

Easy Read



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Community and town councils in Wales

A report about what we found out



This is an easy read version of ‘**Democratic Health of Community and Town Councils**’. This report was written by the **Democratic Health Task and Finish Group** for Welsh Government.

**November 2024**

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# How to use this document



This is an easy read document. But you may still need support to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. You can check what these words in blue mean on page 40.



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Where the document says **we**, this means **Democratic Health Task and Finish Group**.

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# About this report



This report was written by the Democratic Health Task and Finish Group.

The **Democratic Health Task and Finish Group** was set up in April 2023 to:



- Find out why people do not get involved in **community and town councils** in Wales.
- Suggest ways to make people aware of **community and town councils**.
- Involve more people.
- Have more **diverse** people running for election to become councillors.



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**Diverse** means people are not all the same. For example, people come from different backgrounds, make different choices or are good at different things.

This report is about:

- what we did
- what we found out
- and what we think needs to be done to improve things.



## **About community and town councils**

**Community and town councils** are part of local government. They are closest to our communities.



They have **councillors** who represent the views of people in their community.

There are 875 communities in Wales. 732 of them have a **community or town council**.



Elections for all councils happen every 5 years.

**Community and town councils** work closely with their **principal council**. The principal council is sometimes called the **local authority**.

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Principal councils provide services for their area like:



- Education
- Social care
- Housing
- Recycling
- Setting and collecting council tax.



Principal councils have more powers and duties than **community and town councils**.

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# What we did



We looked at reports, research and surveys.

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We ran 15 focus groups to find out more.

We spoke to:



- People in the community

- Young people

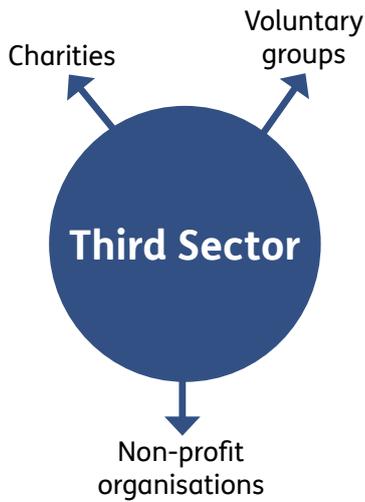


- Community and town councils

- Experts

- Political parties

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- **Third sector** groups.



The **third sector** is made up of charities, voluntary groups, and non-profit organisations. They are not part of the government or businesses.

We focussed on 5 areas:



1. What people think of **community and town councils**.
2. Problems between council members and how it affects the community.

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3. How **community and town councils** are set up.



4. Do **councils** share enough information with their communities.



5. Are communities involved in **community and town councils**.



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# What we found out

## What people think of community and town councils

People often did not trust their local councils because of bad experiences.



Most people did not know what councils do, especially young people.



Many councillors were older, often retired men. Councils were seen as outdated and not **diverse** enough.

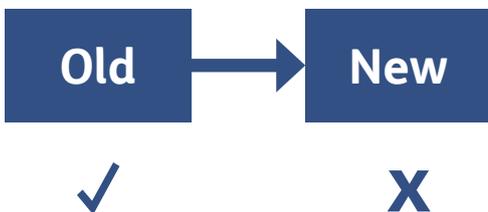
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## Problems between council members. And how it affects the community



New councillors did not agree with older councillors.

Councillors with different views were not supported.



Many **community and town councils** did not like change. This made it hard for new people to join.

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## How community and town councils are set up



**Community and town councils** often did not deal with important community issues well enough.

It is important to support people to get involved in decisions.



Some people found the rules of councils hard to understand.



People found the old systems, meetings and minutes confusing.

**Community and town councils** still work in ways that are formal and difficult. This slows down decisions.

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## Do councils share enough information with their communities



**Community and town councils** were not able to reach many people. Because they use old methods like notice boards.

**Community and town councils** often did not ask for feedback or ideas from their communities.



Young people were often left out when making decisions.

