear whether the responses received are the views of the council or of the clerk. Thirdly, both surveys are necessarily snapshots in time. Whilst the Aberystwyth Report remains the most extensive research project undertaken on the local council sector in Britain to date, its results are now over 10 years old and do not necessarily still reflect an actual picture of the sector. Although the WAG survey is more recent, its results still pre-date the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, and therefore do not provide any evidence in relation to the impact of this legislation.

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[1] The Aberystwyth Report survey was administered entirely as a postal survey, whilst the 2010 WAG survey was distributed and returned by e-mail, with an option for councils to return questionnaires by post. This different approach does not appear to have produced any significant difference in the overall response rate.

[2] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales: Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

1.7 Furthermore, although the 2010 Welsh Assembly Government survey was designed in part as a follow-up to the Aberystwyth Report, the robustness of comparison between the results of the two surveys is constrained by three factors. Firstly, the councils responding to the 2010 survey had not necessarily responded to the earlier 2002 survey (no information on this is provided in the published report from the 2010 survey). As such, differences in results, especially those of a relatively small magnitude, may reflect differences in the sample rather than actual changes over time. Secondly, the 2010 survey covered a smaller number of topics than the 2002 survey and on some topics worded questioned differently. As such, data provided on these topics may not be directly comparable. Thirdly, the compilation and categorisation of data from the 2010 survey was undertaken differently for some topics than for equivalent questions in the 2002 survey, meaning that the presented results cannot be directly compared as, for example, the interval levels are different. Accordingly, whilst it is possible to identify broad trends in some cases, results from the two surveys cannot be reliably compared to identify detailed changes over time. Where results from the two surveys are juxtaposed in this report, this is done not to indicate change over time, but to highlight areas where the survey findings reinforce each other, or topics on which the two surveys present contrasting evidence.

1.8 Three further surveys were also consulted in this evidence review. The Local Government Candidates Survey was conducted by Welsh Government Social Research following the May 2012 local elections. The overall response rate of 35% is reasonable for a questionnaire of this type, and included 2,450 responses from elected community and town councillors, equating to around 30% of all community and town councillors. Comparison of data on gender and age from the survey with earlier data from the Aberystwyth Report, suggests that there are no major systematic biases in the profile of the survey responses (it is unclear whether the small differences between the two surveys reflect different samples or indicate change over time). As such, the survey results can be treated with a relatively high degree of confidence, although it is possible that there is some distortion from the absence of data from Isle of Anglesey (where elections were postponed to 2013), from variations in response rates between principal authority areas, and from the exclusion of co-opted council members.

1.9 The Wales Rural Observatory's Community Services Survey conducted in 2010 included questions relating to major areas of community council expenditure, the provision of recycling services and initiatives to support crime prevention. The results for these questions were not published in the summary report for the survey, but were obtained for this review. Whilst these data present indicative evidence on community council spending and services, their major limitation is that the survey only covered communities in local authority areas eligible for the Wales Rural Development Plan, and as such excluded councils in more urban settings and most of the councils serving populations of more than 10,000 residents. The data is also not directly comparable to data from the 2003 Aberystwyth Report due to differences in the wording of questions.

1.10 The final survey consulted in the review is a Training Needs Survey undertaken by One Voice Wales in 2012 to inform the National Training Strategy. The survey was e-mailed to all member councils of One Voice Wales (and therefore excluded councils who are not members of One Voice Wales), and the summary report does not provide details of the response rate or profile of responding councils. Further, it might be postulated that as the respondents to the survey were in effect self-selecting, councils already engaged with training would be more likely to reply. As such, the results of the Training Needs Survey should be considered as indicative rather than representative, and should be regarded as over-stating the level of participation in training across the sector as a whole.

1.11 Non-questionnaire-based quantitative evidence relating to community and town councils, includes the Wales Audit Office's summary review of council accounts published in September 2013, which is comprehensive in its coverage but narrow in the objectives of its analysis; and data on election results compiled by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (LDBCW) from information supplied by principal authorities. The LDBCW (previously the Local Government Boundary Commission) has compiled this information for elections to community and town councils in 2004, 2008 and 2012, enumerating the number of councillors elected with or without a contest by principal authority area. However, checking of the 2012 data for this review identified a number of issues concerning the accuracy and consistency of data provided by principal authorities. The LDBCW is currently correcting these data, however in this report the data is drawn on only at a general level as the figures available at the time of writing were not sufficiently robust to support detailed analysis.

1.12 The LDBCW elections data were checked against election results published on principal authority websites, which were also used to compile data on the contestation of elections by council or ward reported in chapter 2. This information may be considered as reliable, especially where copies of the official notifications of results are archived online, but it is not comprehensively available for the whole of Wales. One authority, Gwynedd, has not published results of elections to community and town councils online, and several authorities have only published full results for wards or councils with contested polls, such that publicly available data is incomplete for councils without contested elections.

1.13 Data has also been compiled specifically for this review on precepts set by community and town councils, again from principal authority websites (usually from online copies of Council Tax Information Booklets for households). Again this evidence is reliable where available, but is not comprehensively available for the whole of Wales, with several authorities not publishing details of community and town council precepts on their websites. These authorities were contacted directly to obtain precept data, however two authorities did not respond to the requests for information.

1.14 In addition to the quantitative data discussed above, qualitative evidence relating to community and town councils is available from a range of sources and in a range of forms. These include evidence submitted or presented to inquiries including the National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee's hearings on the National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Local Government) Order 2010 and the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, and the Independent Advisory Group on planning reform; case studies described in publications by the Welsh Government and One Voice Wales; and information collated from community and town council websites and other public sources. Case study evidence, in particular, should be considered as illustrative rather than representative, as generalisations cannot be made from these specific examples to the sector as a whole.

1.15 In consideration of the limitations in the evidence available from secondary data sources, as discussed above, a small number of key informant interviews were also conducted for this review. These included interviews with senior officers of the three largest representative associations: the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales, representing community and town councils; the Wales Co-ordinating Officer for the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), representing council clerks; and the Head of Policy for the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), representing principal authorities. These interviews were designed to obtain information about aspects of community and town council activity for which the available evidence base is limited, notably the impact of provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011; and to canvass informed opinion on the interpretation of the available evidence. The information obtained through these interviews is informed expert knowledge and opinion accrued through discussions with members of the respective organisations, but it also inevitably reflects the personal interpretation of the interviewee and the strategic interests of the body concerned, and is as such subjective evidence. Two further interviews were also conducted with the Chair of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales and the Chief Executive of Planning Aid Wales in order to obtain factual information concerning community reviews and community council electoral arrangements, and the involvement of community and town councils in planning and training on planning, respectively.

The development of community and town councils

1.16 Community and town councils were established in Wales by the Local Government Act 1972, replacing the previous structure of parish councils – which has been created in rural areas of Wales by the Local Government Act 1894 – as well as a number of urban district councils and municipal boroughs in small towns. The nomenclature of 'community council' was adopted for Wales in the Local Government Act 1972 as the equivalent of 'parish council' in England, and reflected the separation of church and state in Wales with no established church.

1.17 The Local Government Act 1972 set out the powers of community and town councils in relation to particular areas and functions, including burial grounds (s 214), conference facilities (s 144), provision of entertainment and support of the arts (s 145), provision of information (s 142), the acquisition of land (s 139), public buildings and village halls (s 133), and the promotion of tourism (s 144). In specified areas, community and town councils were permitted to grant fund other bodies to provide amenities in addition to direct provision. Additionally, Section 137 of the Act enabled community councils to "incur expenditure which in their opinion is in the interests of their area or any part of it, all or some of its inhabitants", subject to a capping of the maximum expenditure per resident set in Section 137(4) of the Act and subsequently modified through Statutory Instruments.

1.18 In addition, community and town councils have been granted powers by a number of pieces of legislation relating to public health, highways, planning, education and traffic. A further more substantial extension of the powers of community councils was introduced by part three of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. These included powers to establish and maintain car-sharing schemes (s 26), grant-aid bus services (s 27), fund taxi fare concessions schemes (s 28), research and provide information about public transport (s 29), provide funds towards traffic calming schemes (s 30), and establish crime prevention schemes (s 31).

1.19 Regulations and procedures for the formation and governance of community councils were defined by Sections 27 to 37 of the Local Government Act 1972, covering the areas for which community councils may be established (s 27), the procedures for the establishment and dissolution of councils (s 28), orders for grouping arrangements (s 29), the constitution of a community meeting (s 32), the constitution and powers of a community council (s 33), the roles of the chair and vice-chair of councils (s 34), and the role and process of election of community councillors (s 35). The Local Government Act 2000 further introduced a new standards regime for community councils, including a statutory code of conduct and the inclusion of community councils under principal council standards committees. Under Section 50(2) of this Act, the National Assembly for Wales was made responsible for issuing the code of conduct for community councils.

1.20 The Aberystwyth Report in 2003 made 76 recommendations for the development and modernisation of community and town councils, relating to the creation and dissolution of councils, their role in providing services and amenities, the representational role of councils, community engagement, funding and financial management, elections and the profile of councillors, training and standards of conduct.[3] The recommendations were addressed to a range of specified actors, including the Welsh Government, principal authorities, One Voice Wales and community and town councils themselves. In their response to the Aberystwyth Report, the Welsh Government committed to taking forward in whole or in part 31 of the recommendations addressed to it, and rejected five recommendations.[4]

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[3] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*, pages 139-144

[4] Welsh Assembly Government (2004) *Response to the Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

1.21 In 2007, the Welsh Assembly Government issued a policy statement on local government, *A Shared Responsibility*: *Local Government's Contribution to Improving People's Lives*, which included a section setting out its expectations and commitments in relation to community and town councils. This section noted actions that had already been taken to assist the creation of One Voice Wales as a single representative forum for the sector, to initiate a National Training Advisory Group for community and town councils, and extending the responsibilities of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to cover maladministration in service failure by community and town councils. It also set out commitments to develop national guidance for charters between principal authorities and community and town councils; support the continuing development of One Voice Wales; make it easier for community councils to be established, and more difficult for councils to be disbanded; commission research on possible mechanisms for direct funding of community and town councils; extend the power of wellbeing to community and town councils; and support One Voice Wales in representing the sector in Local Service Board development projects and other public sector partnerships.[5]

1.22 As part of its response to the Aberystwyth Report, the Welsh Government established a working group on charters between principal authorities and community and town councils in early 2006. This led to the publication in March 2008 of joint guidance by the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales on relationship building and charters.[6] As outlined in the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Aberystwyth Report, the guidance supported charters as a voluntary arrangement, to be introduced by local agreement. As is discussed further in Chapter 4, the guidance proposed that charters might cover areas including consultation, information and communication, joint working and engagement, contribution to the land use planning process, practical support and sharing of expertise, ethical standards, financial arrangements, delegated responsibility for service provision, and contributions to Community Strategies.

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[5] Welsh Assembly Government (2007) *A Shared Responsibility: Local Government's contribution to improving people's lives*, paragraphs 7.14 – 7.20.

[6] Welsh Assembly Government, WLGA and One Voice Wales (2008) *A Shared Community: Relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils – final guidance.*

1.23 Nineteen of the recommendations in the Aberystwyth Report required primary legislation for implementation. Section 93 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 gave the National Assembly for Wales the power to make Assembly Measures in relation to specified matters concerning local government, including community and town councils, following the transfer of ministerial functions relating to community and town councils by the Wales Act 1998. The competence of the National Assembly for Wales to legislate in relation to community and town councils was conferred by the National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Local Government) Order 2010.

1.24 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced the most significant changes in the legislation relating to community and town councils since 1972. Part 7 of the Measure outlined a number of provisions to modify regulations for the operation of community polls (ss 88-99), amend arrangements for establishing and dissolving community councils (ss 100-115), require community councils to give public notice of vacancies to be filled by co-option (ss 116-117), enable community councils to appoint up to two community youth representatives (ss 118-121), revise procedures for reviewing community areas and electoral arrangements (ss 122-125), extend the power of wellbeing to community councils (ss 126-128), permit Ministers to pay grants to community councils (s 129), set out guidance for model charter agreements (ss 130-133), and enable Ministers to make regulations for an accreditation of quality scheme for community councils (ss 134-140) (see Table 1.1). In addition, Part 8 of the Measure extended the remit of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP) to include community and town councils, enabling community and town councils to pay allowances to members up to maximum levels set by the IRP.

Table 1.1: Provisions introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Community Meetings and Community Polls

Ss 88-92	Modified requirements for convening community meetings, including increasing threshold of electors required to convene a meeting to 50 or 10% of the electorate, whichever is lower, and procedures for issuing notice of a community meeting.
Ss 93-99	Increased the threshold of electors required to demand a community poll, and set out requirements for the consideration of the outcome of a poll by the community council and principal authority.

Organisation of Communities and Community Councils

S 100	Repealed existing provisions in the Local Government Act 1972 on the establishment and dissolution of community councils.
Ss 101-102	Outlined procedure for a community council to be established in a community with support of (i) 150 electors or 10% of electorate (whichever is less) at a community meeting, and (ii) a majority of electors voting in a community poll.
Ss 103-104	Outlined procedure for the dissolution of a community council, including increased threshold of electors required to attend a community meeting to call a poll, and majority support in a community poll.
Ss 105-108	Set out procedures for grouping community councils into a common council for two or more communities.
Ss 109-112	Set out procedures to dissolve a grouped council or separate a community from a grouped council.

Co-option of Members of Community Councils

Ss 116-117	Required community councils to give a public notice of vacancies for which co-option is intended, permitting electors to apply for co-option.

Community Youth Representatives

Ss 118-121	Enabled community councils to appoint up to two community youth representatives aged between 16 and 25.

Reviews of Community Areas and Electoral Arrangements

Ss 122-125	Required principal authorities to review community areas and permitted the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales to undertake a community review on behalf of a principal authority for a fee.

Power to Promote Wellbeing

Ss 126-128	Granted community councils the power to promote wellbeing in their area through amendment to the Local Government Act 2000.

Grants to Community Councils	
S 129	Empowered Welsh Ministers to pay a grant directly to community councils.
Model Charter Agreements	
Ss 130-133	Granted Welsh Ministers the power to set out a model charter agreement between a principal authority and community councils, and the power to require the adoption of a model charter agreement.
Accreditation of Quality in Community Government	
Ss 134-140	Enabled Welsh Ministers to introduce an accreditation of quality scheme for community councils, and set out criteria that may be included in a scheme (S 135).

**The structure, number and geographical coverage of community and town councils**

1.25 As at the end of September 2013, there are 735 community and town councils in Wales, collectively covering 96% of the nation's land surface and approximately 70% of its population. As is discussed further below, the extent and number of community and town councils has remained largely stable over the last 25 years.

1.26 There is considerable diversity in the size and setting of community and town councils. The population served by community and town councils ranges from 179 (Ganllwyd, Gwynedd) to 45,145 (Barry, Vale of Glamorgan). More than two-thirds of community and town councils have populations of less than 2,500 people, according to the 2011 Census (Table 1.2). However, the average population of a community and town council has increased over the last 20 years, with a reduction in the number of councils with populations below 500, due to population growth in accessible rural areas and the amalgamation of some small communities. Over the same period, the number of community and town councils with populations of more than 10,000 people has increased from 40 to 47 (Figure 1.1).

Table 1.2: Population of Community and Town Council Areas, 2011

Population	Number of Councils	%
<500	131	17.8%
500 – 999	194	26.4%
1000 – 2499	201	27.3%
2500 – 4999	100	13.6%
5000 – 9999	62	8.4%
10000 – 19999	38	5.1%
> 20000	9	1.2%
Total	735	100.0%

Figure 1.1: Number of councils by population, 1991 and 2011
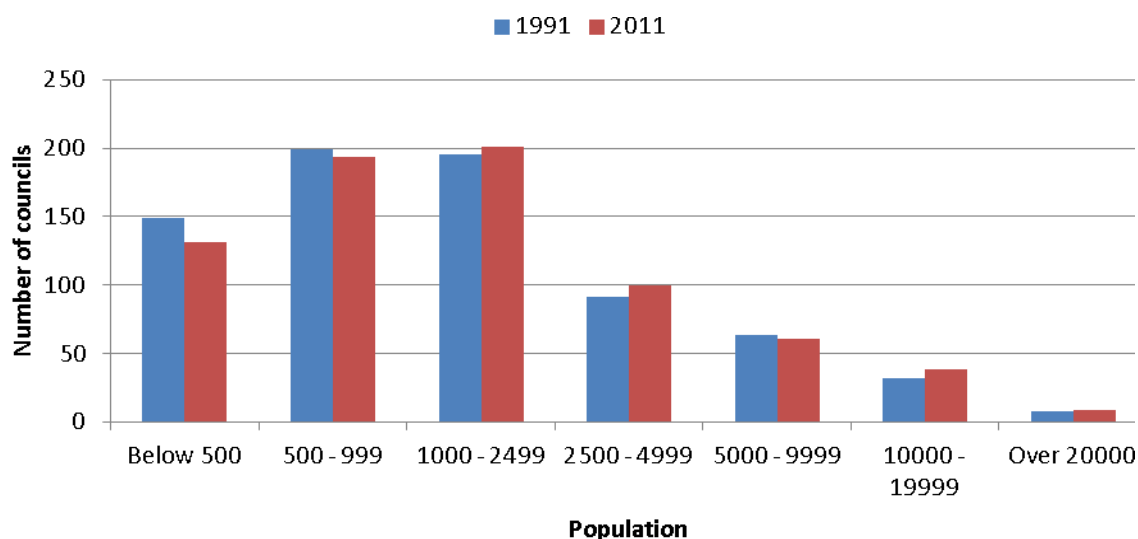
1.27 The variation in size of community and town councils has implications for the range of their activities, their capacity and their ambition. The Aberystwyth Report in 2003 noted that whilst several larger councils had argued for increased powers and an expanded role in service delivery, many smaller councils were anxious about more regulation and being compelled to take on more functions. These concerns were also articulated by Marteltwy Community Council in written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee on the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, in which they commented that the Welsh Government may have "incorrectly assessed the ambitions of members of small rural community councils, who do not necessarily want to assume some of the powers and functions currently exercised by other authorities".[7]

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[7] National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee No. 3 (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure. Stage 1 Committee Report*. Paragraph 281.

1.28 In contrast to England, where most urban areas are unparished, the whole of Wales was divided into communities in community reviews during the 1970s and 1980s, but not all have a community council. Community and town councils exist in all 22 local authority areas, but there is complete coverage in only 13 areas, and there are in total 110 communities across Wales with no council (Table 1.3). These include communities within the areas of the pre-1974 boroughs of Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Port Talbot, Rhondda and Swansea, which were excluded from the establishment of community councils by the Local Government Act 1972, as well as a small number of communities in which councils have been dissolved following provisions in the 1972 Act.[8]

Table 1.3: Geographical distribution of community and town councils in Wales

Local authority area	Community and Town Councils	Communities without council
Blaenau Gwent	4	6
Bridgend	20	0
Caerphilly	18	9
Cardiff	6	24
Carmarthenshire	72	0
Ceredigion	51	0
Conwy	33	0
Denbighshire	37	0
Flintshire	34	0
Gwynedd	64	0
Isle of Anglesey	40	0
Merthyr Tydfil	1	11
Monmouthshire	33	0
Neath Port Talbot	19	12
Newport	14	16
Pembrokeshire	77	0
Powys	111	0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	11	16
Swansea	24	15
Vale of Glamorgan	26	1
Torfaen	6	0
Wrexham	34	0
Total	*735*	*110*

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[8] Griffiths, M. P. and Lawton, A. (1992) *Community Councils in Wales*. Pontypridd: Polytechnic of Wales.

