

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

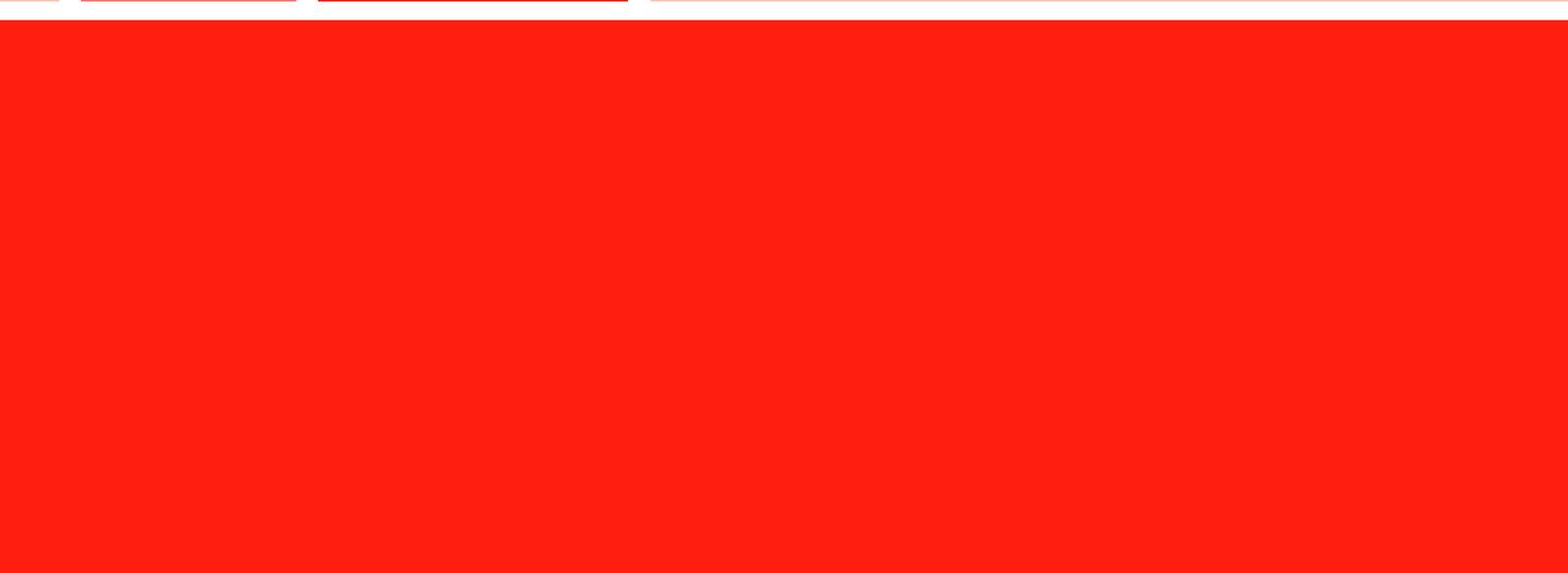
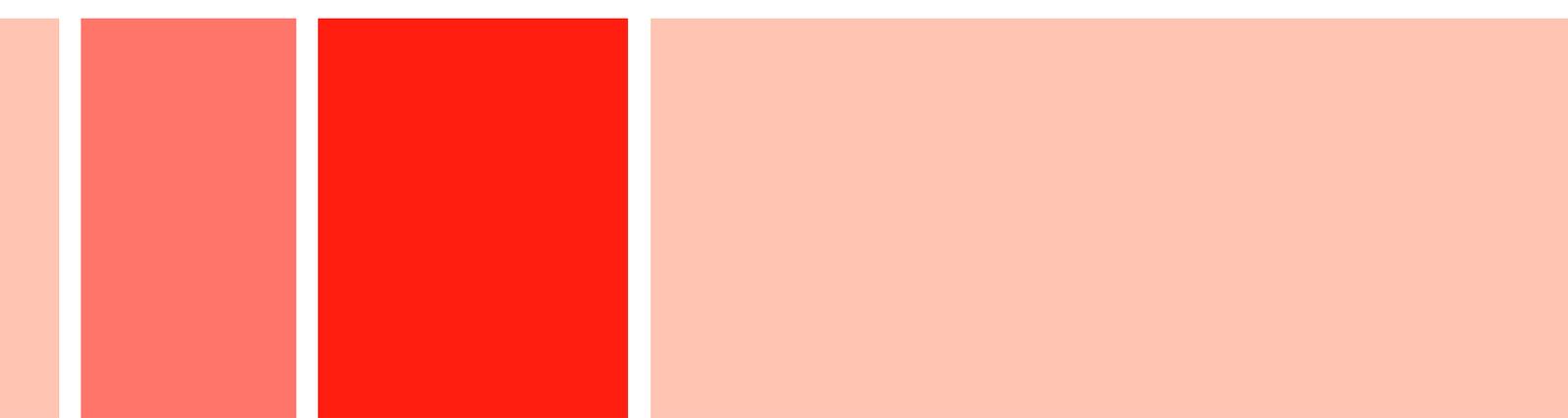
Social research
Number: 07/2011