**Community and town councils** often preferred to appoint councillors without elections. This was seen as unfair.

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## Are communities involved in community and town councils



Some research showed it would be better if councils had to involve people.

Not many people were involved in the work of **community and town councils** because they:



- did not know that they could take part
- or felt left out sometimes.



We looked at different ways of involving people. For example, community groups and voting.

But there were some worries that this would not help involve everyone in the community.

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# What people said

## People in the community



Many people do not understand what **councils** do.

They found it hard to get involved because councils often ignored them. Or took time to answer them.

Many people said they would not want to run for elections. They said things like:

- It was not easy for everyone to get involved.
- Elections are too difficult for people to get involved with.





- We need more time and money to run elections.
- Mostly councillors were chosen without elections.
- Councils did not welcome new people.

People were confused about **principal** and **community and town councils**.



Most people were not interested in being more involved with councils.

Many people preferred volunteering through other groups.

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## Young people



Young people often did not know much about councils. They were confused about the difference between principal councils and community and town councils.

They were less likely to talk to councillors or go to meetings. They liked being involved in community events but did not want council roles.



Many young people did not know how to contact local councils or councillors.

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They had different reasons for not wanting to be councillors. For example:



- not being interested
- not having enough time
- not knowing enough about the role
- there was not enough **diversity**.



Many felt the issues **community and town councils** focus on were not relevant to young people.

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Young people want councils to:

- Create more opportunities.
- Have projects that young people can get involved with.
- Promote health and wellbeing. And include everyone.
- Have someone to represent young people.
- Improve communication.
- Provide clearer websites.
- Involve young people in improving transport, safety, and the environment.
- Pay young people for getting involved.





Young people feel left out because they do not often have a say in council decisions or projects.

## Third sector groups

Many **third sector** groups knew about **community and town councils**.

The main reason for not wanting to be a councillor was:

- Too much work.
- Caring responsibilities.
- Lack of pay.



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They felt the **third sector** and councils could work together better.



People said that by improving the way the **third sector** and councils work together, we would:

- Be clearer and more open.
- Have more joined up support and training.
- Get everyone in the community involved.
- Learn from each other and best ways of working.



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People talked about challenges that we would face:



- Sharing information.
- Lack of understanding and awareness.
- Less resources.
- Different ways of working.
- Fear of losing control or power.
- Lack of skills and knowledge to complete funding applications.
- Difficult elections process.
- Fear of **abuse** through social media.

Application  
Form

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**Abuse** is when someone says or does something to hurt you or make you feel bad.

- More work.
- Competition for the same funding.
- Differences in opinions.



**Third sector** groups felt that we need:

- To know more about **community and town councils**.
- Have more projects and share information.
- Have more examples of joint working.





- More **diversity** in **community and town councils**.
- New ways of working to involve everyone.
- Shared wellbeing plans.
- Have budgets for working together.

## **Community and town councils and principal councils**

Councillors and officers talked about issues, like:



- **Abuse** from other councillors or people. Especially on social media.
- Bad behaviour by council members or officers.

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- More work.
  - What it is like working within community and town councils.
  - Lack of pay.
  - Caring responsibilities.



Community and town councils found it difficult to work with **Principal Councils (local authorities)**.  
They felt:

- **Principal councils** do not consider the views of **community councils**.
- They do not respond to their queries in time.



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**Principal councils** shared similar views. They did not want to be councillors because of:

- Fear of **abuse**.
- Too much work.
- No interest.
- Different working patterns.



People felt it was important to have:

- Good media stories about council work.
- Support for new councillors. And for people who want to become councillors.

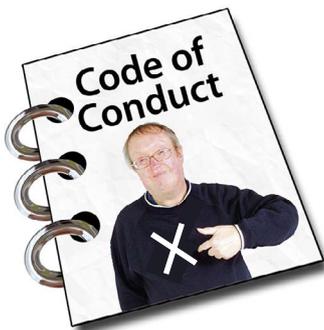


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- Special leave for employees to help them act as councillors.
  - **Community councils** being valued by local authorities.