1.29 The communities without councils are predominantly urban, including inner-city areas of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea, and industrial and former mining towns in south Wales, a number of which have experienced significant deprivation as a result of economic decline and/or poor housing stock. As such, an unintended consequence of the rules adopted for community council formation in 1974 has been that the relatively few communities without councils are disproportionately concentrated in more deprived areas of Wales. The 100 most deprived census 'lower super output areas' in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011 include 62 in communities that do not have a community or town council.[9] This produces a disparity in community capacity that could become increasingly significant as the role of community councils in service delivery and planning policy develops, as observed by the Chief Executive of Planning Aid Wales:

> "The areas that need community and town councils the most are those that are least likely to have community and town councils."[10]

1.30 The Aberystwyth Report noted that procedures for establishing new community councils in Wales were more complex than procedures to establish new parish councils in England at the time, and set out a number of options for facilitating the easier creation of new councils.[11] In response to this recommendation, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 revised the required threshold of electors required to attend a community meeting to initiate the process of establishing a council from 300 electors or 30% of the electorate to 150 electors or 10% of the electorate.[12] The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 also made the process for dissolution of a community council more challenging, with an additional requirement that dissolution is supported by two-thirds of electors voting in a community poll.

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[9] Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011, Full domain rankings and area codes, https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2011.

[10] Interview.

[11] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*, paragraphs 3.9-3.13 and recommendation 3.1.

[12] Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, section 101.

1.31 In spite of these changes, since 2003 there has been a net decrease of two in the number of community and town councils in Wales. Only two new councils have been established in communities previously without councils, in Risca East and Risca West in Caerphilly, using the provisions of the 2011 Measure. One community council, Dunvant, has been dissolved under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972. Community reviews in Pembrokeshire and Powys have produced a net reduction of four councils through the amalgamation of small communities, whilst an additional council has been created in Swansea by the separation of Three Crosses community from Llanrhidian Higher community (Table 1.3).

1.32 The relatively static number of community and town councils in Wales contrasts with a significant increase in the number of parish councils in England, largely driven by the creation of new parish councils in urban and suburban areas. The Aberystwyth Report noted that over 80 new parish councils had been created in England between 1998 and 2003, and whilst accurate figures are not available, evidence suggests that at least 200 further councils have been established since 2003.

Table 1.3: Changes in communities and community councils, 2003-2013

New councils created in communities without councils

2012   Risca East Community Council and Risca West Community Council
(Caerphilly)

Dissolution of community councils

2006   Dunvant (Swansea)

New councils created through the amalgamation of communities

2008   Llanrhaedr-yn-Mochnant, from Llanrhaedr-yn-Mochnant (Denbighshire)
community and Llanrhaedr-yn-Mochnant (Montgomeryshire) community
(Powys)

2012   Castlemartin and Stackpole, from Castlemartin community and Stackpole
community (Pembrokeshire)

Scleddau and Trecwn, from Scleddau community and Trecwn community
(Pembrokeshire)

Uzmaston, Boulston and Slebech, from Slebech community and
Uzmaston and Boulston community (Pembrokeshire)

New councils created through the division of communities

2011   Three Crosses community, separated from Llanrhidian Higher
community (Swansea)

Source: Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

CASE STUDY: RISCA EAST COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND RISCA WEST COMMUNITY COUNCIL

New community councils were established in the communities of Risca West and Risca East, in the area of Caerphilly County Borough Council in November 2012. The town of Risca had had an urban district council prior to local government re-organisation in 1974, but no council was established for the community following re-organisation. Awareness of the possibility of creating a community council was prompted by a community review in 2009, which divided the community of Risca into two communities – Risca East and Risca West – coterminous with local authority wards. Interest was also generated by local issues including the closure of a care home, with campaigners arguing that the interests of the town were not being appropriately represented. The Risca East and West Community Council Action Group was formed to campaign for the creation of community councils in the two new communities, advised by One Voice Wales. The action group organised a number of events, including a music festival and a jubilee celebration, to build community identity and as a means to generate support from local people for the proposed councils and to collect names to demand a ballot. The campaign gained support from prominent figures in the community, and well-attended community meetings in early 2012 voted to request community polls to establish councils, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. In the ballots held in July 2012, electors in Risca West supported the creation of a community council by 319 votes to 79 (80% in favour), and electors in Risca East backed a community council by 197 votes to 98 (67% in favour). The creation of the two community councils was formally approved by Caerphilly County Borough Council in October 2012, with the first elections held in November 2012.

1.33 A number of reasons are suggested by stakeholders for the limited creation of new community councils in Wales. These include:

- The geographical coverage of community and town councils in Wales is already far more extensive than the coverage of parish councils in England. Only 30% of the

population of Wales is not served by a community council, compared with 63% of the population of England that does not have a parish council.[13]

- The incentives for establishing a community council are not evident to the public. Community councils are popularly perceived as expensive, adding a precept to council tax bills, but the absence of a clear definition of the role and functions of community councils means that the benefits of community councils are difficult for supporters to communicate.

- Publicity and support for the revised process of creating community councils in Wales has been less extensive than activities to promote the creation of new parish councils in England. This reflects a difference in resources. The promotion of new community councils in Wales by One Voice Wales is funded from within its core grant from the Welsh Government (£93,000 per annum for 2013-14); in England, the National Association of Local Councils has been given an additional ear-marked grant of £1 million by the Department for Communities and Local Government to promote the creation of urban parish councils, and has set up a dedicated website as a resource for groups wanting to establish a council (www.createacouncil.nalc.gov.uk/). Toolkits have also been disseminated through county associations of local councils.

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[13] Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Making it easier to set up new town and parish councils: Discussion paper*.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9360/2246057.pdf

1.34 The Local Government (Wales) Measure also introduced revised procedures for the grouping of two or more communities under a common council. This followed the recommendation of the Aberystwyth Report that voluntary grouping of communities should be promoted as "an opportunity for smaller councils to overcome the diseconomies of scale, to save expenses by cutting the duplication of meetings and of clerks' work, and to achieve a level of resources that may enable them to draw down delegated functions from principal councils".[14] Research for the Aberystwyth Report had noted that whilst around one in 20 parish councils in England were 'grouped councils', only six 'grouped councils' existed in Wales (Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council; Bay of Colwyn Council; Croesyceiliog and Llanyrafon Community Council; Cwm, Waen and Tremeirchion Community Council; Cwmbran Town Council; and Pontypool Town Council).[15]

1.35 In spite of the new guidance and revised procedures, no further groupings of communities under a common council have been initiated since 2003. This is again attributed to a lack of promotion and an absence of clear incentives for grouping. However, sector stakeholders including One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks continue to advocate grouping as a mechanism for increasing the capacity of the sector.

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[14] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*, paragraph 3.15.

[15] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

1.36 New community councils may also be created through alterations to community boundaries as part of community reviews. Community reviews are important to maintaining the relevance of community councils in three ways: (i) by altering community boundaries to take account of new developments; (ii) by amalgamating communities where the population is too small to sustain an independent community council; and (iii) by dividing communities where there are significant demands supported by objective reasons for a separate community council to be established in one part of the community. Special community reviews were completed for the whole of Wales between 1974 and 1983, which reduced the overall number of communities and community councils by amalgamating small communities, but which also divided some large communities such as Wrexham into smaller areas. Since 1983, community reviews have generally been conducted on an ad hoc basis, but requirements for a more systematic approach were introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. Principal authorities are responsible for undertaking reviews within guidance from the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. The Commission has set out an advisory timetable for community reviews preceding its own programme of reviews of principal authority electoral arrangements, and over half of the principal authorities in Wales are currently engaged in community reviews.

2. COUNCILLORS AND ELECTIONS

2.1 One of the key strengths of community and town councils is their democratic accountability. Unlike other organisations involved in community governance, which tend to rely on voluntary participation or operate as partnerships with representatives from selected partner bodies, community and town councils have legitimacy in that any local elector may stand for election to the council and that its members are accountable to the community through elections. However, there have been long-standing concerns about the level of participation in community council elections, and about the demographic profile of councillors. This chapter examines the evidence relating to patterns of participation in community and town council elections, the profile of community and town councillors, and the effectiveness of measures to broader participation.

Elections to community and town councils

2.2 Information collated by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales indicates that more than two-thirds of community and town councillors elected in May 2012 were returned without a contest – around 5,000 individuals – and that over 1,000 seats remained vacant after the elections, to be filled by co-option.[16] These figures are consistent with those for elections in 2004 and 2008, with 77% of community and town councillors returned without a contest in 2004 and 66% in 2008, and vacant seats ranging in the order of 12% to 15% of community council places.[17]

2.3 There are variations in the level of contestation of community and town council seats between principal authority areas. More than 80% of community and town councillors were returned without a contest in Blaenau Gwent, Isle of Anglesey, Monmouthshire, Powys and Wrexham, but only 38% in Rhondda Cynon Taff, 36% in Bridgend and 26% in Torfaen (Figure 2.1). No vacant seats were reported in Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport and Torfaen, but nearly a quarter of community council seats in Isle of Anglesey were not filled in the delayed elections in May 2013.

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[16] Data supplied by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales. Precise figures are not available due to inconsistencies in reporting by principal authorities.

[17] Data supplied by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales.

2.4 An alternative analysis of the election results by community council wards reveals a similar pattern. Across the 21 local authorities for which full data are available,[18] only just under a quarter of community and town council wards had contested elections in May 2012 (May 2013 in Anglesey). There were at least 11 wards in which no candidates were nominated. These figures suggest only a small increase in the number of contested wards on the 1999 community council elections – analysed in the Aberystwyth Report – when 80% of wards were uncontested. Contested elections are more common in more urban wards in communities with larger populations, though not exclusively so, and the proportion of wards without a contested election ranged from 32% in Torfaen to 94% in Isle of Anglesey (Table 2.1). However, nearly half of community council wards in both Swansea and Wrexham did not have enough candidates to fill all available vacancies.

Figure 2.1: Contested and uncontested seats on community and town councils, May 2012
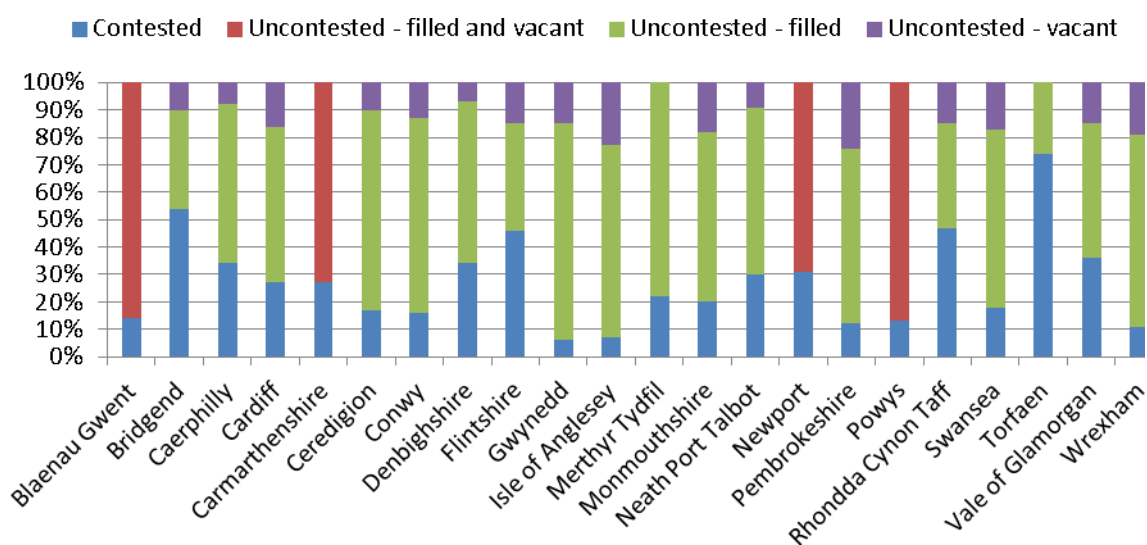
Source: Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales

Note: 'Uncontested-filled' are seats filled by candidates without an election; 'Uncontested – vacant' are seats not filled at the May 2012 elections. Figures differentiating between these categories are not available for all local authority areas. Figures for Isle of Anglesey are for May 2013.

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[18] Results not available for councils in Gwynedd. Data collected from published election results on principal authority websites.

Table 2.1: Contested and uncontested community council wards in Wales, May 2012

	Contested wards	Uncontested wards	Breakdown of uncontested wards		
			All seats filled	Vacant seats	No candidates
Blaenau Gwent	15% (2)	85% (11)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bridgend	50% (23)	50% (23)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Caerphilly	31% (20)	69% (45)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cardiff	30% (3)	70% (7)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Carmarthenshire	26.5% (36)	73.5% (100)	n/a	n/a	4% (5)
Ceredigion	17% (15)	83% (73)	44% (39)	38% (33)	1% (1)
Conwy	16% (11)	84% (59)	44% (31)	39% (27)	1% (1)
Denbighshire	43% (24)	57% (32)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Flintshire	31% (25)	69% (55)	n/a	n/a	1% (1)
Gwynedd	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Isle of Anglesey (2013)	6% (5)	94% (79)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merthyr Tydfil	50% (1)	50% (1)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Monmouthshire	19% (23)	81% (100)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Neath Port Talbot	31% (16)	69% (36)	44% (23)	23% (12)	2% (1)
Newport	29% (6)	71% (15)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pembrokeshire	13% (15)	87% (100)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Powys	12.5% (12)	87.5% (175)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rhondda Cynon Taff	46% (21)	54% (25)	30% (14)	20% (9)	4% (2)
Swansea	15% (8)	85% (45)	36% (19)	49% (26)	0
Torfaen	68% (25)	32% (12)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vale of Glamorgan	40% (25)	60% (37)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wrexham	13% (11)	87% (71)	38% (31)	49% (40)	0
Total	*23.6% (340)*	*76.4% (1101)*	*n/a*	*n/a*	*n/a*

2.5 The 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey found that half of councils had co-opted members, including co-options to fill casual vacancies. Almost all councils that had filled vacancies through co-option (92%) had advertised the position, before the legal requirement to do so; however, only 31% of councils reported that they received a good response from the public when council seats were advertised.[19]

2.6 The consistently high number of community and town council wards without contested elections suggests that efforts to publicise elections and encourage individuals to stand as candidates have had little impact, but also that the size of councils (in terms of the number of members) may be too large relative to their electorate. Analysis by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales shows that the overall ratio of electors to community councillors in Wales is 207:1, but that it can be considerably lower in some rural areas.[20] In Pembrokeshire the electors to community councillors ratio is 99:1, in Isle of Anglesey it is 109:1, in Ceredigion it is 110:1 and in Gwynedd it is 114:1. These counties are among the areas with the lowest proportions of contested elections.

2.7 The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission notes that there is currently no published guidance for the determination of an appropriate level of representation for community councils, and that different models were adopted in recent community reviews in Flintshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys. The Commission is actively considering adopting standard guidance for the size of community councils across Wales based on incremental increases in the number of councillors relative to the size of the electorate.[21]

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[19] Welsh Assembly Government (2011) Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.

[20] Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (2013) Community Council Size. Unpublished discussion paper.

[21] Ibid.

Demographic profile of councillors

2.8 Information about the profile of community and town councillors has been substantially improved by the 2012 survey of local government candidates undertaken by the Welsh Government. This received reponses from 2,450 candidates elected as community councillors, including 244 who were also elected as principal authority members.[22] This sample represents approximately 30% of all community councillors in Wales and is a significantly larger evidence base than that examined in the Aberystwyth Report. Data on the gender, age and linguistic ability of community councillors in the Aberystwyth Report was collected indirectly via a questionnaire survey of councils in 2002, generally completed by council clerks; data on other demographic characteristics of councillors and their council work was sourced through a questionnaire of a limited sample of 146 councillors in 17 case study councils.[23]

2.9 The 2012 survey indicates that 68% of community councillors are men and 32% are women. This suggests that female representation on community and town councils is slightly higher than on principal councils, and also slightly higher than in 2002, when only 28% of community councillors were women. However, the 2012 survey suggests that the age range of community councillors has become more concentrated. It found that over 60% of community councillors were aged over 60, and that over 80% were aged over 50. This compares with data collected for the Aberystwyth Report which showed that 40% of community councillors in 2002 were aged over 60.[24] The age profile of councillors is discussed further later in this chapter.

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[22] Welsh Government Social Research (2013) *Local Government Candidates Survey 2012*.

[23] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales.* Note data was collected in 2002.

[24] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

2.10 In other respects, community councillors tend to be over-representative of majority social groups, with the 2012 survey finding that 99.5% are white, 83% identifying themselves as Christian, and 98% are self-identified as heterosexual.[25]

2.11 Community councillors are more likely to speak or understand Welsh than the general population. The 2012 survey found that 38% of community councillors responding could understand spoken Welsh, 36% could speak Welsh, 36% could read Welsh and 31% could write in Welsh.[26] These figures are higher than for principal councillors, and arguably reflect both the disproportionate concentration of community and town councils in areas with greater prevalence of Welsh language speakers, and the tendency observed in research for the Aberystwyth Report for members of community councils in these areas to be Welsh-speakers. For instance, in 2002, over three-quarters of community councillors in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey were Welsh-speakers.[27]

2.12 In line with the age profile, 45% of community councillors are retired – roughly the same proportion as for principal councillors, and broadly the same as in the more limited 2002 survey for the Aberystwyth Report. Self-employed workers are also over-represented, accounting for nearly a quarter of all community councillors. This may indicate a continuing strong representation of farmers and small business owners on community councils, as had been identified in earlier studies, but may also reflect the benefits of flexibility in working hours in permitting involvement in council meetings and activities. Only a fifth of community councillors in 2012 were in full-time employment – fewer than in the 2002 survey, though this may reflect sampling differences rather than an actual trend (Table 2.2).

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[25] Welsh Government Social Research (2013) *Local Government Candidates Survey 2012*.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

2.13 Apart from the over-representation of self-employed workers, the 2012 survey indicates that community councillors are disproportionately drawn from professional middle class backgrounds, especially within the public sector (see again Table 2.2). The current or most recent employment of 29% of community councillors was in managerial positions, with 28% in professional or technical positions, and 9% working as teachers, lecturers or researchers. Roughly equivalent numbers of community councillors worked, or had worked, in the private sectors and in the public sector (43% and 42% respectively), with public sector employment particularly in education and local government. However, community councillors are notably more likely to have been employed in the private sector than principal councillors (43% compared to 37%). Similarly, whilst just over half of community councillors have a degree or equivalent professional qualification, this is slightly lower than for principal councillors, and the proportion of community councillors with no qualifications is higher than for principal councillors (Table 2.3).

Table 2.2: Employment characteristics of community and town councillors, 2012

	Retired	45%
	Self-employed	24%
Employment Status	Full-time employment	19%
	Part-time employment	8%
	Unemployed	1%
	Other	3%
	Managerial/executive	29%
Current or most recent type of employment	Professional/technical	28%
	Teacher/lecturer/researcher	9%
	Administrative/clerical/secretarial/sales	13%
	Manual or craft	21%
	Private sector	43%
	Public sector – education	14%
	Public sector – local government	12%
Current or most recent sector of employment	Public sector – NHS	5%
	Public sector – central government	3%
	Public sector – other	6%
	Voluntary sector	5%
	Other	10%

Source: Local Government Candidates Survey 2012

(Employment status, n=2430; Employment type, n=1246; Employment sector, n=2450)

Table 2.3: Highest educational qualifications of councillors, 2012

Qualification level	Community councillors	Principal councillors
NVQ 4 or Equivalent (Degree, professional qualification)	51%	54%
NVQ 3 or Equivalent (A-level)	9%	10%
NVQ 1 or 2 or Equivalent (GCSE, O-level, CSE)	25%	25%
None of the above qualifications	14%	11%

Source: Local Government Candidates Survey 2012
(Community councillors, n=2311; Principal councillors, n=449)

2.14 The 2012 survey found that 83% of community councillors had served as a councillor previously and that 75% had stood for election previously – suggesting that 8% had been co-opted during the previous council term, which is in line with analysis of election results.[28]

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[28] Welsh Government Social Research (2013) *Local Government Candidates Survey 2012*.