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

www.cymru.gov.uk

Community and Town Councils Survey 2010: Findings Report



Community and Town Councils Survey 2010: Findings Report

Social Research Division Welsh Assembly Government

For further information please contact:

Ian Jones

Social Research Division

Welsh Assembly Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Tel: 029 2082 5540

Email: ian.jones2@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly Government Social Research, 2011

ISBN 978 0 7504 6120 7

© Crown Copyright 2011

Table of contents

Key messages	5
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Background	9
1.2 Research aims and objectives	10
1.3 Methodology	11
1.4 Response rate	12
2. Profile of councils	14
2.1 Profile of councillors	14
2.1.1 Elected and co-opted councillors	15
2.1.2 Demographics of councillors	16
2.3 Working hours of clerk	16
2.4 Model Code of Conduct	17
2.5 Council precepts	17
2.6 Services and amenities provided by councils	18
2.7 Welsh language	19
3. Skills and training	20
3.1 Power of Wellbeing	21
3.1.1 What do councils envisage they would use the Power of Wellbeing for?	21
3.1.2 What would stop councils from using the Power of Wellbeing?	23
4. ICT and communications	25
4.1 Council websites	25
4.2 ICT access	26

5. Interaction with communities	27
5.1 Community engagement and complaints procedure	28
5.1.1 Comments about the relationship between council and its community	29
6. Interaction with unitary authorities	31
6.1 Charter and service level agreements	32
6.2 Co-option to local authority committees	33
6.2.1 Comments about the relationship between council and unitary authorities	33
7. Interaction with Welsh Assembly Government	36
7.1.1 Comments about the relationship between council and the Welsh Assembly Government	37
Appendix A: Questionnaire	40

List of tables and figures

Tables

Table 1.1	Survey responses by unitary authority	13
Table 2.1	Services and amenities provided by councils	19
Table 4.1	What is provided on council websites?	25
Table 4.2	Reasons that councils do not have websites	26
Table 5.1	Most common reasons that community interacts with council	28
Table 5.2	Most common methods used by community to contact council	28

Figures

Figure 2.1	Number of councillors	14
Figure 2.2	Proportion of councillors that are elected	15
Figure 2.3	Proportion of councils that advertise vacancies for co-option	15
Figure 2.4	Weekly working hours of clerk	16
Figure 2.5	Council precepts 2010-11	18
Figure 3.1	Community and town council skills and training	20
Figure 3.2	Do you envisage that your council would use the Power of Wellbeing, if extended to community and town councils?	21
Figure 4.1	ICT access of councils	26
Figure 5.1	Community and town council interaction with communities	27
Figure 6.1	Community and town council interaction with unitary authorities	31
Figure 7.1	Community and town council interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government	37

Key messages

Profile of councils

- The number of council seats per community and town council ranged from six or fewer (4 per cent of councils) to 20 or more (2 per cent of councils). **The average number of seats per council was 11.3.**
- An overall gender imbalance remains in the demographics of councillors. In total, **seven out of ten councillors are men**, similar to the proportion reported in 2002.
- Overall, 6 per cent of councils had youth members (between 16 and 25 years of age).
- Overall, 6 per cent of council clerks work full-time, while 56 per cent work 10 hours a week or less.
- **The Model Code of Conduct has had almost universal take-up**, with all but four of the responding councils adopting it.
- The precepts for community and town councils in 2010-11 varied widely from £0 to £913,610. The average (median) precept for 2010-11 was **£13,300.**
- The services and amenities most commonly provided by community and town councils were grants (63 per cent) and playing fields, open spaces, village greens or commons (59 per cent).