**Abuse** was mainly on social media. Councils did not have enough resources to help manage social media **abuse**.

Complaints often went to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). Instead of being solved locally.



Some councillors chose not to go to Code of Conduct training.

There was too much time spent on meetings, writing reports, committees and events.

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Not all councillors worked to make projects happen. Some just wanted the status.

Some councillors wanted to leave their role because of:



- Low pay or no pay.
- The council was not working well enough.



- Too much paperwork.
- Bad behaviour continuing because complaints were not taken seriously.
- Other councillors being silent or not caring about issues.

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# What happens next



We already knew about some issues in this report.

The goal is to build trust in councils across Wales.

There are **2 options** for improving **community and town councils**.



Some extra research may be needed for both options. This research will be useful no matter which option is chosen.

The first option looks at ways to rebuild **community and town councils**.

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The second option suggests **changing the way community and town councils** work. It says the current way might be outdated and that a new system is needed.

We think Welsh Ministers should choose 1 of these 2 options.

## Option 1

## Option 1

### Rebuilding community and town councils

This option focuses on helping communities and councils work together better. Under this option we want to:



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## Create awareness

We need to:



- Train councillors to connect with schools, youth groups, and communities.



- Work with teachers to make lessons about **community and town councils**.
- Have councils in areas that do not have one.
- Share good examples of **community and town councils** to inspire others.

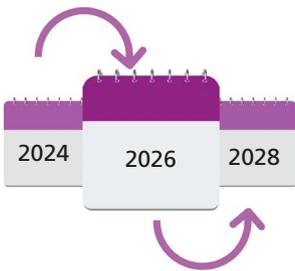
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## Promote inclusion and diversity



This would mean:

- Collecting and sharing information about councils and communities.
- Offer guidance to get more **diverse** councillors.
- Report on **diversity** every 2 years.
- Look at having reserved seats and money for young people and other groups who are not well represented on councils.
- Work with organisations that promote **diversity** in politics.



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## Improve skills

Help councils improve their skills. And fix problems. This can be done by:



- Offering training.
- Looking at new ways of working.
- Checking on how councils work.

## Make elections fair



Make election costs clear and fair.

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Help councils encourage people to get involved in elections.

## Change how we work

There have been many reports of poor behaviour within **community and town councils**. But there are only a few formal complaints.

We want to:

- Check the complaint process and suggest changes to improve the system.
- Work with organisations to review and improve how councils deal with bad behaviour.





- Work with Audit Wales to improve how things are checked.
- Review policies.
- Make the role of **community and town councils** clearer. And how they work with **principal councils**.

## Option 2

## Option 2

### Changing the way community and town councils work

We suggest that a special group is made by a Minister. This group can look at changing how **community and town council's** work.

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The group can look at:



- Reviewing the aim and roles of **community and town councils**.
- Making it clearer how community councils, principal councils, and the **third sector** work together.
- Changing how people are elected. Or chosen to be part of these councils.



- Making sure councils are **diverse**.
- Making sure there is enough money and staff.
- Checking how councils are doing.

We talked about using some actions from **Option 1** together with **Option 2**.

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These actions include:



- Reviewing the pay of councillors and money for groups who have less opportunities.
- Setting up a temporary project to find new ways of working for officers.
- Review council sizes.
- Check how councils handle complaints.
- Work with Audit Wales to improve how things are checked.
- Work with organisations to review and improve how councils deal with bad behaviour.



These actions will provide a strong base for future changes.

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# Hard words

## Abuse

Abuse is when someone says or does something to hurt you or make you feel bad.

## Diverse

Diverse means people are not all the same. For example, people come from different backgrounds, make different choices or are good at different things.

## Third sector

The third sector is made up of charities, voluntary groups, and non-profit organisations. They are not part of the government or businesses.