2.15 The above evidence indicates that as an aggregate group, the profile of community councillors is not representative of the diversity of the population of Wales. Compared with the Welsh population, community councillors are more likely to be men, aged over 50, retired, with backgrounds in professional, public sector employment, with a relatively high level of education. The under-representation of women, younger people in employment and individuals from lower income background may reflect particular obstacles to participation in community governance, as discussed further below; but the high level of continuity of service as community councillors and low proportion of contested elections also reinforces these demographic biases. However, it should be noted that the available evidence is not sufficiently fine-grained to support analysis of geographical variations in the profile of councillors – and thus comparison with the population profile of individual communities, and there is insufficient evidence on the recruitment of councillors to confidently identify casual factors for the observed biases.

2.16 The Aberystwyth Report in 2003 observed that "councils whose membership does not reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve are limited in their ability to engage with that community and fully to represent its interests to external bodies. Inclusive councils have a richer relationship with their communities, greater public interest in, and engagement with, council work, and can be more effective advocates of community interests".[29] The report accordingly made a number of recommendations for action to encourage broader participation in community councils, which are discussed further in the sections below.

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[29] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 8.3

Youth representatives

2.17 As noted above, the age profile of community councillors is disproportionately weighted towards older generations, with four out of five councillors aged over 50, three out of five aged over 60, and two out of five aged over 70. In contrast, only one in 20 community councillors are aged under 40, and just one in every 100 are aged under 30 (Table 2.4). The under-representation of young people was identified as a concern for the community council sector in the Aberystwyth Report, including engagement with young people under 21 who were at the time ineligible to stand for election to community councils, but who were "particularly concerned with a number of councils' areas of responsibility, including recreational facilities and community transport".[30] In order to address these issues the Aberystwyth Report made two key recommendations.

2.18 Firstly, the Aberystwyth Report reiterated the recommendation of the Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales that the minimum age for candidates in local elections should be lowered from 21 to 18.[31] This change was introduced by the Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006. However, evidence for the impact of the change is limited. The results of the 2012 candidates' survey do not differentiate between councillors aged 18 to 20 and those aged 21 to 29, but the very small number of councillors recorded in the larger category suggest that there has not been a significant number of individuals aged under 21 elected to councils. Anecdotal evidence nonetheless identifies a number of cases of community council members aged under 21 in Wales, including students elected to Aberystwyth Town Council, a 19-year old co-opted to Pontypridd Town Council, and an 18-year old elected to Llanfairfechan Community Council.

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[30] Ibid., paragraph 8.5

[31] Ibid., recommendation 8.3.

Table 2.4: Age of community councillors, 2012

18 – 29 years	1%
30 – 39 years	4%
40 – 49 years	11%
50 – 59 years	23%
60 – 69 years	40%
70 – 79 years	18%
80 years and over	3%

Source: Local Government Candidates Survey 2012

(n=2430)

2.19 Secondly, the Aberystwyth Report recommended the creation of a new provision to permit community and town councils to appoint two 'youth representatives' aged between 16 and 25.[32] Whilst the age category covered by this provision over-laps with the new minimum age for candidates to elections, the youth representatives are additional to the ordinary members of a council, such that the mechanism is available to councils where all seats have been filled through elections. The provision was introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

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[32] Ibid., recommendation 8.4.

2.20 No comprehensive information is currently available on the uptake of the capacity to appoint youth representatives, but councils known to have appointed youth representatives include Solva Community Council in Pembrokeshire and Welshpool Town Council in Powys. The Welsh Assembly Government Community and Town Councils Survey in 2010 reported that 6% of responding councils had youth members aged between 16 and 25, but the intention and interpretation of this question is ambiguous as the provision to appoint youth representatives had not been enacted at the time. The figures are therefore likely to indicate full councillors aged between 18 and 25.[33]

2.21 The Aberystwyth Report additionally recommended that community and town councils should be encouraged to work with local youth councils and youth forums. In areas where youth councils are well established and active, this has frequently been the preferred mechanism for community and town councils to engage young people, and can be as effective as the appointment of youth representatives. A noted example of this is in Penarth, where the town's youth council is not only part-funded by the town council, but youth council members – who are elected by their peers to represent youth organisations and schools - attend meetings of the town council and are able to speak to represent the interests of young people.[34]

Councillors' workloads and the payment of allowances

2.22 Membership of a community council can entail a substantial time commitment, especially on larger and more active councils, involving not only attendance at council and committee meetings, but also preparation and paperwork, reading consultation documents, letter writing, meetings with principal council officers and other outside bodies, meetings with constituents, case work, training, attendance at civic events and representation of the council on other bodies and at meetings and conferences. A survey of 146 councillors for the Aberystwyth Report found that they spent an average of 13.2 hours per month on council activity, and that 1 in 10 councillors spent more than 20 hours a month on council business.[35]

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[33] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[34] http://www.penarthtowncouncil.gov.uk/Core/Penarth-Town-Council/Pages/Penarth_Youth_Action_1.aspx

[35] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 8.8

2.23 The time demands on community councillors are likely to have increased in the decade since the survey mentioned above, as councils have expanded their activities and modernised their procedures. As such, the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales has posed the question, "what is the difference between a fully committed town councillor and a ward member on a unitary council that's got no responsibilities?"[36]

2.24 The Aberystwyth Report identified the voluntary, unpaid commitment required from councillors as an obstacle to wider participation, noting that "the time and costs involved in participating fully in council activity can therefore act as a deterrent to potential councillors, particularly those in full-time employment or with family commitments or who otherwise have limited free time or limited disposable income."[37] Accordingly, the Aberystwyth Report recommended that community and town councils should be permitted to pay allowances and expenses to councillors as a means of reducing barriers to participation by under-represented groups.

2.25 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 in effect enabled community and town councils to pay allowances and expenses to members by extending the remit of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales. Since 2011, the panel has consulted with stakeholders including One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks and the North Wales Association of Larger Town and Community Councils to develop a framework for payments. In its most recent Annual Report, the panel noted that "it is clear that there is considerable variation in the functions and responsibilities across councils and therefore in the role of individual councils", but that evidence- gathering had permitted some initial determinants to be made.[38]

2.26 The new regulations introduced by the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2013-14, permit community and town councils to make payments to members in respect of the following:[39]

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[36] Interview.

[37] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 8.9.

[38] Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (2012) *Annual Report*, paragraph 3.5.

[39] Ibid., determinations 7-12.

- costs incurred in telephone usage, information technology, consumables etc, up to a maximum of £100 per year;

- travel costs for attending approved duties outside the area of the council;

- subsistence expenses for attending to approved duties outside the area of the council;

- an attendance allowance for attending to approved duties outside the area of the council;

- a financial loss allowance for attending to approved duties outside the area of the council; and

- a civic allowance to the Mayor/Chair and Deputy Mayor/Chair

2.27 The determinations of the Independent Remuneration Panel are permissive powers that enable but do not compel councils to make payments to members within the limits set. The introduction of allowances for community councils has divided opinion in the sector, with concerns that it would place pressures on the budgets and precepts of smaller councils, attract the 'wrong type' of councillor, be open to abuse, and diminish the voluntary ethos of community councillors. In public consultation on the Aberystwyth Report recommendations, a majority of submissions opposed the original proposal to pay an 'annual allowance' to community councillors. The modified proposal enacted by the Independent Remuneration Panel to cover expenses up to £100 per year was initially suggested during this consultation exercise.[40] There is no comprehensive information available on the extent to which community councils have introduced allowances under the new regulations, but anecdotal evidence suggests that uptake has been very limited.

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[40] Welsh Assembly Government (2004) *The Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales: Summary of Responses to Consultation*.

3. FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 Community and town councils in Wales are responsible for spending over £40 million of public funds each year (of which £30 million is raised through the precept),[41] an increase of around £15 million on the estimated position in 2002.[42] They differ from other community groups and partnerships in being able to raise funds from taxation through a precept to council tax. This capacity brings with it responsibility for the sound and accountable management of finances. This section examines the evidence on community council funding and expenditure, and issues concerning financial management and auditing, as well as efforts to professionalise management in the sector, including training for council members and employees.

Community council funding and income

3.2 The major source of funding for community councils is the precept. The aggregate precept set by community councils for 2013/14 totals over £30 million, but is heavily weighted by the higher precepts set by larger community councils. The mean precept for 2013/14 is approximately £40,000, but the median precept is significantly lower at £10,500. Individual precepts range from zero to £959,930 for Llanelli Rural Community Council (Figure 3.1). A quarter of community councils have set a precept of less than £5,000, whilst one in 10 councils set a precept of over £100,000 (Table 3.1).

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[41] Wales Audit Office (2013) *Improving Finance Management and Governance: Issues from the Audit of Community Council Accounts 2011-12*.

[42] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 7.1

Figure 3.1: Precept set by community and town councils, 2013-14 (n=711)
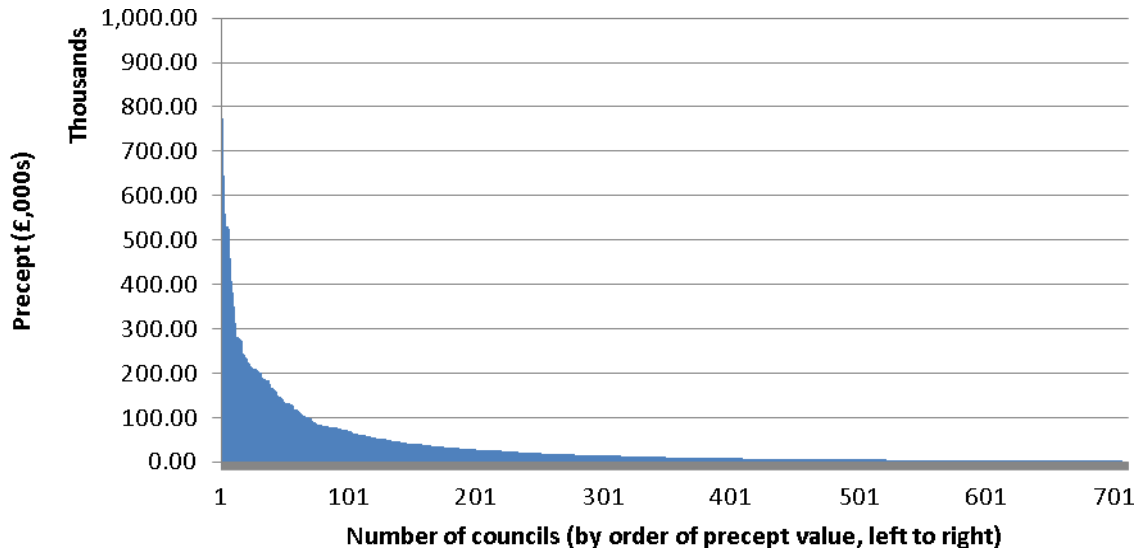
(NB: Data not available for Blaenau Gwent and Neath Port Talbot)

Source: Principal authorities

Table 3.1: Precepts set by community and town council, 2013-14, by band

|	% of councils
More than £500,000	1%
£250,000 - £499,999	1%
£100,000 - £249,999	7%
£50,000 - £99,999	9%
£25,000 - £49,999	13%
£10,000 - £24,999	21%
£5,000 - £9,999	24%
£2,500 - £4,999	16%
£1,000 - £2,499	7%
£0 - £999	1%

(n = 711; NB: Data not available for Blaenau Gwent and Neath Port Talbot)

Source: Principal authorities

3.3 Three community councils set a zero precept for 2013/14: Llanrhidian Lower (Swansea), St David's (Pembrokeshire), Trelech (Carmarthenshire). St David's and Trelech community councils have consistently set zero precepts, due to alternative sources of income from car parks and property respectively. Llanrhidian Lower Community Council set a zero precept for 2013/14 having recorded a surplus of £4,500 in 2012/13, when it had set a precept of £3,500.

3.4 Community and town council precepts increased by an average of 88% in the decade between 2002/03 and 2012/13. For almost a third of councils, the precept had more than doubled over this period, with some increases of more than 400%. Only around 2.5% of councils had a lower precept in 2012/13 than in 2002/03 (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Change in precept for community and town councils, 2002-03 to 2012-13
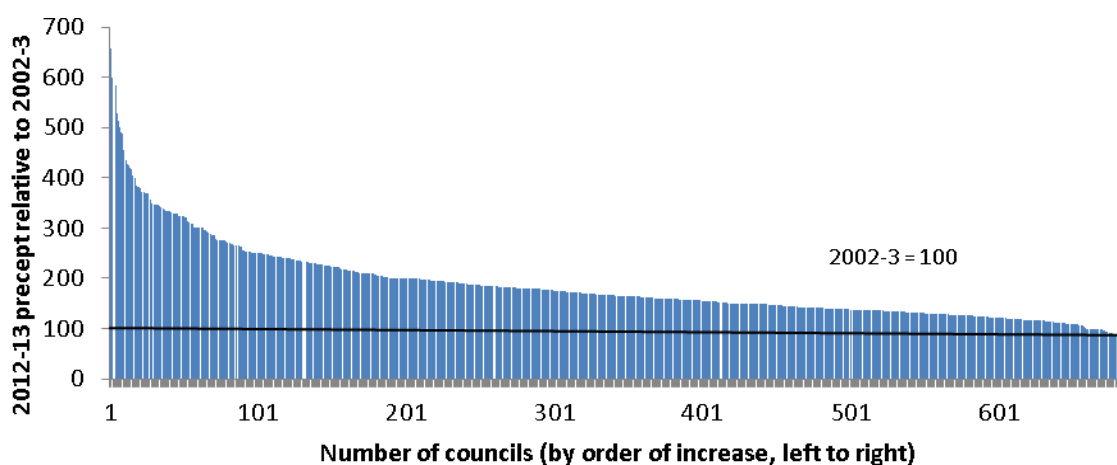
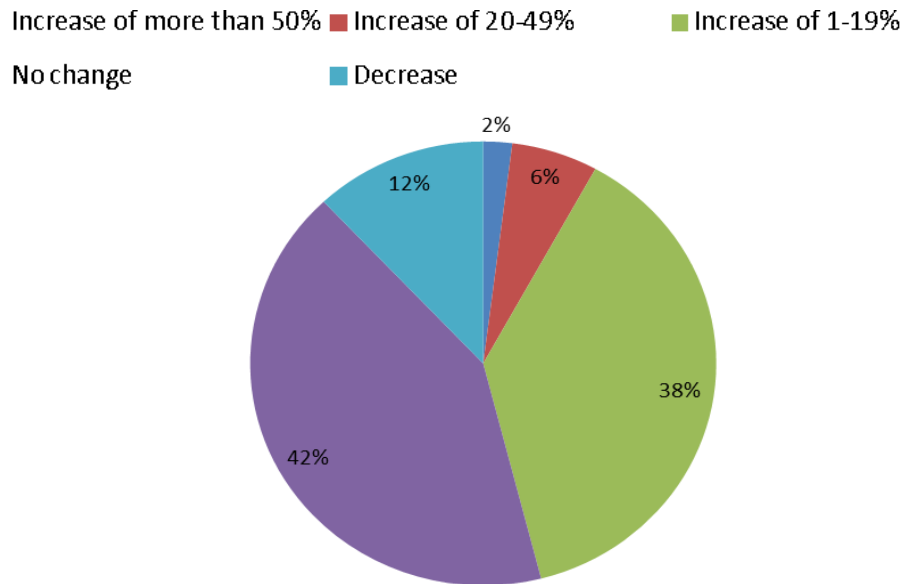(n=687; NB: Data not available for Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot and Newport)
Source: Principal authorities

3.5 Year-on-year changes in the precept between 2012/13 and 2013/14 have been less pronounced. The average increase in the precept is 3%, with two-fifths of councils setting the same precept in 2013/14 as in 2012/13. Around 12% of councils have set a lower precept than in 2012/13 (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Change in precept 2012-13 to 2013-14 by number of community and town councils

Increase of more than 50% ■ Increase of 20-49% ■ Increase of 1-19%

No change ■ Decrease

(N=695; Data not available for Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot and Newport)

Source: Principal authorities

3.6 No detailed information on other sources of income for community and town councils has been collected since research for the Aberystwyth Report in 2002. The Aberystwyth Report found that the precept contributed 77% of all income to community councils, 15 times as a much as the next most significant income stream, rents and lettings. It also noted that dependency on the precept was greatest for councils with populations between 2,500 and 5,000. Larger councils had notable income flows from commercial activities, including rents and lettings, whilst very small councils were able to fund a substantial proportion of their activities from relatively modest investment income. Overall, two-thirds of councils had income from investments, including half of councils with populations of fewer than 500 people.[43]

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[43] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

3.7 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced powers to enable the Welsh Government to make direct grant payments to community and town councils, however it made clear in evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee that it did not intend to, nor had the resources to, use these powers in the short-term.[44] The initial recommendations in the Aberystwyth Report on direct grants had specific purposes to fund by-elections (to remove the financial disincentive for councils to fill vacancies through election rather than co-option), to fund initiatives of primary benefit to local businesses (as an alternative to top-slicing business rates) and to support community development.[45] The Welsh Government had signalled an intention to examine these proposals through further research in its response to the Aberystwyth Report, and indicated that this research would also cover the funding of delegated functions and procedures for the avoidance of double taxation.[46] This may be origin for the conflation of later discussion of direct grants with the issue of the delegation of services, which the Welsh Government noted in its evidence to the Legislation Committee.[47]

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[44] National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee No. 3 (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure. Stage 1 Committee Report*. Paragraph 354.

[45] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* recommendations 6.8, 7.7 and 7.8.

[46] Welsh Assembly Government (2004) *Response to the Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

[47] National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee No. 3 (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure. Stage 1 Committee Report*. Paragraph 355.

3.8 The payment of direct grants to community and town councils has been questioned by the Welsh Local Government Association, including in its evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee, with concerns raised about the impact on funding to principal authorities and consequences for the transparency of local government funding and double taxation. The WLGA has observed that the community council precept is not capped, such that community councils have a mechanism for raising additional funds through taxation that is not available to principal councils. However, representatives from One Voice Wales and the SLCC indicated in interviews that, as a rule, community and town councils have been wary of increasing the precept significant, both with regard to the cost to council tax-payers, and with regard to their own concerns about 'double taxation' if funds were to be raised to pay for services and amenities that had previously been provided by other authorities. The factors shaping the decisions of individual councils in setting the precept have not been explored in previous research, and as such systematic evidence is not available to corroborate this assessment.

Community council expenditure

3.9 The major areas of expenditure by community and town councils include salaries for employees, grants to local organisations, the maintenance of village halls, community centres, burial grounds, parks and recreational facilities, and the provision of street-lighting, footpaths and other public amenities. The most recent available evidence, collected from 320 rural councils by the Wales Rural Observatory in 2010, shows that salaries and wages for the clerk and other employees were the largest item of expenditure for 22% of councils, with lighting the largest item for 11% of councils, and grants and donations and village halls or community centres the largest item for 10% each (Table 3.2).[48] Insurance payments and other administrative costs, including expenses, were also reported as significant items of expenditure, but rarely the largest single item. These findings largely reinforce findings for the Aberystwyth Report which identified salaries, village halls or community centres, administrative costs and lighting as the largest areas of aggregated expenditure.[49]

3.10 Research for the Aberystwyth Report also found that larger communities have both a more diverse range of expenditure and different spending priorities than smaller councils. The only areas of expenditure common to the majority of councils with populations of less than 1,000 were the clerk's salary, insurance, audit costs and office costs. Councils with populations of more than 10,000, however, commonly also supported a range of public amenities and community events, and employed staff other than the clerk (Table 3.3).[50]

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[48] Wales Rural Observatory (2010) Community Services Survey, unpublished data.

[49] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales*.

[50] Ibid.