Skills and training

- Around **one out of three councils support the notion of an accreditation scheme** for community and town councils.

- Overall, around a third of councils agreed that their councillors regularly attend training courses, while three out of ten councils reported having a training budget.
- Around three quarters of councils responded that they would 'definitely' or 'probably' use the Power of Wellbeing if extended to community and town councils. Of those that would 'probably' or 'definitely' not use the Power of Wellbeing, a major concern was a lack of necessary financial resources.

ICT and communications

- **Around a half of councils reported having a website** (47 per cent). For those without a website about half did not consider it to be a priority, while a half had no-one to maintain a website.
- Overall, seven out of ten councils had access to the internet but one out of twenty did not have access to a computer, printer, or the internet.

Interaction with communities

- Councils were generally positive about the interaction with their communities, with **nine out of ten agreeing that they have a good relationship**.
- The main reasons that the community interact with their council are to report local problems and discuss planning issues. The most common method used by the community to interact with the council was by telephone.
- There was a strong feeling among many of the smaller community councils that the good relationship they perceived they had with their community was due to the area being 'close-knit', and the accessibility and approachability of the councillors.

- However, an apparent concern was that members of the community often did not know what the different responsibilities of the community or town council and county council were.

Interaction with unitary authorities

- Three quarters of councils agreed that they had a good relationship with their unitary authority. However, a quarter disagreed with the statement 'our council's comments on planning applications are taken into consideration by the unitary authority'.
- Around **two thirds of councils were working towards a charter agreement** with their unitary authority.
- Overall, 16 per cent of councils had a service level agreement.
- Around one quarter of councils had members that were co-opted to local authority committees.
- Community council forums and liaison meetings were identified as a positive way for councils and the unitary authority to interact, as were having county councillors attend community council meetings.
- A common complaint from community and town councils was that unitary authorities were viewed as being **slow in responding to correspondence** from councils, although this may differ between departments within the same unitary authority.

Interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government

- Questions regarding interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government elicited a relatively high proportion of neutral responses.

- Many of the criticisms made were in regard to the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to consulting with councils. In particular, it was felt that **councils were not given enough time to fully consider and respond to consultations**; that the detailed language that consultation papers are written in makes them difficult to understand; and that it was not always apparent why councils were being consulted on certain issues.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This report presents findings from the Welsh Assembly Government's Community and Town Councils Survey 2010. The survey was undertaken in-house by the Welsh Assembly Government's Social Research Division.

Community and town councils are the grassroots tier of government in Wales. They are responsible for providing a variety of services tailored to meet the needs of their local population and together, receive an overall annual budget of more than £25 million¹. In Wales, there are a total of **735 community and town councils** which serve populations that range from fewer than 200 to more than 45,000 people. However, not all communities in Wales have a community and town council – currently, around 70 per cent of the population in Wales are represented by a community or town council².

With the exception of a study by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth carried out in 2002 (and published in 2003³) into the role and functions of community and town councils, an evidence gap exists regarding the Welsh Assembly Government's understanding of the councils and how they operate. The Aberystwyth study concluded that the benefits of community and town councils outweigh their costs, highlighting their particular benefits such as **local responsiveness** in comparison to higher tier authorities and their **representation of local interests** when engaging with external organisations.

¹ See <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/communitytowncouncils/>

² See <http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/allabout-councils>

³ University of Wales, Aberystwyth (2003). *Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. Available here: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/iges/research-groups/new-political-geographies/research-intro/community-town-councils/>

Eight years on from the Aberystwyth study, there have been many developments and changes within the sector. The current study allows the Welsh Assembly Government to learn more about a key group of stakeholders, the composition of the sector, its priorities, challenges as well as the relationship between the councils and their communities, unitary authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government. Due to the diversity of community and town councils, up to date information about the characteristics of the sector and its capabilities will enable the Welsh Assembly Government to tailor policy making to the unique characteristics of this grassroots level of local government. It helps to demonstrate how community and town councils are currently operating and how this compares with the potential demands resulting from the proposed Local Government Measure, which aims to:

[...] make provision to strengthen the structures and working of local government in Wales at all levels, and to ensure that local councils reach out to and engage with all sectors of the communities they serve.⁴

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The overall aim of the research was to improve the Welsh Assembly Government's understanding of community and town councils in Wales and how they operate.