Table 3.2: Four largest areas of expenditure for community councils, ranked by number of councils listing them as the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th largest item of expenditure

Largest item of expenditure	2nd largest item of expenditure	3rd largest item of expenditure	4th largest item of expenditure
Salaries and wages	Salaries and wages	Grants and donations	Grants and donations
Lighting	Insurance	Insurance	Other admin costs
Village hall or community centre	Village hall or community centre	Village hall or community centre	Salaries and wages
Grants and donations	Grants and donations	Burial grounds	General maintenance
Burial grounds	Lighting	General maintenance	Insurance
Outdoor recreation	Burial grounds	Lighting	Audit costs
Parks and playgrounds	Outdoor recreation	Salaries and wages	Village hall or community centre
Insurance	Parks and playgrounds	Outdoor recreation	Burial grounds
Footpaths	Footpaths	Other public amenities	Other public amenities

Source: Wales Rural Observatory Community Services Survey 2010

Table 3.3: Areas where expenditure is incurred by more than 33% of councils in population size band, 2002 (ranked by number of councils spending on item)

<500	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10000-19999	>20000
Clerk's salary	**Clerk's salary**	**Clerk's salary**	**Clerk's salary**	**Clerk's salary**	**Clerk's salary**	**Clerk's salary**
Insurance	**Insurance**	**Insurance**	**Insurance**	**Audit fees**	**Audit fees**	**Audit fees**
Audit fees	**Audit fees**	**Audit fees**	**Audit fees**	**Insurance**	**Insurance**	**Insurance**
Office costs	**Office costs**	**Office costs**	**Office costs**	**Office costs**	**Office costs**	**Office costs**
Village halls	Village halls	Parks	**Other salaries**	**Community events**	**Other salaries**	**Other salaries**
		Village halls	**Village halls**	**Other salaries**	**Other public amenities**	**Outdoor recreation**
		Burial grounds	**Lighting**	**Village halls**	Community events	**Crime Prevention**
		Lighting	Parks	Parks	Village halls	**Community events**
			Community events	Lighting	Twinning	**Community halls**
			Footpaths	Outdoor recreation	Parks	**Communications and publicity**
					Lighting	**Footpaths**
					Allotments	**Other public amenities**
						Indoor recreation
						Burial grounds
						Tourism
						Lighting
						Twinning

(emboldened items are areas of expenditure for over 50% of councils in band)

Source: Woods et al. (2002)

3.11 Grants and donations are a major item of expenditure for community councils of all sizes. These include grant aid for the provision and upkeep of amenities such as village halls, community centres and playing fields, where these are provided by independent organisations, grants to support community events, grants and donations to local social, cultural, sports and youth societies, and charitable donations to groups in need in the community. Research for the Aberystwyth Report found that 85% of councils had made grants to local organisations in 2002, though the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey suggests a lower figure of 63%.[51] Data collected by the Wales Rural Observatory and reported in Table 3.3 found that grants were one of the top four items of expenditure for more than a third of councils surveyed.[52] The Aberystwyth Report estimated the aggregate contribution to the voluntary sector of Wales of grants from community councils at over £1 million in 2002.[53]

Council employees

3.12 Community councils are legally required to have a clerk, although this does not necessarily have to be a salaried position. In practice, almost all community councils in Wales employ a clerk on a full-time or part-time basis, with only 27 councils recorded as having a volunteer clerk in 2002. The number of community councils employing a full-time clerk remained consistent between 2002 and 2010 at around 6% of all councils, but there is evidence that part-time clerks were working longer hours, with 56% of clerks working 10 hours a week or less in 2010, compared with 72% in 2002.[54]

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[51] Ibid.*; Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010*.

[52] Wales Rural Observatory (2010) Community Services Survey, unpublished data.

[53] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[54] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010*; Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

3.13 The most recent comprehensive information on other staff employed by community councils is from research for the Aberystwyth Report in 2002. This found that a third of community councils employed staff in addition to the clerk, most of whom worked part-time. These most commonly included ground staff, building caretakers and secretarial staff. A few councils employed seasonal staff, including summer playscheme leaders. A quarter of employees worked for councils with populations of more than 10,000, including half of the full-time employees.[55]

3.14 The Aberystwyth Report noted that clerks commonly lacked professional support within their council, even for larger councils, and that as such "many clerks work considerably longer hours than those formally stated by their contracts, and many clerks have been forced to inform themselves of technical knowledge on financial management, insurance, health and safety laws and other issues".[56] Accordingly, the Aberystwyth Report recommended that:

> "If community and town councils are further to expand their role, many will be advised to review the terms of employment of their clerk and the resources made available to them. It may be appropriate for a clerk's hours of employment to be increased and for new resources to be purchased. Larger councils may wish to consider the more fundamental restructuring of their personnel structure, redefining the role of the clerk more as a 'chief executive' of the council, and employing new staff with particular specialist expertise."[57]

In an interview for this review, the Wales Officer of the Society of Local Council Clerks stated that the terms and conditions of clerks had improved over the last decade with the adoption of new national protocols, and that there are currently no significant concerns regarding the employment conditions of clerks, and no problems with the recruitment of new clerks.

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[55] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[56] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 8.17

[57] Ibid., paragraph 8.18

Financial management

3.15 The increase in the income and expenditure of community and town councils has heightened requirements for good financial management, and reinforced the need for principles of transparency, professionalism and public accountability to be followed by all community councils. Whilst these principles are upheld by the majority of councils, there have been repeated concerns expressed about the standards of financial management at a minority of councils.

3.16 In a report published in September 2013 on the external audit of community councils' accounts for 2011-12, the Wales Audit Office warned that "the number and range of common issues with the timing and quality of accounts and annual returns submitted for audit, and consequent audit qualifications, suggests there are systematic weaknesses that local councils need to address".[58] In particular, the report highlighted three areas of concern.

3.17 First, the Wales Audit Office noted that up to 40% of community councils had not provided the annual return of accounts and supporting information to auditors by the date appointed by the auditor, and that up to 17% did not provide the information without a reminder from the auditor. It comments that, "councils that fail to publish an annual return on a timely basis are not providing this basic level of accountability."[59]

3.18 Second, the Wales Audit Office expressed concern that almost one in 10 community councils submitted annual returns for audit that needed to be corrected following the audit. Additionally, 14% of community councils submitted incomplete annual reports – with omissions ranging from the council name to signatures to confirm that the responsible financial officer had certified the accounts – and 9% of councils had not provided information requested by auditors.[60]

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[58] Wales Audit Office (2013) *Improving Finance Management and Governance: Issues from the Audit of Community Council Accounts 2011-12*, page 3

[59] Ibid., page 9.

[60] Ibid., page 11.

3.19 Third, the Wales Audit Office observed that 130 councils (17%) had received a qualified audit opinion because of issues identified with the annual return. Qualified opinions were issued to councils across almost the full range of budgets, in broadly comparative proportions to the proportion of councils in each band. However, there is a slight over-representation of councils with income and expenditure of between £10,000 and £30,000 per annum (Figure 3.4).[61]

Figure 3.4: Community councils with qualified audit opinions, 2011-12, by annual income and expenditure
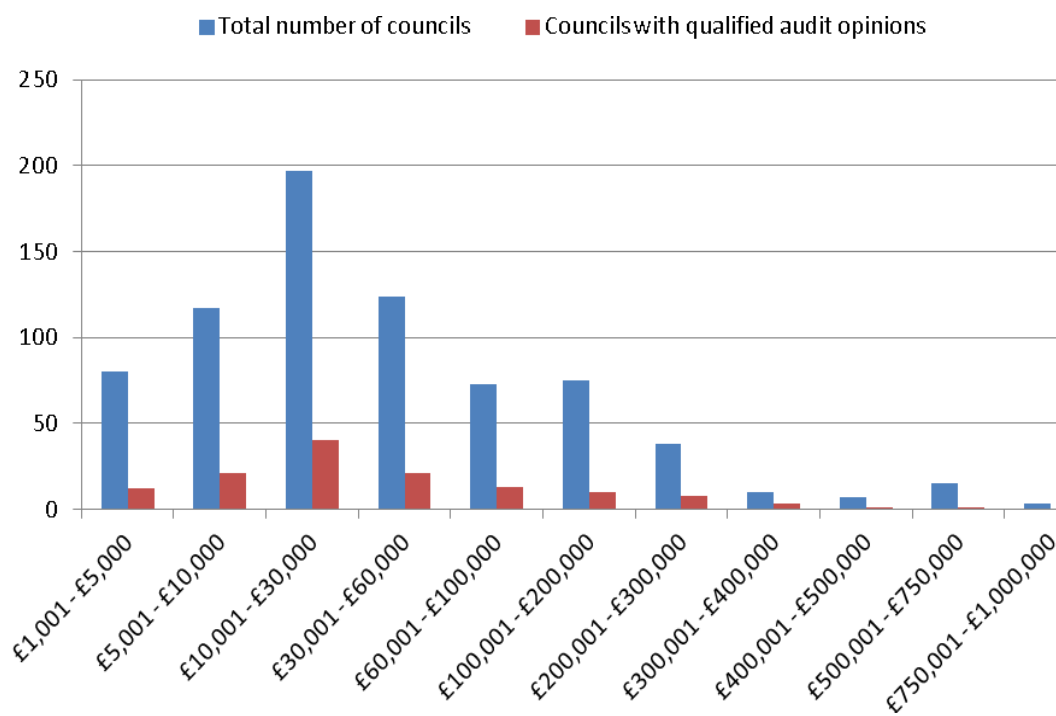
Source: Wales Audit Office

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[61] Ibid., page 13.

3.20 The Wales Audit Office notes the connection between council size and the likelihood of receiving a qualified audit opinion, commenting that "as councils increase in size, their management and governance arrangements become more mature and although they are subject to more detailed audit procedures, a smaller proportion receive qualified audit opinions".[62] The total budget controlled by councils with qualified audit opinions amounts to less than £10 million, which, whilst not insignificant, is relatively small in comparison with other organisations in the public sector. Thus, whilst the risk of failures in financial governance in the community council sector may be higher than desired, the potential impact of such failures remains comparatively limited.

Training for councillors and clerks

3.21 Training is an area in which substantial progress has been made since the Aberystwyth Report in 2003, with the formation of a National Training Advisory Group – with representation from One Voice Wales, the Society of Local Council Clerks, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Welsh Government – and the adoption of a National Training Strategy in 2008. This development has been supported by funding from the Welsh Government, as recommended by the Aberystwyth Report.

3.22 Opportunities for training have been taken up by a significant proportion of community councils, but not all. Sixty per cent of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey stated that they encouraged their clerk to be trained, and just under a third stated that councillors regularly attended training (Table 3.4).[63] Seventy-one per cent of councils responding to the One Voice Wales Training Needs Survey in 2012 stated that one or more of their members had participated in an event in the One Voice Wales Training Programme. Moreover, 96% of these councils reported that members were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the training provided.[64] However, as noted in Chapter 1, these figures are likely to overstate the extent of involvement in training across the sector.

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[64] One Voice Wales (2012) *Training Needs Survey.*

3.23 The most widely attended courses by councils responding were modules on 'The Role of the Council', 'The Role of the Councillor', 'Understanding the Law', 'The Council Meeting' and Planning, which had been attended by members from half of the councils that had sent councillors for training. Modules on 'Understanding Local Government Finance', 'Community Engagement' and 'The Council as an Employer' had been attended by members from between a third and a half of the participating councils.[65]

3.24 However, these figures suggest that there is a sizeable minority of around one-third of community councils who have not engaged with the training programme. As table 3.4 also shows, 37% of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey disagreed with the statement that members regularly attended training, and 10% disagreed with the statement that the council encouraged the clerk to attend training.[66]

Table 3.4: Responses of councils to statements on training (n=411)

	Agree	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**
This council encourages the clerk to be trained	60%	31%	10%
Councillors regularly attend training courses	32%	31%	37%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

3.24 The evidence also reveals issues about the depth of commitment of community and town councils to training. Surveys indicate that between 45% (OVW Training Needs Survey) and 71% (2010 Community and Town Council Survey) of councils do not have a specific budget for training, with the former reporting that only around a quarter of councils set a training budget of more than £250. Of councils responding to the OVW Training Needs Survey, 61% indicated that they would not be willing to pay more than £30 for a councillor to attend a course, and 86% indicated that councillors would not be prepared to travel more than 20 miles to attend a course. Written comments emphasized limited budgets, accessibility and travelling time and councillors' work commitments as factors limiting participation in training.[67]

3.25 The development of web-based training could address some of the constraints related to cost, time and distance, however 37% of councils responding to the Training Needs Survey stated that they would be 'unlikely' to subscribe to internet based e-learning. The survey report suggests that this may be "linked to a resistance by many councils to using the internet", noting the relatively low level of interest indicated by councils in possible training on information technology and website development.[68]

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[67] One Voice Wales (2012) *Training Needs Survey.*
[68] Ibid.

3.26 Evidence for the take-up of training by community council clerks is also mixed. Only seven clerks in Wales currently hold the Certification in Local Council Administration (CiLCA), with a further 20 registered on the CiLCA programme in October 2013, and six re-sitting the process.[69] However, the Society of Local Council Clerks suggests that as candidates are required to submit their portfolio for examination within two years after registration, it is common practice for candidates to only formally register once they had completed most of the portfolio and that the number of clerks in Wales currently working towards CiLCA is likely to be higher than the registration figures indicate. Other reasons put forward for the low take-up of CiLCA in Wales include the predominance of very small councils, possibly lower precepts in Wales, clerks already holding a higher level qualification, and the absence of an accreditation scheme requiring clerks to hold the CiLCA qualification.[70] However, there is no supporting evidence for the suggestion that precepts are lower in Wales than in England, and the average size of councils is actually larger in Wales than in England.

Views on an accreditation scheme

3.27 The Aberystwyth Report proposed the creation of an accreditation scheme for community and town councils in Wales, similar to the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme in England. An accreditation scheme was proposed as a mechanism for quality assurance as a precondition for services and functions being delegated to community councils from principal authorities, but could also serve as a driver to raise standards across the sector.[71]

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[69] National Training Advisory Group, minutes of meeting held 31 October 2013.

[70] National Training Advisory Group, minutes of meeting held 23 May 2013.

[71] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* recommendation 4.5.

3.28 Evaluation of the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme in England has identified benefits to participating councils including "enhanced professionalism, improved leadership, greater capacity to act, increased community engagement and greater success attracting funding from external agencies".[72] Nearly half of councils participating in the scheme reported "increased professionalism of council procedures", and the report noted that "some councillors and clerks have treated the process of applying for Quality status as a 'health check' of council procedures enabling them to ensure that their council is following correct procedures and has appropriate management arrangements in place".[73]

3.29 Powers were granted to the Welsh Government to introduce an accreditation scheme for community and town councils in Wales by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011,[74] but it is not currently proposed to implement this provision. The Measure outlined criteria that may be set as part of an accreditation test, including the percentage of council members elected not co-opted; the qualifications of and training for officers of the council, including the clerk; training for members of the council and youth representatives; the frequency of meetings and publicity given to meetings; involving persons in the work of the community council; encouraging persons to improve the wellbeing of the community; annual reports; and accounts.[75]

3.30 There is support from stakeholders in local government for the introduction of an accreditation scheme in Wales. At its meeting in May 2013, the National Training Advisory Group resolved that an accreditation scheme should be proposed to the Minister, noting that "the likelihood of a future re-organisation of local government in Wales would have a bearing and the existence of an accreditation scheme might fit in well with any future structural changes in the local government landscape".[76]

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[72] Woods, M. et al (2006) *Research Study of the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme*, page 4.

[73] Ibid., page 30.

[74] Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, sections 134-140.

[75] Ibid., section 135.

[76] National Training Advisory Group, minutes of meeting held 23 May 2013.

3.31 However, this support is qualified by the assertion that a scheme must be supported by more tangible incentives for accreditation than simply the award of a kite mark. This has been a concern with the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme in England, the review of which found that "there is a significant gap between expectations of support for Quality councils and the actual support that quality councils have received".[77] In particular, councils complained that the initial incentive of access to a Quality Parish Investment Fund had been subsequently discontinued. The National Training Advisory Group has proposed that incentives for accreditation in Wales might include unrestricted spending under the power of wellbeing (discussed further in chapter 4).[78]

3.32 Evidence suggests that knowledge and understanding of a potential accreditation scheme among community councils is limited. The 2010 Community and Town Council Survey found that 37% of councils responding thought that they would benefit from working towards an accreditation scheme, and 29% supported the notion of an accreditation scheme, but that the largest proportion of councils surveyed had no strong opinion on either statement (Table 3.5).

Table 3.4: Responses of councils to statements on accreditation (n=411)

	Agree	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**
Our council would benefit from working towards an accreditation scheme	37%	49%	15%
This council supports the notion of an accreditation scheme for community and town councils	29%	55%	16%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

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[77] Woods, M. et al (2006) *Research Study of the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme*, page 5.
[78] National Training Advisory Group, minutes of meeting held 23 May 2013.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY AND AMENITY PROVISION

4.1 The most visible aspect of the work of community and town councils is the provision of public services and amenities which, whilst often small in scale, play an important role in the everyday life of local communities – meeting places, bus shelters, seating, parks, playgrounds, recreation fields, and footpaths. However, local government stakeholders have asserted in interviews that there is widespread uncertainty among the public about the division of responsibility in service provision between community councils and principal authorities. Whilst there is no survey research in Wales to corroborate this assertion, the view resonates with research in England that has identified a lack of public awareness of the responsibilities of local government, with the Local Government Association summarising that "detailed knowledge of local councils is patchy, with disparate awareness of the various types of councils and the services they run".[79] This confusion has contributed to frustration on the part of some community and town councils at limitations to their involvement in service provision, and ambitions to expand their role, either through the delegation of services from principal authorities or through the power of wellbeing. This chapter examines the evidence relating to the scope and nature of service and amenity provision by community councils, the extent of delegation of services by principal authorities, and the use of the power of wellbeing.

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[79] Local Government Association (2008) *The Reputation of Local Government*. London: LGA.

Service and amenity provision by community and town councils

4.2 All community and town councils provide services or amenities to local communities to some extent, however the nature, scale and range of services and amenities supported varies by the size and setting of councils. The most widely provided amenities reported to the 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey include noticeboards; seats and shelters; playing fields, parks and open spaces; village halls or community centres; war memorials; burial grounds; and street lighting, all of which are provided by more than a quarter of community and town councils.[80] These figures broadly reinforce the findings of the Aberystwyth Report survey in 2002, though there are some variations reflecting differences in wording of the questionnaires and categorisation of data (Table 4.1).

4.3 Only signs and noticeboards are provided by a majority of community and town councils of all sizes. A majority of councils with populations above 1,000 people also provide seats and shelters, whilst playing fields and playgrounds are provided by a majority of councils serving populations of between 2,500 and 5,000 people, but not higher (possibly indicating that in larger settlements, playing fields and playgrounds are more commonly provided by principal authorities). A majority of large community and town councils with populations above 20,000 operate community centres. Larger community councils also tend to provide a wider range of amenities and services (Table 4.2).[81]

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[80] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[81] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

Table 4.1: Amenities and services mostly commonly provided by community and town councils,

2002 and 2010 (2002: n=445, 2010: n=413)

Amenity or service	2010	2002
Signs, noticeboards and information boards	n/a	75%
Seats and shelters	n/a	69%
Playing fields, parks and open spaces	63%	PF/PG 38%*
		OS/VH 31%*
Village hall or community centre	44%**	24%
War memorials, public clocks etc	39%	40%
Public footpaths or bridleways	n/a	32%
Burial grounds, cemeteries or churchyards	31%**	25%
Lighting	30%	27%
Recycling facilities, skips or litter bins	24%	24%
Allotments	13%	10%
Advice and information services	n/a	12%
Crime prevention (CCTV, Neighbourhood Watch)	n/a	11%
Car and cycle parks	n/a	10%

* Playing fields or playgrounds 38%, Open spaces, village greens or commons 31%

** Includes grant-aided provision

   Sources: Aberystwyth Report (2002), Community and Town Council Survey (2010)

Table 4.2: Typical amenities and activities grant-aided by councils by population band, ranked by number of councils providing grant-aid, 2002 (n=445)

<500	500-999	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10000-19999	>20000
Village halls	Village halls	**Village halls**	**Village halls**	**Arts events**	**Arts events**	**Arts events**
Burial grounds	Burial grounds	Burial grounds	Outdoor recreation	**Outdoor recreation**	**Outdoor recreation**	**Outdoor recreation**
	Seats and shelters	Seats and shelters	Arts events	**Community halls**	**Community halls**	**Public entertainment**
		Outdoor recreation	Crime Prevention	**Public entertainment**	**Public entertainment**	**Crime Prevention**
		Arts events	Public entertainment	Crime Prevention	**Crime Prevention**	**Community centres**
			Seats and shelters	Indoor recreation	Seats and shelters	**Indoor recreation**
			Burial grounds	Seats and shelters	Indoor recreation	**Tourism**
			Open spaces	Litter bins	Litter bins	Litter bins
				Tourism	Tourism	Seats and shelters
				Traffic calming	Public clocks	Burial grounds
				Open spaces	Traffic calming	Public clocks
						Traffic calming
						Open spaces

NB: Grant-aid provided by more than 20% of councils in band; amenities grant-aided by more than 50% of councils are in bold.

Source: Aberystwyth Study Interim Report 2

4.3 In addition to directly providing amenities, many community and town councils grant-aid the provision of services and amenities by other bodies within the scope of functions defined by legislation. The Aberystwyth Report found that half of community and town councils grant-aid the running of village halls or community halls by an independent association, around a third grant-aid the provision of outdoor recreational facilities such as playing fields, and just over a quarter provide grants to support the maintenance of cemeteries and churchyards (Table 4.3). Nearly a third of councils also provide grants to support arts events or facilities, and a fifth pay grants to support public entertainment – though this is only commonly done by councils with populations of more than 5,000 people.[82]

Table 4.3: Councils providing grant-aid for the provision of certain amenities and activities, 2002.

(n = 445)

	% of councils grant aiding provision
Village or Community Halls	50%
Arts Events or Facilities	31%
Outdoor Recreational Facilities	31%
Seats and Shelters	28%
Burial Grounds, Cemeteries & Crematoria	28%
Public Entertainment	22%
Crime Prevention Schemes	18%
Indoor Recreational Facilities	15%
Village Green or Open Space	13%
Litter Bins	13%
Tourism Promotion	12%
Traffic Calming	9%
Public Clocks	6%
Other	10%

Source: Aberystwyth Report

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[82] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

4.4 Two areas in which provision by community and town councils has increased are crime prevention and recycling, both facilitated by new powers granted in the 1990s. The 2010 rural services survey by the Wales Rural Observatory, found that just under a quarter of councils surveyed had used their powers to introduce crime prevention measures, with the most common actions including the installation of CCTV, supporting and/or part-funding neighbourhood policing, and neighbourhood watch and farmwatch schemes (Table 4.4). Support for neighbourhood policing included not only part-funding PCSOs or special constables, but also purchasing bicycles for police officers and funding an internet connection for the local police office. This evidence relates only to rural and small town councils, and it is possible that a survey of more urban councils might indicate a different focus to crime prevention activity.

Table 4.4: Crime prevention measures introduced by community councils, 2010 (n=370)

All crime prevention measures	*23%*
CCTV	12%
Support for neighbourhood policing, PCSOs and special constables	7%
Neighbourhood watch schemes	2%
Farmwatch schemes	1%
Other	4%

Source: Wales Rural Observatory, Rural Services Survey

4.5 Evidence suggests that the number of community and town councils providing recycling facilities has increased from the 4% recorded by the Aberystwyth Report in 2002, but has been primarily to support recycling services provided by principal authorities. The Wales Rural Observatory survey found that 9% of community councils responding provided bottle banks, 7% provided paper recycling facilities, 7% provided plastic recycling facilities, and 5% provided clothes banks. Only 4% of councils operated door-to-door recycling collections.[83]

4.6 Whilst most services and amenities provided by community and town councils are aimed at local residents, the setting of some councils means that they provide facilities for a wider range of users. Councils for small and medium-sized towns that function as service centres for the surrounding area, for example, commonly provide facilities that are used by residents from neighbouring communities, including leisure centres, playgrounds and other recreational facilities; or services that are primarily of benefit to businesses, such as CCTV on high streets. Similarly, councils in coastal communities and in national parks frequently provide facilities for tourists, including car parks, public conveniences, and footpaths. Around 10% of councils are active in tourism promotion, which may include for example marketing materials, tourist information, setting up waymarked walks or running heritage centres. Although some of these activities are revenue-generating, in other cases the cost is covered through the precept, which has been a source of contention for some councils and used as an argument for targeted direct grants to community councils.[84]

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[83] Wales Rural Observatory (2010) Community Services Survey, unpublished data.

[84] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

4.7 In addition to the services and amenities commonly provided by community and town councils identified above, a number of councils have demonstrated innovation in developing activities targeted to the specific needs of their communities. These are often provided under the 'power of wellbeing' (or before 2011 under Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act), as discussed further below. Notable examples – which are described further in boxed case studies over the next couple of pages – include summer playschemes for children (several councils, including Cwmbran), youth centres (several councils, including Pontardawe), a community task scheme (Cwmbran), a resource centre (Offa), and a cinema (Holyhead).[85] No evidence is available on the number of other councils providing similar amenities, but these examples are likely to be exceptional rather than routine.

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[85] For more examples see Welsh Assembly Government (2005) *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils.*

CASE STUDY: CWMBRAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL PLAYSCHEME AND COMMUNITY TASK SCHEME

Cwmbran Community Council has long been recognised as an example of good practice in its innovative provision of services that address the particular needs of its large urban population. Its *summer playschemes* provide places for over 1,000 primary school children during the summer holidays. Over 70 staff are employed to organise activities including arts, crafts, sports and games, and the children also help to raise funds for local charities. The council also operates a *community task scheme*, which provides a gardening and indoor decoration service available to all, but particularly aimed at older and less able residents who are not able to do the work themselves. The scheme generates limited income, but is free to those in need and operates with a budget from the council of around £46,000 per year.

More information: http://www.cwmbran.gov.uk/?page_id=408

CASE STUDY: PONTARDAWE TOWN COUNCIL YOUTH CENTRE

The Ponty Project was set up by Pontardawe Town Council in partnership with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and other local groups after provision for young people in the town was raised at a council meeting. Following consultation, the town council agreed to set up a resource centre for young people, which now includes games facilities (pool and table tennis tables, games consoles), arts tables, IT facilities (including computers and free wifi), and a youth café with a kitchen, meeting area and large screen television. Although initiated by the town council, a community development company was established to enable applications to be made for external funding. Several councillors serve as trustees of the company, and the council provides the company's secretariat. Set-up costs of £600,000 included funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund and from local employers, and revenue costs have been sourced from the Community Fund. Neath Port Talbot Council has contributed staff time and use of the building.

More information: *Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils*; Pontardawe Town Council newsletter: http://www.pontardawetowncouncil.org/news-12-01.htm

CASE STUDY: OFFA COMMUNITY COUNCIL RESOURCE CENTRE

Offa Community Council, serving an urban area within the town of Wrexham, has placed a strong emphasis on community development and youth work, employing a community development officer and a team of youth workers. Its flagship project is Luke O'Connor House, a community resource centre that it took over in 2001 with funding from a Sustainable Communities grant from the National Assembly for Wales. Luke O'Connor House provides meeting rooms for local organisations and for private hire, an IT suite with internet access, and hosts a number of groups and courses including computer classes, Tai Chi, arts and crafts groups and a youth club. The building also includes offices for the council's community development officer, the Barrack Fields Tenants' Association, the mental health charity Hafal, and Wrexham Outreach Tenancy Support.

More information: http://www.offacommunitycouncil.gov.uk

CASE STUDY: HOLYHEAD TOWN COUNCIL EMPIRE PROJECT

In spring 2013, Holyhead Town Council took over ownership of the Empire cinema in the town and commenced a programme of refurbishment. The project, due to be completed by October 2013, will create a multifunctional building with a modern cinema showing new box office releases (with new projector, new seating and disabled access), a play centre for children and soft play area for toddlers, a Quasar laser arena and a café. The project is intended to create jobs in the town. The Empire project follows a number of innovative services developed by Holyhead Town Council, including left-luggage facilities at the port, and a bouncy castle for hire at the town hall.

More information: http://www.holyheadtowncouncil.com/

Delegation of functions by principal authorities

4.8 Evidence suggests that a sizeable minority of community and town councils undertake functions that have been delegated to them from principal authorities, but there are no reliable precise figures available. The Aberystwyth Report found that just over two-fifths of councils had had functions delegated to them,[86] whilst the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey found that 16% of councils had service level agreements with principal authorities to provide delegated services (the difference between these figures is likely to reflect differences in the question asked rather than any actual decrease in the extent of delegation of services).[87] The most commonly delegated areas of activity in 2002 included the maintenance of public rights of way, street lighting and street naming (Figure 4.1), whilst the 2010 survey additionally identified the maintenance of public conveniences and bus shelters, and funding for youth workers as notable delegated functions.[88]

4.9 The delegation of functions may not necessarily involve the full transfer of control or responsibility to a community council, but can also include partnership arrangements between principal authorities and community councils for the co-management and co-funding of services and amenities. Partnership arrangements can also facilitate the delegation of services to a group of community councils, as in the Penllyn Partnership involving community councils around Bala and Gwynedd Council (see case study). This model has however not been widely adopted to date, and the Penllyn Partnership is identified as an example of good practice largely because it remains an exception.

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[86] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 4.9.

[87] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[88] Ibid.

Figure 4.1: Functions delegated to town and community councils by principal authorities, 2002
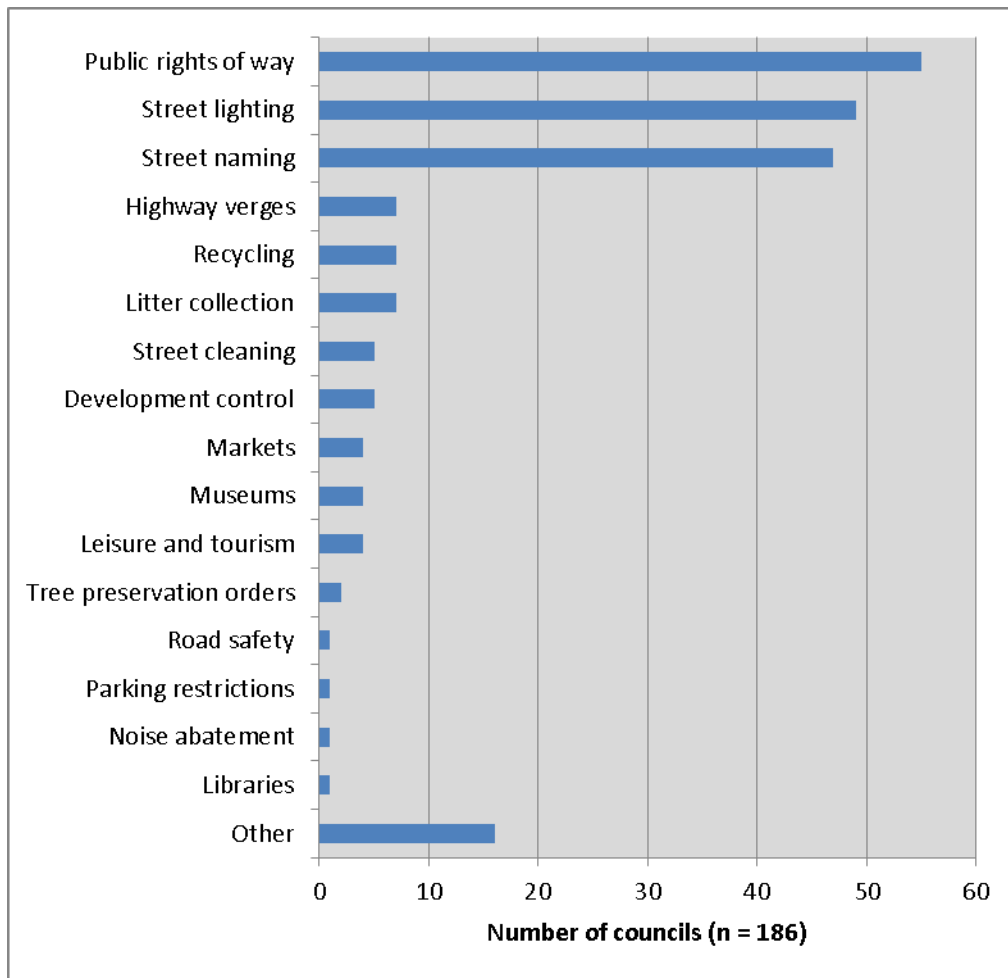
Source: Aberystwyth Study, Second Interim Report

4.10 Benefits of the delegation of functions to community councils have been argued to include more local management and opportunities to inject additional funding or resources. In some cases, communities have sought to take over responsibility for amenities and services where they consider that they are not being adequately maintained by principal authorities, and where improvements can be made within the resources of the community council. For example, Newtown Town Council assumed responsibility for town centre flower beds as part of an initiative to improve the appearance of the town (see case study).[89] Anecdotal evidence suggests that this type of arrangement is more common than the more ambitious model of the Penllyn Partnership, but still has been adopted by only a small minority of community and town councils.

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[89] Welsh Assembly Government, One Voice Wales and WLGA (2008) *A Shared Community: Relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils*, pages 36-37.

CASE STUDY: THE PENLLYN PARTNERSHIP

The Penllyn Partnership was formed in 2009 by Gwynedd County Council and five local councils in the Penllyn area: Bala Town Council, Llandderfel Community Council, Llangower Community Council, Llanuwchllyn Community Council and Llanycil Community Council. Under the agreement, Gwynedd has delegated responsibility to the partnership for delivering services in five areas: public toilets, children's playing fields, benches, open spaces and rights of way. The partnership agreement set out three grades of responsibility that can be delegated, basic, medium and high. The partnership completed the basic grade in 2009/10 and moved on to the medium grade in 2010/11. Different financial allocations are made to the partnership by Gwynedd council depending on the grade of responsibility assumed. Initially, no assets have been transferred from Gwynedd, but the agreement allows the partnership the option of taking full control of one or more of the delegated functions, at which point asset transfers would be arranged.

Perceived advantages of the delegation of functions to the Penllyn Partnership include (i) five councils collaborating on expressing joint ideas, aspirations and opinions, setting a firm direction for the partnership but also with the capacity to inform and direct Gwynedd Council on local issues; (ii) offering a forum for the local area and a means to voice the aspirations, ideas and needs of the local population; and (iii) being able to communicate information on the priorities of the local area.

Lessons identified from the formation of the Penllyn Partnership include: (i) that a practical structure and constitution must be ensured for the partnership; (ii) that a model that transfers responsibilities gradually provides an opportunity for the partnership to establish its procedures as it gains experience and develops skills; (iii) that the partnership needs to receive guidance, assistance and support from the principal authority, especially during the first year; and (iv) that any similar partnership must be based on an appropriate combination of councils in terms of numbers and attitudes. The willingness to collaborate and share similar aspirations is important to ensuring a successful outcome.

More information:

CASE STUDY: NEWTOWN TOWN COUNCIL

Newtown Town Council approached Powys County Council to take over the maintenance of roadside flower beds in the town centre, which had suffered from budget cuts reducing maintenance to once a year. The town council already provided hanging-baskets and planted open spaces with summer and winter bedding. An agreement between the town and county council transferred responsibility for the roadside beds, with funding from the county council for the first three years on a sliding scale. The roadside beds are now planted with summer and winter bedding, improving the visual environment of the town.

More information: *A Shared Community*, pages 35-36.

4.11 The major issue concerning the delegation of functions to community and town councils is funding. The Aberystwyth Report stated that "delegation should not be seen as a means of rationalising spending by transferring the burden of responsibility", and outlined an expectation that "core funding would be provided as a ring-fenced grant from the principal council to the community or town councils, but that any additional funds required to enhance or expand the service or amenity would be raised by the local-level council".[90] The delegation of functions without appropriate financial arrangements risks introducing 'double taxation', whereby "functions are performed in some communities by the community or town council but by the county or county borough council in other communities in the same local authority area. In this situation, local taxpayers can effectively be paying for the same service twice, once through the precept, and once through the general council tax."[91]

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[90] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 4.13.

[91] Ibid., paragraph 7.0.

4.12 These concerns have been heightened by recent cuts in local government funding. On the one hand, there is increased interest in the delegation of services and amenities, both from principal authorities seeking to reduce costs, and from community and town councils concerned about the prospective closure of local facilities. On the other hand, the capacity of principal authorities to provide funding to community councils for the delivery of delegated services has been severely restricted. As such, One Voice Wales has warned about the risks for community councils taking on delegated functions at this time:

> "My message at the moment to the sector on the delegation of service is, the guidance manual is one page with two letters on it: No. And yet, there are councils being short-armed by unitaries at the moment into taking on services and we haven't gone through due diligence, and that it is a serious, serious concern for the future, because ultimately all we could be doing is putting off the inevitable but actually bearing costs in the process and making it very ugly for communities."[92]

4.13 One Voice Wales has argued for a clearer, formal delineation of responsibilities between principal authorities and community and town councils as a response to these issues, which could involve the transfer of certain functions between sectors, as well as the transfer of staff (under TUPE regulations) and of assets. It notes that some community and town councils have been offered the opportunity to purchase assets from principal authorities, but observes that this approach contrasts with the transfer of assets from previous borough and urban district councils to new principal authorities as a paper exercise in 1974.[93]

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[92] Chief Executive, One Voice Wales, interview.
[93] Ibid.

The power of wellbeing

4.14 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 extended the 'power of wellbeing' to community and town councils, permitting them to do "anything that they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area."[94] The power replaced the existing provision under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, which had allowed community and town councils to spend funds on "any purpose which in its opinion is of direct benefit to its area or to the inhabitants" within a limit set by the Welsh Government.

4.15 The introduction of the power was welcomed by the local councils sector, with One Voice Wales telling the National Assembly of Wales Legislation Committee that, "the wellbeing power may encourage people to see what they can do for their communities and to take part in local democracy."[95]

4.16 More than three-quarters of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council survey stated that they definitely or probably would use the power of wellbeing if extended to community and town councils. Possible uses of the power indicated by councils responding to the survey including promoting tourism, staging community events and supporting specific community projects.[96] The quarter of councils indicating that they would not use the power, cited reasons including an insufficient understanding of the power, the adequacy of existing powers and a lack of financial resources.[97]

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[94] Local Government Act 2000, quoted by National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure, Stage 1 Committee Report*, paragraph 334.

[95] National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure, Stage 1 Committee Report*, paragraph 337.

[96] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[97] Ibid.

4.17 However, the available evidence suggests that uptake of the power of wellbeing by community and town councils to date has been limited. The representative bodies, OVW and SLCC have argued that use of the power of wellbeing has been constrained by guidance issued in May 2013 that restricts spending under the power of wellbeing by community and town councils in Wales to the Section 137 expenditure limit, set at £6.98 per election for 2013-14.[98] Without detailed survey data from individual councils, there is insufficient evidence either to accurately quantify spending under the power of wellbeing, or to corroborate the stakeholders' assessment of the position. The Welsh Government has noted that there was an unregulated period between the implementation of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the issuing of the guidance, in which councils had the opportunity to undertake projects under the power of wellbeing without a spending limit,[99] yet it is reasonable to presume that many councils will have waited for guidance to be published before considering use of the new power. Equally, it should be noted that there is no substantial evidence that lifting the spending limit of the power of wellbeing would necessarily lead to a significant expansion in the activities of community and town councils, with the 2003 Aberystwyth Report finding that only a small number of councils were spending close to the limit under Section 137.[100]

4.18 As noted in Chapter 3, the National Training Advisory Group has suggested that financial restrictions on the use of the power of wellbeing could be lifted for councils passing an accreditation test.[101] This would provide an incentive for councils to participate in an accreditation scheme and ensure that councils qualifying for unrestricted spending would have demonstrated appropriate financial management and completed relevant training.