The key objectives of the research were to:

- Capture the profiles of community and town councils, their councillors and clerks, and the services they offer;
- Assess the quality of community and town councils' interaction with their communities, local authorities and the Welsh Assembly Government; and
- Establish a skills and capabilities baseline which demonstrates how community and town councils are currently operating and how this

⁴ See <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/business-legislation-measures-localgov.htm>

compares with the potential demands resulting from the proposed Local Government Measure.

1.3 Methodology

This findings report is based on analysis of responses to an online and postal survey of community and town councils conducted in-house by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The survey questionnaire was developed by the Welsh Assembly Government in consultation with One Voice Wales (an umbrella organisation for community and town councils that provides an advice and guidance service to its members) and the Society of Local Council Clerks. In September 2010, the questionnaire was piloted with four distinct community and town councils, chosen for the different characteristics of the communities they serve and their geographic location. Following feedback from the pilot participants, some amendments were made to the questionnaire prior to the fieldwork commencing.

Rather than taking a sampling approach, it was decided that all community and town councils in Wales would be invited to take part in the survey. The clerks of all community and town councils were invited to respond to the survey (on behalf of, and in consultation with their council). The contact details of the clerks were identified using the Welsh Assembly Government's database of community and town councils. In cases where contact information was missing or outdated, further efforts were made to ensure that the clerks would be invited to take part in the survey.

An advance letter or email was sent by the Welsh Assembly Government's Head of Local Government Policy to all contacts invited to participate in the survey in order to explain the purpose of the research. To raise further awareness, a letter was also circulated by One Voice Wales to alert area committees to the survey. An email was also sent to clerks to advise on how the councils could respond, with a PDF of the questionnaire attached so it

could be discussed by councils before the clerk, or another nominated person, completed the questionnaire on behalf of the council.

Councils that were unable to respond online were offered the opportunity to respond by post. Offering this alternative presented a more inclusive approach and helped to increase the response rate. In accordance with the Welsh Assembly Government's Welsh Language Policy, all respondents were offered the opportunity, at first contact, to complete the survey in either Welsh or English.

Survey fieldwork took place between 29 October and 17 December 2010. Reminders were sent to non-respondents half-way through and towards the end of the fieldwork period. In a few exceptional circumstances, responses were accepted after the 17 December deadline.

Where appropriate, the findings in this report are compared with those from the 2002 study conducted by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth⁵.

1.4 Response rate

Survey responses were submitted by 413 of the 735 community and town councils in Wales, giving a response rate of **56 per cent**. This response rate is slightly lower than the 60 per cent achieved in the 2002 study conducted by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. In total, 297 responses were submitted online and 116 by post.

Table 1.1, below, provides a breakdown of responses by unitary authority area.

⁵ Any changes between 2002 and 2010 that are described as 'significant' are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. However, it should be noted that the different methodologies and focus of the two studies mean that the 2002 and 2010 data may not be directly comparable.