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[98] Welsh Government (2013) *Statutory Guidance to Welsh Local Authorities on the Power to Promote or Improve Economic, Social or Environmental Well-being under the Local Government Act 2000*.

[99] Correspondence with Welsh Government Department of Local Government.

[100] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 7.5.

[101] National Training Advisory Group, minutes of meeting held 23 May 2013

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

5.1 A key strength of community and town councils is their closeness and accessibility to local communities. This chapter examines the evidence relating to how community and town councils engage with members of their local community, both formally and informally, and the effectiveness of these mechanisms, the operation of websites by councils, the role of councils in community leadership and civic ceremony, and policies on the Welsh language and on public accountability and complaints procedures.

Practices of community engagement

5.2 Community and town councils generally have a positive view of their engagement with the local community. Nine out of 10 councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey thought that they had a good understanding of the needs of the local council and a good relationship with the local community, and a similar number reported that the community regularly approached the council with queries (Table 5.1). However, some councils reported that it was difficult to stimulate interest from the community in engaging:

> "The community has little interest in the running of the community council".

> "We as a council find it very hard to engage with the community, although members are well approached individually. The website has proved to be a success but we still struggle to engage the community we serve."

> "The council tries to engage with the community through open meetings, coffee mornings and evenings, exhibitions etc. but the response is generally poor."[102]

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[102] Welsh Assembly Government (2011) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010*

Table 5.1: Responses of councils to statements on community engagement (n=413)

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
The council has a good understanding of what the needs of the local community are	92%	7%	1%
The council has a good relationship with the local community	90%	9%	1%
This community readily approaches the council with queries	89%	9%	2%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

5.3 The most commonly reported reasons why residents or groups in the local community contact community and town councils are to raise local problems or to discuss planning issues. Queries concerning funding issues or services provided by the community council were reported as being among the top three reasons that the council was contacted by fewer than half of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Top three reasons why councils are contacted by members of the community, by number of council citing reason (n = 413)

Local problems	94%
Planning	75%
Funding issues	40%
Unitary authority services (e.g. refuse collection)	39%
Community or town council services (e.g. community hall, fete)	29%
Campaigning	14%
Community resilience planning	<2%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

5.4 As Table 5.2 also shows, many community councils also receive a large number of queries about services that are provided by principal authorities, such as refuse collections. This reflects widespread public uncertainty about the division of responsibilities between principal authorities and community and town councils, as noted in Chapter 4, and was emphasised in comments by some respondents to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey:

"Most people are unclear as to the role of the community council – many think councillors are paid and part of [the county council]. Community councils would benefit from assistance in producing booklets and other materials to explain role in community."

"Most people don't know the difference between the county council and the town council. So the first approach is mostly to the town council."[103]

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[103] Ibid.

5.5 Contacts with community and town councils by members of the public or local organisations are most commonly made by telephone or by face-to-face contact with councillors or the clerk (Table 5.3). These figures reinforce the importance of informal engagement between councils and communities, and the accessibility of councillors, especially in smaller communities, that was observed by the Aberystwyth Report. Write-in comments by councils in the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey also emphasise this point:

> "[We are] a small community. It is hard to avoid meeting feeling residents on a regular basis and communication between council and residents is continuous and open."

> "We are a very small but tight knit community and our councillors are very approachable. Most problems are dealt with promptly over a cup of tea!"

> "Most of the councillors have lived and worked in the community all of their lives so know the area and community extremely well. They are totally approachable and there are also full contact details on [our] noticeboards and website."[104]

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[104] Ibid.

Table 5.3: Top three methods use by members of the community to contact community and town councils, by number of council citing method (n = 413)

Telephone	88%
Face-to-face	77%
Post	70%
E-mail	51%
Forms on council website	<4%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

5.6 However, there is a danger that reliance on informal engagement between councillors and members of the local community could lead to complacency on the part of community and town councils with respect to community engagement. Only around 1one in 10 community or town councils have a formal community engagement policy,[105] and it is notable that the training module on community engagement has the second lowest uptake by councils in the One Voice Wales training programme, with around a quarter of councils surveyed not considering it to be relevant to them.[106] Yet, as the Aberystwyth Report observed, social change has eroded the effectiveness of informal channels of engagement:

> "It can no longer be assumed that 'everyone' will know who the community or town councillors are, or that opportunities exist where councillors will routinely meet other local residents. Instead, it has become necessary for councils to establish more formal mechanisms for engaging with their communities, including public participation in council meetings and various forms of consultation exercises."[107]

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[105] Ibid.

[106] One Voice Wales (2012) *Training Needs Survey*

[107] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 6.2

5.7 More formal mechanisms for community engagement reported by the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey include holding regular surgeries or general meetings, publishing minutes of council meetings in the local newspaper, website and noticeboards. As this information was only provided as write-in comments to the 2010 survey, the most recent comprehensive evidence on the number of councils undertaking these activities is from research for the Aberystwyth Report. This showed that in 2002, the majority of community councils used noticeboards to publicise information such as agendas and minutes for council meetings and contact details for councillors, but only 15% published a newsletter, and only 18% had council meetings reported in the local press.[108] A very small number of councils did not meet legal obligations to make the agenda and minutes of council meetings publicly available.[109]

5.8 The Aberystwyth Report also found that only a quarter of community councils in 2002 had set periods for public participation at council meetings, and that only around four out of ten councils regularly had members of the public attending their meetings. Half of councils surveyed in 2002 had held public meetings to discuss specific issues, notably planning, traffic, environmental issues and events for the Millennium and Queen's Golden Jubilee, but public attendance at these meetings had varied significantly.[110] More up-to-date data is not available on these activities, though anecdotal evidence suggests that levels of participation have not increased substantially since 2002.

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[108] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[109] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 6.4.

[110] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

5.9 Community and town councils additionally have powers to consult the local community through a community poll or a community survey. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 modified procedures for community polls, including a higher threshold required for electors in a community to call a poll and a role for the principal authority in determining the poll question, intended to stop "vexatious calls" for community polls.[111] However, evidence suggests that the use of community polls is limited, with only 23 councils organising community polls in the three years up to 2002.[112] Recent community polls in Wales include polls on housing development and confidence in the community council in Esclusham, Wrexham in 2008, on the sale of school playing fields for housing in Caldicot in 2011, and on the redevelopment of the town lido on Pontypridd in 2012.[113]

5.10 Community surveys have been more widely used, with research for the Aberystwyth Report finding that a quarter of community councils had undertaken a survey of local residents in the preceding three years.[114] More up-to-date data is not comprehensive, but available evidence identifies a range of uses of community surveys by community councils including housing needs surveys, community appraisals and surveys to test opinion on contentious issues such as community surveys undertaken by Llanfair Caereinion and Carreghofa Community Councils in 2013 on the Mid Wales Connection Project. Surveys have also been used by community and town councils to gather information as part of a wider process of community engagement and consultation leading to the formulation of action plans, such as the Old School Redevelopment Project led by Lisvane Community Council in Cardiff (see case study).

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[111] National Assembly for Wales Legislation Committee (2010) *Proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure, Stage 1 Committee Report*, paragraph 292.

[112] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales: Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[113] Information from press reports and council websites.

[114] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales: Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

Community and town council websites

5.11 In 2010, just under half of community and town councils reported having a website,[115] more than double in the number reported in 2002, when only around an eighth of councils had a website.[116] The development of community council websites has continued to be actively promoted, with funding from the Welsh Government, and as such it is probable that a clear majority of community and town councils now have websites, although no accurate figures are available.

CASE STUDY: LISVANE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OLD SCHOOL PROJECT

The redevelopment of the Old School site in Lisvane is an example of good practice in community engagement around a specific project. The Old School site is managed by Lisvane Community Council as a community resource, but two of the buildings on the site, the Cabin, housing a library, and the Annex, used for children's activities, were expensive to heat and in need of repair. In 2007, a community survey was undertaken by the community council to ascertain the facilities that residents required for the village, with the results informing the redevelopment plan for the site. Detailed plans produced by an architect were then displayed to the community at an exhibition, with all residents invited to comment. The Community Council also explained to the community its approach to funding the redevelopment, and encouraged fund-raising within the community. The community is kept informed of progress with the redevelopment with a dedicated page on the Community Council's website.

More information:

http://www.lisvanecommunity.org.uk/Core/Lisvane-c/Pages/Old_School_Redevelopment_2.aspx

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[115] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[116] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 6.12.

5.12 The sophistication and content of community and town council websites varies, with most websites used primarily as a means of conveying information about the council, including contact details for the council and for councillors. Nearly 9 out of 10 websites include minutes of council meetings, and nearly two-thirds include agendas for council meetings (Table 5.4). Only a minority of council websites include more interactive elements to facilitate community engagement, including consultations, surveys and web forums. Other content available on some websites includes information about council budgets, community plans, community newsletters, and wider information about the community, including calendars of events, links to local organisations, and tourist information.[117]

Table 5.4: Community council websites with specified content (n = 191)

Council minutes	88%
Agendas for council meetings	62%
Budget summary for council	27%
Consultations	20%
Surveys	14%
Community plan	11%
Web forums	10%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

5.13 Reasons cited by councils in the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey for not having a website included both voluntary and involuntary constraints. Two-fifths of councils without a website stated that they did not have anyone to maintain a website, and a third commented that they could not afford a website (Table 5.5). A smaller number also cited the difficulty of maintaining a bilingual website and slow internet connections in their area as reasons for not having a website. However, more than half of the councils without a website stated that it was not a priority for the council, and 17% claimed that the community would not make use of a website.

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[117] Welsh Assembly Government (2011) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010*

Table 5.5: Reasons cited by councils for not having a website (n = 219)

It is not a priority for our council	56%
There is nobody to maintain a website	42%
The council cannot afford a website	34%
The community would not make use of it	17%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

5.14 These answers suggest a degree of resistance to websites and information technology on the part of a minority of community councils. This was also noted by One Voice Wales in its Training Needs Survey, which found that a proposed module on 'IT/Website Guidance' had the lowest level of support from councils of the options suggested.[118]

5.15 There is a connection between councils' attitudes towards websites and their engagement with information technology more generally. Both the 2002 and 2010 surveys of councils indicate that only around two-fifths of clerks have access to a computer owned by the council (44% in the 2010 survey; 37% in the 2002 survey), and just over a half of clerks use a computer that they own themselves (57% in the 2010 survey; 56% in the 2002 survey).[119] Although the results of the two surveys are not directly comparable, an apparent increase in access to internet and e-mail from 56% of councils in 2002 to 69% in 2010 is likely to be indicative of the general trend, but it is notable that three in 10 councils still did not have internet access in 2010, and one in 20 councils did not have access to a computer, printer or the internet.

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[118] One Voice Wales (2012) *Training Needs Survey.*

[119] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010;* Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

5.16 The more technologically engaged councils not only have websites, but have employed IT in all aspects of their work, including circulation of papers for meetings, communications between the clerk and councillors, enquiries from community residents, interaction with the principal authority and responses to consultations. Radyr and Morganstown Community Council in Cardiff was one of the first to explore the advantages of new technology in its internal and external operations (see case study). In some districts, the development of IT resources by community and town councils has been supported by the principal authority, which has provided technical support and access to e-mail and intranet networks, as in Torfaen.

CASE STUDY: RADYR AND MORGANSTOWN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Radyr and Morganstown Community Council was an earlier adopter of a professionally designed website, which provided extensive community information including community council agendas and minutes, and planning applications. In 2007 there were 230,000 visits to the site, with 632,000 page views. Pages accessed in October 2007 included 267 views of council policies, 188 views of planning applications, and 82 views of minutes. The clerk also started using e-mail for notices of meetings, minutes, reports, invitations to events and to respond to consultations and communicate with Cardiff Council officers. Group e-mails facilitated discussion between members.

More information: http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/news/radyr-and-morganstown

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Accountability and complaints

5.17 In the period since 2002, the majority of community and town councils have adopted policies to uphold standards and enhance accountability to the public. Almost all of the councils surveyed in the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey had adopted the model Code of Conduct for members, with only four councils out of 413 not having done so. The survey also recorded that 55% of community and town councils had a formal complaints procedure.[120]

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[120] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

5.18 The remit of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales was extended to cover community and town councils in 2004. In the period from 2011 to 2013 only one complaint concerning a community or town council was investigated by the ombudsman. The complaint was upheld but not considered sufficiently significant to warrant a public interest report; however, the finding has lessons for other community and town councils. The ombudsman found that the council had not handled a complaint from an elector in a 'proper manner', and in particular the complaint should not have been addressed by the clerk, who had a personal involvement in the complaint.[121] This highlighted the need for community councils to have robust and objective processes for handling complaints, and for clerks and councillors to have completed appropriate training.

Welsh language policy

5.19 There is significant use of the Welsh language by community and town councils in Wales. Research for the Aberystwyth Report found that Welsh was the main language used in meetings for 18% of community councils surveyed – including a majority of councils in Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey – and that a mix of English and Welsh was used in meetings for a further 9% of councils, particularly in Carmarthenshire. However, only 7% of councils provided simultaneous translation for meetings.[122] More recently, the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey found that 43% of community and town councils "provided services" in Welsh, although the question was open to variable interpretation and it is unclear precisely what activities are included in this figure.[123]

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[121] Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (2012) *The Ombudsman's Casebook*, Issue 10, October 2012.

[122] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[123] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

5.20 The Welsh Language Act 1993 requires community and town councils to produce a Welsh Language Scheme, setting out policies for the language of council meetings and council minutes, and for dealing with correspondence and requests received in Welsh.[124] It also requires community and town councils to produce notifications and agendas for council meetings bilingually. The Aberystwyth Report found that a small minority of councils were not compliant with this regulation, producing notices of meetings and agendas only in English or only in Welsh.[125]

5.21 Just over half of councils (53%) responding to the 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey reported that they had a Welsh Language Scheme, however Welsh Language Schemes for only 18 community or town councils are currently accessible on the Welsh Language Commissioner's website.[126] As Table 5.6 shows, the deposited Welsh Language Schemes outline a number of different approaches to the use of Welsh and English in council business.

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[124] Welsh Language Act 1993, Section 6(1) (a).

[125] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 6.5.

[126] www.comisiynyddygymraeg.org

Table 5.6: Language to be used in specified aspects of council business as stipulated in Welsh Language Schemes for community and town councils

Council	Language of Council Meetings	Notice of meetings and agenda	Minutes
Betws CC	Bilingual	Bilingual	Bilingual
Cenarth CC	Welsh	Bilingual (Notice)/ Welsh (Agenda)	Welsh
Cil-y-cwm CC	Bilingual	English	English
Gorslas CC	Bilingual	Bilingual	English
Lampeter TC	Bilingual	Bilingual	Bilingual
Laugharne CC	English	Bilingual	English
Letterston CC	English	Bilingual	English
Llanarthne CC	Bilingual	Bilingual	English
Llandovery TC	English	Bilingual	English
Llanddarog CC	Welsh	Bilingual	Bilingual
Llanelli TC	English	Bilingual	English
Llanelli TC	English	Bilingual	English
Llangynderyn CC	Welsh or bilingual	Bilingual	Welsh or bilingual
Llanpumsaint CC	Welsh	Bilingual (Notice)/ Welsh (Agenda)	Welsh
Llanrhian CC	English	Bilingual	English
Llansanffraid Glan Conwy CC	English (but councillors may contribute in Welsh)	Bilingual	Bilingual
Newchurch and Merthyr CC	Welsh	Bilingual	English
Newtown and Llanwchaiarn TC	Not stated	Bilingual	Not stated
Pentyrch CC	Public contributions in English or Welsh	Bilingual	English

Source: Welsh Language Commissioner

5.22 The Welsh Language Schemes deposited with the Welsh Language Commissioner outline procedures for information and copies of council meetings to be provided in English or Welsh, for public and private meetings in either language, and for dealing with correspondence received in either language. Several of the schemes stipulate limitations to the availability of translation or capacity of the council to operate in either language. For example, Newtown and Llanwchaiarn Town Council's scheme requires three days' notice of a requirement for simultaneous translation at a meeting, whilst Laugharne Community Council's scheme states that it is not currently possible for meetings with individuals to be conducted in Welsh as the clerk is not a Welsh-speaker. The most commonly cited reason for limitations in the availability of translation, including simultaneous translation at council or public meetings, is cost, and some councils indicate that their ability to engage with the public in Welsh is dependent on volunteers.

5.23 Some of the Welsh Language Schemes acknowledge that there are implications of language policies for the capacity to participate in council business of both councillors and members of the public. Cenarth Community Council, for example, which conducts its meetings in Welsh, states in its Welsh Language Scheme that "If non-Welsh speaking members are elected the situation would be explained to them and either the Clerk or the Chairman would translate into the English language if necessary".[127]

5.24 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 has introduced Welsh Language 'standards' for service delivery, policy making, operation and record keeping that are 'potentially applicable' to community and town councils under Schedule 6 of the Measure. Guidance on Welsh Language Standards in relation to community and town councils has not been issued to date.

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[127] Cenarth Community Council (2004) *Welsh Language Scheme*, paragraph 4.4.1.

Community events and civic functions

5.25 The community leadership role of community and town councils extends beyond the provision of services and the representation of community interests to include organising and/or supporting community events. Half of councils surveyed in 2010 stated that they organised community events,[128] and events identified as major items of expenditure by rural community and town councils in the 2010 Community Services Survey included firework displays, a senior citizens' Christmas party, a school eisteddfod, a community show and a 'Christmas event with real reindeer'. Just over one in 20 of the councils surveyed listed Christmas lighting and/or a Christmas tree as one of their three largest items of expenditure.[129]

5.26 The Welsh Government's Good Practice Guide for community and town councils additionally highlights examples of councils providing leadership and facilitation through the organisation of events in the community, including late-night Christmas shopping in Beaumaris and an inter-school eisteddfod in Pontypool (see case studies). As the guide notes, such events have benefits in building community spirit, engaging young people, attracting visitors and boosting local business.[130]

5.27 Many town councils, especially those that are the successor body to previous borough councils or urban district councils, also have a civic function in the community, including civic processions and services, Mayor's dinners and participation in Remembrance Sunday ceremonies. Where councils have a Mayor they are frequently active in supporting local events, often in a ceremonial function. No accurate figures are available for the number of community and town councils in Wales who are engaged in such civic activities.

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[128] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[129] Wales Rural Observatory (2010) Community Services Survey, unpublished data.

[130] Welsh Assembly Government (2005) *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

CASE STUDY: BEAUMARIS LATE-NIGHT CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Beaumaris Town Council on Anglesey combined with the local Chamber of Trade to organise late night shopping one evening before Christmas. The council contributed £2,500 to the event, with match-funding by Mentor Môn. The evening included a children's fancy dress parade, led by the town band, stalls by local charities and the switching on of new Christmas lights. Shop and bar staff dressed in Victorian costume. The evening raised the profile of the council, engaged local residents and contributed to the local economy.

More information: *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils in Wales* (2006)

CASE STUDY: PONTYPOOL INTER-SCHOOL EISTEDDFOD

Pontypool Community Council organises an annual Eisteddfod for local schools, which was established in 1999 from an idea originating in discussions among councillors about the traditions that they enjoyed when young. The Eisteddfod runs over three days and includes one day each for infants, juniors and comprehensive schools. The community council provides core funding, with local businesses and organisations sponsoring prizes. Judging is undertaken by the Welsh Advisory Service for schools. More than 20 schools and almost 1,000 children and young people regularly take part, with competitions including Welsh language singing, music, dancing and arts and crafts.

More information: *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils in Wales* (2006).

6. PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

6.1 Community and town councils form one part of the wider structure of local government and community leadership in Wales. They can be most effective when working with other organisations and have a particular role in representing community interests in consultations with outside bodies. This chapter examines the engagement of community and town councils with other organisations, covering interaction with principal authorities – including through Charters and in the planning system; representations to external bodies, including the Welsh Government; and involvement in partnership working, including for sustainable development.

Interaction with principal authorities

6.2 The majority of community and town councils have a good relationship with their principal authority – the county or county borough council. Nearly three-quarters of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey stated that they had a good relationship with the principal authority, and more than half agreed that the principal authority helped the council to achieve its objectives (Table 6.1). However, the survey also revealed a sizeable minority of community and town councils with more negative perceptions of their interactions with principal authorities. One in 20 disagreed that they had a good relationship with the principal authority, one in eight disagreed that the principal authority helped the council to meet its objectives, and one in seven stated that communications between the principal authority and the council were poor.[131]

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[131] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

Table 6.1: Responses of councils to statements on interactions with principal authorities (n=413)

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Our council has a good relationship with the unitary authority	73%	21%	6%
The unitary authority helps our council to achieve our objectives	54%	34%	13%
Communication between the unitary authority and our council is poor	14%	31%	55%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

6.3 The main complaint cited by community councils to support negative evaluations of their relationship with the principal authority was the perceived slow response of principal authorities to correspondence or enquiries from community councils. Some councils remarked that their enquiries were not treated any differently from queries from the public, which they felt failed to recognise the role of community councils in local government, as one council commented:

"The contact [with] the unitary authority varies from department to department, many do not recognise the role of the Community Council within local government and treat queries no differently from those of members of the public […] Greater interaction and training needed to ensure the role of each is more clearly understood and appreciated – enabling more of a partnership approach."[132]

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[132] Ibid.

6.4 Councils providing comments to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey also commonly noted that the quality of interactions differed between different departments of principal authorities, and that relationships with individual officers were often good, as a council in South Wales remarked:

> "At present, the relationship varies from one department of the unitary authority to another, and it generally depends on the willingness of the individual member of staff to assist, rather than a general policy of co-operation. This will hopefully change when the Charter is agreed."[133]

6.5 These comments resonate with observations made by the Aberystwyth Report in 2003, which noted concerns with an absence of clear contact points for community councils in principal authority departments; non-replies to letters and e-mails; a lack of co-ordination between principal authority departments, with contradictory advice, policies and practices between departments; and consultations that were invited too late in the process to influence plans and policies.[134] The available evidence is not sufficient to make an assessment of whether incidences of these problems have increased or decreased since 2003.

6.6 The Aberystwyth Report also highlighted examples of good practice by principal authorities in their dealings with community and town councils, and proposed the adoption of charters as a mechanism for codifying good practice in the interactions between principal authorities and community and town councils – building on the pioneering adoption of charters by Bridgend County Borough Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council.[135]

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 5.7.

[135] Ibid., paragraph 5.9.

6.7 In response to the Aberystwyth Report a working group on charters was set up by the Welsh Government, One Voice Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association. The working group produced guidance on relationship-building between principal authorities and community and town councils, including a model charter, in 2008. In the final guidance, the group noted that "Charters are a way of cementing good relationships"[136] and identified benefits from the adoption of a charter including:

- The process helps to improve communication through clarity of commitments from both parties. This has a knock-on effect of reducing misunderstandings between partners.
- The charter is evidence to the community that the two tiers are working efficiently and collaboratively together. The document may be publicised to the community to demonstrate citizen-focused delivery of services.
- The charter gives validity and recognition to both community and town councils and their unitary authorities as equal partners.
- Charter documents are very useful for inducting new staff and councillors and in their ongoing training and development.[137]

6.8 The working group also commented, however, that "encouragement to engage in charters, and the provision of a model to facilitate this process are only steps in the right direction. To achieve optimum take-up, these measures need to be strands in a more comprehensive framework of engagement between the tiers of government."[138]

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[136] Welsh Assembly Government, One Voice Wales and WLGA (2008) *A Shared Community: Relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils*, page 4.
[137] Ibid., page 45.
[138] Ibid., page 5.

6.9 At the end of September 2013, charters had been approved, or completed subject to approval, in 13 of the 22 local authority areas in Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea, Torfaen and Vale of Glamorgan).[139] A further four authority areas have a draft charter or a precursor agreement. A charter has also been agreed between the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and local community councils. The agreed charters have mostly followed the format of the model charter produced by the working group, but with some local variations in content and coverage. Carmarthenshire has separately adopted a protocol for relationships between community councils and their county councillor.

6.10 Some concerns have been voiced about the implementation of, and adherence to, charters where they have been adopted, with one town council commenting that "the unitary authority seldom meets its own charter for the response time to written communications".[140] At the same time, progress with the development of action plans from charters has in some areas been limited by a lack of participation by community councils. Some of the earliest areas to adopt charters are now reviewing these agreements, and their reflections are instructive. The Vale of Glamorgan Council, for example, conducted a questionnaire survey of community councils to evaluate the charter and identified a number of issues concerning communication, the depth of engagement and the usefulness of meetings (see case study).[141]

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[139] Information from Welsh Government Department of Local Government.

[140] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[141] Vale of Glamorgan Council Community Liaison Committee, 23 October 2012, Report of the Managing Director.

6.11 Progress in areas where charters have not been adopted is mixed, with active discussions in some local authority areas but not all. Reasons mentioned for not pursuing charters include lack of interest from community councils; concerns that a voluntary charter agreement could be replaced by a mandatory charter; concerns about adopting a charter in districts without complete coverage of community and town councils; and issues relating to drafting a charter that is applicable to a wide range of councils in terms of size and setting, combined with insufficient resources to negotiate charters with individual councils. The absence of an accreditation scheme in Wales has contributed to the last issue, as there is no simple mechanism for differentiating between councils in terms of the possible delegation of functions or access to resources.

6.12 One of the most important functions of charters has been to encourage the more widespread adoption of good practice in engagement in between principal authorities and community and town councils, including initiatives such as designating a local councils' liaison officer (see Caerphilly case study), holding liaison meetings for community councils, and providing practical support and expertise to community councils, including access to ICT resources and advice on planning, legal and compliance issues. Some of these practices have been adopted in authorities where charters have not been agreed.

6.13 All of the adopted charters include regular liaison meetings with community and town councils, although the format of meetings varies. Some charters involve a single meeting with all community and town councils in the district, usually on a quarterly basis, whilst others include provision for smaller 'cluster meetings'. These follow the model developed by Denbighshire County Council, which introduced biannual meetings with geographically-based clusters of councils in 2006. Community councils were able to choose which cluster meeting to join, and the smaller format permits greater opportunity for discussion and the tailoring of agendas towards local items.[142] Liaison meetings and forums are generally considered to be beneficial initiatives for community and town councils, as captured by comments to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey:

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[142] Welsh Assembly Government, One Voice Wales and WLGA (2008) *A Shared Community: Relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils*, page 21.

"One of our most effective interactions is through the [liaison meeting] attended by council clerks and chairmen, managed by the one stop shop personnel, who then liaise with [principal authority] departments."

"The community council regularly sends three members to the Town and Community Council Forum meetings […] and welcomes the opportunity for such debate with the leader of the [principal authority]."

"Excellent town and community council forum meetings held quarterly."[143]

6.14 In addition, some community and town councils have had members co-opted on to principal authority committees, including planning committees and standards committees. The 2010 Community and Town Councils Survey suggests that a quarter of community councils have members co-opted to principal authority committees, however this figure includes community council liaison meetings and forums, as well as school governing bodies and police forums, and as such is not an accurate count of actual co-option.

6.15 One Voice Wales has suggested that community and town councils could assume a greater scrutiny role in respect to principal authority services, allowing a differentiation between service providers and service scrutiny as part of a clearer delineation of responsibilities between the sectors.[144] Some county associations of local councils in England have similarly started to explore possibilities for expanding the scrutiny role of parish and town councils under the power of general competence, which replaced the power of wellbeing in England in the Localism Act 2011.[145]

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[143] Welsh Assembly Government (2010) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[144] Interview with Chief Executive of One Voice Wales

[145] Rewhorn, S. (2013) Strengthening rural equity: new dawn opportunity for town and parish councils. Paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference.

CASE STUDY: VALE OF GLAMORGAN CHARTER REVIEW

The Vale of Glamorgan was one of the first areas to adopt a Community and Town Council Charter, in 2008. The charter was reviewed after four years in 2012. As part of this process, Vale of Glamorgan Council circulated a questionnaire survey to community and town councils which highlighted the following issues:

- There was a general feeling that the relationship between the principal authority and community and town councils had improved.

- Despite action arising from the charter to increase community council access to key partnerships, councils felt strongly that they were not sufficiently represented.

- There were mixed views from community councils on the usefulness of liaison meetings, with a view that the principal authority did not listen sufficiently, especially on planning decisions.

- Consultation with community councils was mixed, with some principal authority officers not consulting and some community councils feeling that they were not being consulted.

- The Town and Community Council Planning Liaison Group was identified as good practice, with each council invited to send two representatives to discuss matters of mutual interest.

- Several community councils felt that communication with the principal council remained poor, and that the single contact centre could be a barrier introducing delays.

- Only half of councils responding to the survey had attended meetings for clerks, but those who did found them useful.

- Most community councils have participated in planning site visits, but complain that they feel excluded by not being able to speak.

- Only one principal authority department had received a request for a delegation of services to a community council.

- Several community councils had taken up support services offered by the principal authority, including IT, legal, personnel and training support.

- The provision of induction training for newly elected members of community councils and newly appointed clerks was variable.

- There were mixed views on whether there had been an increase in public interest in the work of community councils.

The evaluation also noted that attendance by community councils at meetings, including meetings for clerks and the planning liaison group, and participation in training was mixed; and that community councils rarely requested items to be placed on the agenda for liaison meetings, or for specific officers to attend.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that, "the general feeling is that the charter has been helpful in identifying responsibilities and increasing communication and improving relationships. It has also been helpful in identifying areas where opportunities for engagement have been increased. Town and community councils that have taken up these opportunities have generally found them to be worthwhile." Although it was noted that some issues raised by community councils were limited by statutory requirements – for example, length of time for consultation – modifications were made to the charter from the evaluation, and the revised charter was approved in 2013.

More information: www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk.

CASE STUDY: CAERPHILLY LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON OFFICER

Caerphilly County Borough Council was the first authority in Wales to appoint a dedicated local councils' liaison officer. The role of the officer is to receive correspondence and queries from community and town councils and to seek responses on their behalf. This work is co-ordinated with meetings of the Community Council Liaison Sub-Committee. Community council representatives on the sub-committee meet with the liaison officer a month before scheduled meetings to discuss items that they wish to place on the agenda. The liaison officer then seeks to make sure that appropriate information is available for the meeting and arranges for appropriate officers to attend.

More information: *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils in Wales* (2006).

Community and town councils and the planning system

6.16 The most prominent and sometimes contentious area of interaction between community and town councils and principal authorities is land use planning. Community and town councils have a statutory right to consultation on planning applications in their areas, and planning is the issue most widely discussed by community councils, being discussed at every meeting by 98% of councils surveyed in 2002.[146] The Aberystwyth Report also reported estimates that most planning departments send between 500 and 1500 notifications of planning applications to community councils each year, and receive responses for 80% of these.[147]

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[146] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[147] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraph 5.14.

6.17 However the input of community and town councils into planning decision is advisory. Although the Aberystwyth Report found that the views of community councils corresponds with the decision of the principal authority planning committee in around 80% of cases,[148] the fifth of cases where there is disagreement can lead to perceptions that the opinions of community councils are being ignored. Only 47% of councils responding to the 2010 Community and Town Council Survey agreed with the statement that their comments on planning applications were taken into consideration by the principal authority, with 27% disagreeing.[149] The lack of feedback or explanation for divergent planning decisions is mentioned by some councils as a cause of frustration.

6.18 Planning Aid Wales, which works closely with community and town councils in developing their capacity to participate effectively in the planning process, attributes tensions over planning decisions to a lack of understanding of the system. In particular, they note that many community councillors have a limited knowledge of the strategic context of individual applications or of the admissible grounds on which objections can be made, and are not aware of the ability to inspect officers' reports on planning applications which present reasons for their recommendations.[150]

6.19 Training has been developed by Planning Aid Wales, with funding from the Welsh Government, to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the planning process by community and town councils. This training is delivered in part through the One Voice Wales training programme and in part direct to councils. A suite of planning distance learning resources is also in preparation.

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[148] Ibid., paragraph 5.16.

[149] Welsh Assembly Government (201o) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[150] Interview with Chief Executive of Planning Aid Wales.

6.20 Planning Aid Wales also argues that community and town councils could have more effective input into the planning process by engaging at an earlier stage in policy development. The formulation of new Local Development Plans (LDPs) has presented opportunities for this, though Planning Aid Wales recognises that effective engagement will require a change in culture by both community councils and principal authorities, including procedures for preparing LDPs that actively involve community councils. The approach taken by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in the preparation of its Local Development Plan is regarded as an example of best practice in this respect (see case study).

6.21 The earlier, strategic engagement of community and town councils is supported by the Independent Advisory Group on planning, which has advised that, "resources would be better utilised in ensuring that Town and Community Councils fully understand and are equipped to engage in the LDP process from the outset. This would build greater understanding of the level of development their area could accommodate the implications in terms of infrastructure; and the policy context against which any proposed development would be assessed."[151]

6.22 To support this process, the Independent Advisory Group recommended that the Welsh Government, Planning Aid Wales and One Voice Wales work together to develop training programmes that enable community councils to understand and become involved in the LDP process; and that the Welsh Government consults on the scope for community and town councils to prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance for their areas for submission to and adoption by the local planning authority as part of the LDP process.[152]

6.23 Additionally, the Independent Advisory Group indicated that "Town and Community Councils have a role in representing their communities in pre-application consultations with developers before applications are submitted", possibly through community forums, such as the Nant Llesg Community Forum in South Wales (see case study).[153]

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[151] Independent Advisory Group (2012) *Towards A Welsh Planning Act: Ensuring the Planning System Delivers*, paragraph 4.149.

[152] Ibid., recommendations 52 and 53.

[153] Ibid., paragraph 4.151.

6.24 The Independent Advisory Group also considered other options for increasing the role of community and town councils in the planning process, including the devolution of decision-making on some planning applications, and the introduction of a third party right of appeal. It concluded that increasing the powers currently available to community and town councils in respect to planning, "would not bring significant benefits to the delivery of planning in Wales, as resources would inevitably have to be diverted from [principal authorities] to support those Town and Community Councils willing to take on this function."[154] It also rejected the idea of a third party right of appeal, but advised that "front loading the planning process and involving third parties in planning decisions from the earliest stages would address the types of problems that have been described to us and go some way towards improving public perception and confidence in the planning system. We are strongly of the view that Town and Community Councils could play a more explicit role in this area."[155]

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[154] Ibid., paragraph 4.147.
[155] Ibid., paragraph 3.64.

CASE STUDY: BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Planning Aid Wales was commissioned by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to facilitate the participation of community and town councils in the preparation of the Local Development Plan. A structured engagement programme was devised by Planning Aid Wales, with the aims of building community capacity to engage with strategic planning policy-making, improve communication between the national park authority and community councils, and reduce the potential for conflict at later stages of plan preparation, especially around settlement development limits and land allocations.

Each community council was offered the opportunity to take responsibility for organising involvement by their community in the early strategy-setting stages of the plan preparation. Around half of the community councils in the park took up this opportunity, which involved collating detailed information about their localities, defining local preferences for future growth, and identifying locations for possible future development sites. The outputs from this locally-driven community engagement process were subsequently used by community councils to consider a range of strategic development options put forward by the planning authority.

To help community councils undertake this role effectively, Planning Aid Wales ran three capacity-building workshops, which included overviews of the planning processes and the role of community councils in the LDP preparation, and produced a Community Participation Toolkit for use by councils and a comprehensive advice and information pack. In the later stages of preparation of the LDP, community and town councils were consulted over options, with Planning Aid Wales again providing facilitation support with further planning workshops for community councillors, a training event for national park authority members, and two 'drop in' events to assist councils in preparing responses to the Deposit version of the LDP.

More information: www.planningaidwales.org.uk/about-us/recent-work.

CASE STUDY: NANT LLESG COMMUNITY FORUM

The Nant Llesg Community Forum was established by Miller Argent to engage local representatives in discussions around the development of proposals for surface coal mining at Nant Llesg near Rhymney. Participants in the forum include Darran Valley Community Council, as well as other local authorities and community groups. Meetings of the community forum were held alongside public consultation events as part of the pre-application process for the mine site. The aim was for members of the community forum to advise Miller Argent on the key issues affecting local communities, and to assist the company in finding ways to minimise impacts and maximise the benefits of the development to the local community. These measures could be incorporated into the formal planning application.

More information: http://www.nantllesg.co.uk/public-engagement/

Place-planning and sustainable development

6.25 The Independent Advisory Group has also encouraged the greater engagement of community and town councils in developing community plans or 'place plans'. This approach is informed by the introduction of Neighbourhood Development Plans in England, and particularly by the work of Shropshire County Council on 'place plans'. However, the Independent Advisory Group considered that the framework adopted in England risked becoming too bureaucratic and thus being counterproductive in discouraging engagement by communities. Instead, they indicated that "we prefer a simpler approach that retains maximum flexibility and can be varied to suit the aspirations and capabilities of different communities."[156]

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[156] Ibid., paragraph 4.153.

6.26 The place-planning approach has also been supported by the Sustainable Futures Commissioner, Cynnal Cymru and One Voice Wales as a means for delivering the Welsh Government's Sustainability Strategy at a local scale, within a framework of a national 'place based' strategy that would link local plans and regional strategies. Community and town councils are identified by One Voice Wales and Cynnal Cymru as the appropriate bodies to co-ordinate this activity.[157]

6.27 The development of community plans or place-plans by community and town councils would build on previous examples of action plans being developed and implemented by community councils, often in partnership with other local organisations. No comprehensive evidence is available for the extent of engagement in such activities by community and town councils across Wales, but there is evidence of LEADER groups and other rural development agencies facilitating community planning in several areas, including PLANED in Pembrokeshire. Other notable examples that illustrate plans initiated from within the community include the Talgarth and District Action Plan in Powys, and the Radyr and Morganstown Community Action Plan in Cardiff (see case study).

6.28 Place-plans form one part of a broader potential involvement by community and town councils in sustainable development. This might also include audits of community assets and partnership working with other local groups to develop or enhance community assets; projects to manage or protect the local environment, and to enhance a sense of place and local distinctiveness; and facilitating or leading community renewable energy schemes.[158] Opportunities for community and town councils to initiate and support the development of community renewable energy in partnership with local organisations and companies have been explored in research for One Voice Wales.[159]

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[157] Cynnal Cymru (2013) Notes on Meeting on the Sustainable Development Role of Community and Town Councils, 31 January 2013.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Thompson, M. (2012) *The Role of Community and Town Councils in Community Energy and Sustainable Development*, MA thesis sponsored by One Voice Wales and the Access to Masters Scheme.

6.29   The potential contribution of community and town councils to sustainable development has also been examined and supported by the Strong Roots initiative, a capacity-building project run in partnership by Cynnal Cymru, One Voice Wales, the Climate Change Consortium of Wales, Cardiff University and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. This notes that "many councils around Wales are already co-ordinating or supporting work that develops the resilience and sustainability of their communities through addressing issues such as local food, renewable energy, care for the environment, helping people develop new skills, forging links between neighbours, helping the elderly and providing opportunities for the younger residents to grow and learn."[160] Examples highlighted by Strong Roots include initiatives by Gelligaer Community Council in organising a schools' environmental competition and supporting community woodlands; and action by St Dogmael's Community Council to tackle invasive weeds (see case studies).

CASE STUDY: RADYR AND MORGANSTOWN COMMUNITY PLAN

The Radyr and Morganstown Community Plan was developed as a response to pressures on the community from its location on the edge of Cardiff, with the rapid growth of settlements over a short period of time perceived as threatening the cohesion of the community. A steering group was formed by the community council and the Radyr and Morganstown Association to oversee the development of the plan, with work streams including data collection to capture the views and needs of the community, a review of existing facilities and identification of those that were missing but needed, and the structure of the plan.

The steering group agreed that the plan should focus on issues over which the community had some control, but that it should also aim to influence decisions taken by others, notably Cardiff Council and the Welsh Government.

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[160] Cynnal Cymru (2012) *Strong Roots – Case studies*, page 2.

Planning students from Cardiff University helped to undertake a site appraisal of the community, identifying the potential for further development within the constraints of creating a long-term sustainable community. In particular, they focused on the practical limits to housing development, the potential for creating jobs within Radyr and Morganstown to reduce commuting and traffic generation, and a future vision for land use in the community. The steering group also oversaw two community questionnaire surveys – one for households generally, and one specifically aimed at young people.

From the collated evidence, the steering group produced a plan and identified a number of projects that they felt addressed the needs of the community. These included the management of green spaces, especially two woodlands owned by Cardiff Council but managed by the community council; community environmental events, with activities such as bulb planting, willow weaving and making bird/bat boxes, funded by the community council and involving schools and the youth club; an annual May festival run by the Radyr and Morganstown Association with financial support from the community council, and a Christmas Fair; and the Old Church Rooms community building, owned by the community council and managed jointly with the RMA, which provides accommodation for two nursery schools, a good neighbour scheme and rooms for community events and private hire.

More information: http://www.cynnalcymru.com/casestudy/radyr-and-morganstown-community-council-community-plan.

CASE STUDY: GELLIGAER COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Gelligaer Community Council, which represents nine small semi-rural and urban communities in the county borough of Caerphilly, has initiated a number of projects aimed at enhancing sustainability. These include an annual environmental competition for schools, introduced in 2009. Schools are given a small grant of £1,000 to spend on an environmental project of their choice, which are then judged in the competition. Projects that have been undertaken include creating nature areas, allotments and vegetable beds in school grounds, which are used for lessons, bird and insect watching, and reflection. Each school has set up its own eco-council and participates in an inter-school environmental council.

The Council has also enhanced green spaces in the community. In 2008 it opened a community woodland at Penybryn on land owned by the county borough council. Funding from the Forestry Commission's Cydcoed Scheme supported litter clearance, landscaping and tree-planting, as well as the construction of an attractive stone wall and a path with disabled accessibility and installation of benches. All labour and materials were sourced locally. More recently, the community council has funded the Tiryberth Woodland and Pond Project, working with Groundwork Caerphilly and local youth clubs to dig out ponds and plant pond plants, create a log circle and wild flower areas, erect 12 bird boxes and lay out a footpath through the woods.

More information:

http://www.sustainwales.com/sites/default/files/Strong%20Roots%20Case%20Studies%2019.7.12.pdf

CASE STUDY: ST DOGMAELS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

In the early 2000s, St Dogmaels Community Council worked with PLANED to develop a local action plan for the village and formed a community forum, 'Cymdeithas Llandudoch', to access funding for which the council was not eligible. Together the community council and Cymdeithas Llandudoch have worked on delivering the action plan, but they have also been responsive to new concerns raised by local residents. In 2005 an elderly couple asked for help with their garden, which had become over-run with the invasive weed, Japanese knotweed. The community council committed 25% match funding for a scheme operated by Pembrokeshire County Council to treat Japanese knotweed and an eradication programme was implemented which involved mapping and clearing 4,500 square metres of knotweed over 92 sites in the community. In 2011, a local farmer asked for assistance with another invasive plant, Himalayan Balsam, which had been accidentally introduced to the area. A councillor worked with three environmental volunteers to map the affected area, whilst Cymdeithas Llandudoch secured funding for equipment needed to clear the plant, and the community council and the association organised volunteers to clear 18 acres of Himalayan Balsam.

More information:

http://www.sustainwales.com/sites/default/files/Strong%20Roots%20Case%20Studies%2019.7.12.pdf

Engaging with other bodies

6.30 Community and town councils also engage with a wide range of other bodies, both within and outside their communities, in a number of different ways. In addition to funding local organisations and events, as described in Chapters 4 and 5, community councils also engage by responding to consultations, appointing representatives to committees and boards, and forming partnerships around specific projects. Detailed and comprehensive evidence on the engagement of community and town councils across Wales in consultations is however limited, with the most reliable data provided by research for the Aberystwyth Report. Such survey data on consultation is potentially skewed by the reasonable assumption that councils who reply to questionnaire surveys are also more likely to respond to other consultations than the average for the sector.

6.31 Community and town councils are consulted by a wide range of public and private organisations, including principal authorities, police authorities, health boards and community health councils, government agencies such as Natural Resources Wales (previously the Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment Agency), the Local Government Boundary Commission, economic development partnerships and groups, the Post Office, businesses including utility companies, telecom companies and bus and rail operators, and the Welsh Government – all of whom contacted at least a quarter of community councils during 2001-02 according to research for the Aberystwyth Report.[161]

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[161] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

6.32 Community and town councils generally welcome consultation, but many feel that they do not have sufficient resources to engage effectively. A common complaint, noted by the Aberystwyth Report, is that timetables for consultation do not fit with their cycle of meetings, or allow sufficient time for all councillors to input. However, as noted in the review of the Vale of Glamorgan Community and Town Council Charter, timescales for consultation are frequently set by statutory requirements – a period of 21 days in the case of consultations by principal authorities – and this is often not understood by community councils. Accordingly, the Aberystwyth Report recommended that "community and town councils themselves should also review the appropriateness of their business practices for permitting effective participation in consultation exercises. Councils may, for example, consider authorising a small sub-committee to review and respond to consultation requests on behalf of the council where the consultation timetable does not fit the council's cycle of meetings."[162] There is no comprehensive evidence on the take-up of this advice by councils.

6.33 The 2010 Community and Town Council Survey asked councils specifically about consultation by the Welsh Government. This reported that just under half of the councils surveyed agreed that it was clear why they were being consulted when they received consultations from the Welsh Government, and around 4four in 10 agreed that the Welsh Government involved them at appropriate stages in the policy-making process. However, it was also noted that there were a high number of neutral answers to these questions (Table 6.2). More broadly, the survey indicated relatively limited awareness by community and town councils of the supported offered by the Welsh Government, and found that less than a third of responding councils agreed that the Welsh Government understood the work of community and town councils.[163]

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[162] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* recommendation 5.14.

[163] Welsh Assembly Government (2011) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

Table 6.2: Responses of councils to statements on interactions with the Welsh Government (n=409)

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
When the Welsh Assembly Government consults with use, it is clear why we are being consulted	49%	33%	19%
The Welsh Assembly Government involves us at appropriate stages in the policy making process	41%	43%	16%
The council is aware of the support the Welsh Assembly Government offers community and town councils	37%	38%	25%
The Welsh Assembly Government understands the work of community and town councils	31%	51%	18%

Source: Community and Town Council Survey 2010

6.34 Specific issues raised by community and town councils in regard to consultation by the Welsh Government included the volume of consultations received and apparent lack of targeting, the length of consultation documents, and the language in which they are written being difficult to understand:

"As a small council the information received from the [Welsh Government] often seems very detailed and confusing and often irrelevant."

"Information passed on to the Town Council by the [Welsh Government] is often wordy and leaves councillors and clerk puzzled as to its relevance to our Town Council."

"We often get very 'beefy' correspondence from the [Welsh Government]. It is impossible to fully consider it."

"The plethora of detailed written consultations can become over burdening and therefore ignored. Maybe a simpler précis relevant to the particular council could encourage more interest and feedback."[164]

6.35 A second level of engagement by community and town councils is the appointment of representatives to external committees and boards. The Aberystwyth Report recorded that a majority of community and town councils are represented on a primary school governing body and on a village or community hall committee, and that many are represented on crime prevention or police liaison committees, and on committees for community associations, festivals, playing field associations and youth groups (Table 6.3). More recent comprehensive data is not available. The Aberystwyth Report in particular noted the importance placed by councils on representation on school governing bodies and proposed that a mechanism should be identified for representation on the governing bodies of secondary schools.[165] This recommendation was not accepted by the Welsh Government.

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[164] Welsh Assembly Government (2011) *Community and Town Councils Survey 2010.*

[165] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* recommendation 5.14.

Table 6.3: Community and town councils with representation on various outside bodies (n = 475)

Primary school governing body	82%
Village or community hall committee	66%
Crime prevention or police liaison committee	48%
Community association	27%
Local festival or cultural event committee	26%
Playing field committee	25%
Citizens Advice Bureau board	19%
Youth group committee	19%
Local trust	16%
Sports centre committee	13%
Transport consultative group	10%
Road safety committee	2%
Other	15%

Source: Aberystwyth Report (2003)

6.36 The third level of engagement by community and town councils with external bodies is through partnership working, including the formation of formal partnership organisations and collaboration on specific projects. Research for the Aberystwyth Report noted that the extent of partnership working by community and town councils is difficult to quantify due to loose interpretations of the term 'partnership', and no more recent comprehensive data is available. The Aberystwyth Report nonetheless identified a wide range of partners working with community and town councils, including government agencies, local authorities, the Ministry of Defence, businesses, churches, schools, police forces, chambers of commerce, Merced y Wawr, the Womens' Institute, young farmers' clubs, youth groups, sports clubs and community associations.[166]

6.37 The major benefit to community and town councils is access to funding and other resources that they would not otherwise be able to mobilise to undertake a project on their own. This can involve the formation of new organisations that are able to apply for funding from sources such as the National Lottery Community Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund. At the same time, community councils contribute accountability to partnerships as channel for community representation, and more tangibly, frequently also contribute financial support, personnel, office resources and accommodation.[167]

6.38 Although no reliable quantitative evidence is available for the extent of partnership working by community and town councils, anecdotal evidence points to a number of successful examples by councils of varying size and in differing geographical settings, including Trawsfynydd Community Council, Nantyglo and Blaina Town Council and Usk Town Council (see case studies).

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[166] Woods, M. et al (2002) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*: *Second Interim Report – Factual Survey of Community and Town Councils in Wales.*

[167] Ibid.

CASE STUDY: TRAWS-NEWID COMMUNITY COMPANY

Following the decommissioning of Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, Trawsfynydd Community Council undertook a community appraisal in 1994 to identify ideas for the social and economic regeneration of the area. To implement the projects proposed, a community company, Traws-Newid, with membership open to all local residents over the age of 18 for a nominal £1 subscription. In partnership with the community council, Traws-Newid refurbished a redundant building in the village centre into a workshop, auditorium, office, exhibition centre and 20-bed hotel. The building is owned by the community centre, but managed by Traws-Newid. Funding for the project was raised from the European Regional Development Fund, the former Welsh Development Agency, Gwynedd County Council, British Nuclear Fuel, the Snowdonia National Park Authority and the Prince's Trust.

More information: *A Shared Community* (2008).

CASE STUDY: NANTYGLO AND BLAINA CHARTER GROUP

The Nantyglo and Blaina Charter Group was formed as a town council-led initiative to regenerate the local economy of the former iron-making and coal-mining community. The group is a registered charity formed as a partnership between the town council, the local council of churches and the Blaina Heritage Group, with the town council providing the secretariat. With a loan from the Public Works Loan Board, the group purchased a local Baptist chapel to develop as a multi-functional centre, including a heritage exhibition on the Chartist movement, a meeting place for young people, and a venue for hire, as well as space for continued Sunday worship. Subsequent funding has been obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Communities First.

More information: http://www.chartistvisitorcentre.org.uk/

CASE STUDY: USK TOWN COUNCIL

Usk Town Council work in close partnership with the local prison, supporting the prison staff and providing work for inmates. Activities undertaken by prisoners include refurbishing the town noticeboards, decorating rooms in the council offices, painting railings outside the council offices, and helping elderly residents with gardening.

More information: *A Good Practice Guide for Community and Town Councils in Wales* (2006).

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Community and town councils are an important part of the local government system in Wales, yet available evidence about their workings is incomplete and of variable quality. Good, comprehensive evidence is available from recent research on the demographic profile of councillors and on several key aspects of council activities, and regular data collection by local authorities, the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, the Wales Audit Office and other bodies provides a robust evidence base on elections, council size, precepting, financial management and standards – though access to some of these data is not consistent across principal authorities. In other areas the most recent available evidence is from research conducted for the Aberystwyth Report in 2002-03, whilst some aspects, such as the recruitment of councillors and analysis of the issue of double taxation, have not been researched in detail. Evidence relating to several of the changes introduced following the Aberystwyth Report, and particularly in the Local Government (Wales) Measure, has not yet been collected in a sufficiently systematic or comprehensive manner to fully evaluate the impact of these developments, though anecdotal and partial evidence is available.

7.2 Sufficient evidence is nonetheless available to support the identification of a number of conclusions about the current strengths and weaknesses of community and town councils in Wales. The strengths largely re-affirm the 'key benefits' of community and town councils identified in the Aberystwyth Report.[168] These are:

- *Local Responsiveness*: Community and town councils and their members are more generally accessible to local residents than higher-tier authorities and can be more responsive to their needs and interests. The evidence indicates that there is a considerably lower ratio of electors to community councillors than of electors to principal councillors, and suggests a fairly high degree of interaction between community and town councils and the local community.

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[168] Woods, M. et al (2003) *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales,* paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5.

- *Representation of Local Interests:* Community and town councils can act as a vehicle for the representation of local interests to external bodies, having a more closely defined geographical focus than principal authorities. The evidence indicates that community and town councils have a high density of contacts with other bodies, including responses to consultation exercises and input to the planning process.

- *Mobilisation of Community Activity*: Community and town councils exist at a scale that reflects people's patterns of social interaction and their identification with place, and as such can act to facilitate community activities, organise and sponsor community events and promote community spirit and inclusiveness. The evidence demonstrates that most community and town councils are heavily involved in such activities, especially through organising events, providing meeting places, grant-aiding local societies, and co-ordinating action to address local problems.

- *Additionality*: Community and town councils can provide additionality to the services and facilities operated by principal authorities. The evidence records examples of councils providing complementary services to principal authority provision in areas such as recycling and recreation, co-funding initiatives in areas such as crime prevention, and enhancing the provision of amenities delegated from principal authorities.

- *Accountability*: The authority of community and town councils comes from their electoral mandate, which sets them apart from non-statutory community organisations. The evidence shows that around 7,000 individuals have been elected to office as community or town councillors across Wales, though the level participation in elections could be higher.

- *Stability and Continuity*: The statutory constitution of community and town councils gives them a relative security of existence, which has been strengthened by legislative changes in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. The evidence points to numerous examples of community and town councils providing stable leadership, secretariats and core funding for projects otherwise dependent on short-term grant-funding.

- *Tax-raising Powers*: The ability of community and town councils to precept the council tax is one of their most significant powers and provides a source of revenue not available to non-statutory community groups. The evidence shows that community

and town councils across Wales raise in excess of £30 million through the precept, which is put to use in providing local amenities, supporting local organisations and funding projects for the benefit of the local community.

- *Promotion of Public Service:* Participation as a community or town councillor engages individuals in public service and may provide a 'training ground' for subsequent participation in higher tiers of government. The evidence records that over 8,000 individuals in Wales are engaged in voluntary service as community or town councillors, many of them making considerable commitments of their time.

7.3 However, analysis of the evidence also points to a number of weaknesses in the current structure and operation of community and town councils. These include:

- *Inconsistency:* The range in size, setting, budget and activities of community and town councils means that it is difficult to generalise about the sector and presents an obstacle to the introduction of new powers or provisions that might apply across the sector. The absence of an accreditation scheme for community and town councils in Wales extenuates this problem, as there is no formal mechanism for differentiation between councils in their eligibility for powers, funding or provisions.

- *Financial Capacity*: The evidence suggests that decision-making by community and town councils, particularly with respect to service provision, is constrained by both statutory and self-imposed restrictions on revenue and expenditure. These include the statutory limit on spending under the power of wellbeing, which evidence indicates has limited its impact, and concerns about double taxation. Equally, it should be noted that there is no substantial evidence that lifting the spending limit of the power of wellbeing would necessarily lead to a significant expansion in the activities of community and town councils, with the 2003 Aberystwyth Report finding that only a small number of councils were spending close to the limit under Section 137.

- *Compliance Issues*: The evidence indicates that a minority of community and town councils – particularly, though not exclusively, smaller councils – are not fully complying with guidance and legal obligations, for example with respect to the preparation of financial accounts. Lack of compliance carries risks of management failure and weakens confidence in the sector.

- *Variable Electoral Mandate*: Whilst accountability is highlighted above as one of the strengths of the sector, the evidence shows that less than a third of community and town councillors returned in 2012 were elected in contested elections. The low number of contested elections weakens the mandate of community and town councils and could limit their capacity to act.

- *Representativeness*: The evidence indicates that the profile of community and town councillors is not representative of the communities that they serve, and that in particular there is an over-representation of people aged over 60 and an under-representation of younger members of communities. This may affect the capacity of councils to reflect community interests. A number of initiatives have been introduced to redress this imbalance, including provisions to recruit young people to councils and mechanism to promote community engagement, though the evidence suggests that use of these capacities by councils is currently mixed.

- *Understanding of Local Government*: The evidence suggests that there are short-comings in the knowledge and understanding of some councillors and clerks of the capacities of community and town councils and the operation of the local government system, and this can limit the effectiveness of community and town councils in areas such as planning. This weakness is being addressed through the National Training Strategy, though evidence indicates varying enthusiasm for training from councils.

7.4 The weaknesses outlined above also reflect issues identified by the Aberystwyth Report, and over the past decade significant advances have been made in strengthening the capacity of the community and town councils sector. The Local Government (Wales) Measure, 2011, in particular is the most significant piece of legislation relating to community and town councils in Wales since the Local Government Act 1972 and together with the development of the National Training Strategy, new guidance on relations between principal authorities and community and town councils, and other specific actions, has considerably strengthened the institutional framework for community and town councils in Wales. However, many of the provisions in the Measure are permissive powers that have not yet been enacted. Where new provisions have been brought into effect, take-up by community and town councils has not been consistent or comprehensive. As such, whilst the potential role and capacity of community and town councils has been increased, this potential has not yet been fully realised. The evidence examined in this report – including interviews with sector stakeholders – suggest that there have been three limiting factors:

- *Finance*: The implementation of new provisions and powers by community and town councils has been constrained by the availability of financial resources. In particular, use of the new power of wellbeing, introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, has been restricted by the continuation of Section 137 spending limits. Though, as noted in 4.17, these limits have had limited impact on Councils' spending.

- *Follow-through*: Some permissive powers awarded to the Welsh Government in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, have not been followed-through with the use of these powers, for example with respect to direct grants and an accreditation scheme. In other areas, changes in legislation and guidance have not been followed-through with promotional activity and resources to support their implementation, for example with respect to the creation of new councils.

- *Culture:* The take-up of new powers and provisions by community and town councils has also been constrained by cultural factors within the sector, including differential enthusiasm for expanding the role of councils in service provision, mixed views on the relevance of expenses payments to widening participation, and the suspicion or resistance demonstrated by a small minority of councils towards modernisation and professionalisation, including training and new technology.

7.5 Representative associations, particularly One Voice Wales and the Society of Local Council Clerks, have also contributed to the development of the community and town council sector. Whilst no formal evaluations of these contributions have been conducted, some conclusions may be drawn about the roles played by the associations from the available evidence, including interviews conducted for this review with the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales and the Wales Coordination Office for the Society of Local Council Clerks. This evidence suggests that the role of OVW and SLCC has been particularly important in developing, delivering and promoting the training strategy for community and town councils, and that the associations have also played significant roles in disseminating information, guidance and good practice through their websites, conferences and publications, and in developing partnerships with groups such as Cynnal Cymru. However, no comprehensive evidence is available on the use of these resources by councils, or their impact on council practice. Constraints on the work of OVW and SLCC include resource limitations – with the Chief Executive of OVW for example contrasting the organisation's staffing and budget with that of the WLGA – and incomplete coverage of councils in terms of membership.

7.6 As evidence presented in this report has detailed, there are numerous examples of good practice that demonstrate the potential of community and town councils to contribute to good governance and the enhancement of local communities. Progress in building the capacity of community and towns councils is being made, however a number of challenges still remain which will require action both within the sector and by the Welsh Government to address.

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