Table 1.1: Survey responses by unitary authority

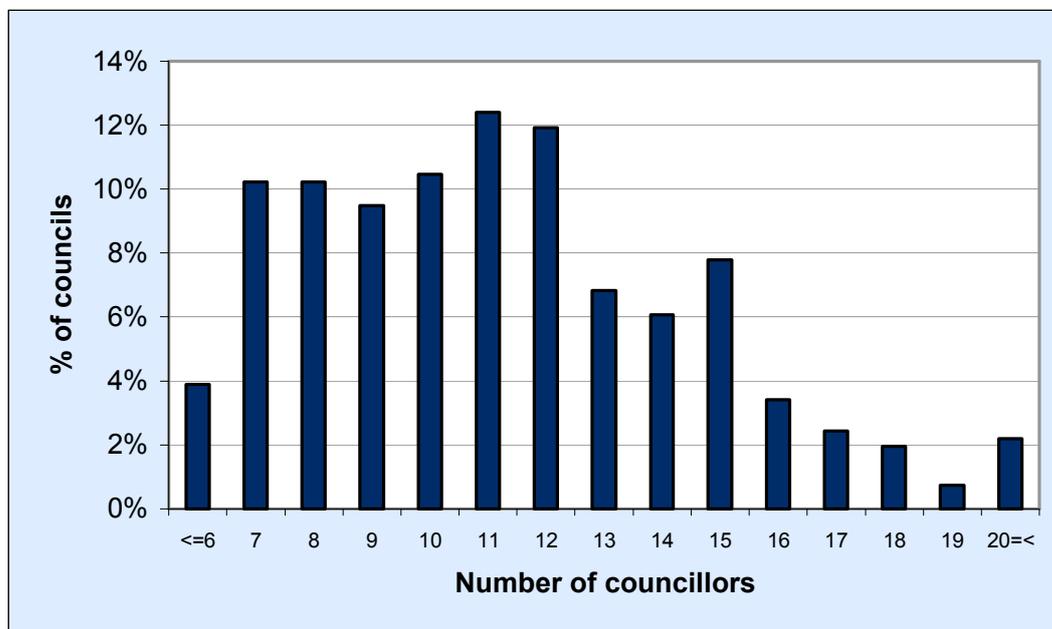
Unitary authority	Number of community or town councils	Number responded	Response rate
Blaenau Gwent	4	1	25%
Bridgend	20	13	65%
Caerphilly	16	11	69%
Cardiff	6	5	83%
Carmarthenshire	72	46	64%
Ceredigion	51	24	47%
Conwy	33	19	58%
Denbighshire	37	17	46%
Flintshire	34	19	56%
Gwynedd	64	28	44%
Isle of Anglesey	40	20	50%
Merthyr Tydfil	1	0	0%
Monmouthshire	33	22	67%
Neath Port Talbot	19	11	58%
Newport	14	8	57%
Pembrokeshire	80	38	48%
Powys	110	66	60%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	12	6	50%
Swansea	23	14	61%
Torfaen	6	3	50%
Vale of Glamorgan	26	17	65%
Wrexham	34	25	74%
TOTAL	735	413	56%

2. Profile of councils

2.1 Profile of councillors

The number of council seats per community and town council ranged from six or fewer (4 per cent of councils) to 20 or more (2 per cent of councils). Almost a quarter of councils had 11 or 12 council seats (see Figure 2.1, below). **The average (mean) number of seats per council was 11.3**, similar to the mean of 10.8 reported in 2002.

Figure 2.1: Number of councillors



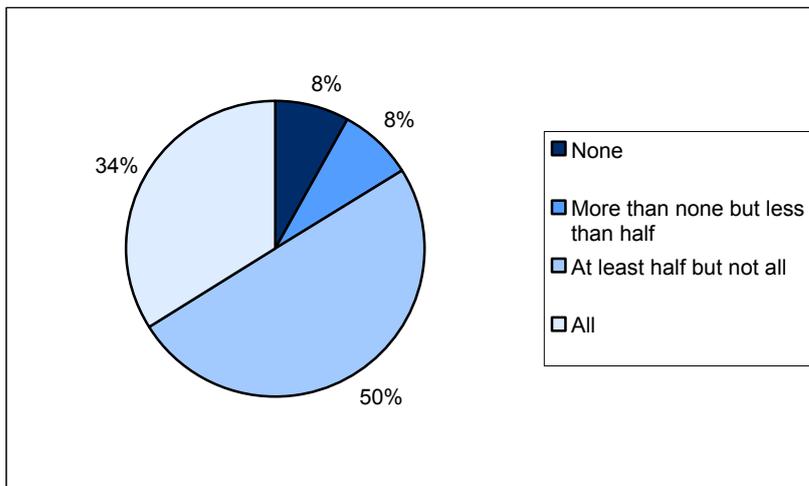
Base: 411 valid responses

More than eight out of ten councils (82 per cent) reported having **no** vacant councillor positions. Of the remainder, the number of vacant councillor positions varied between one and five per council.

2.1.1 Elected and co-opted councillors

As Figure 2.2 shows, in around one third of councils (34 per cent), all councillors were elected. The profile of councils where all councillors were elected varied from smaller community councils with six seats to larger community and town councils with more than 20 seats.

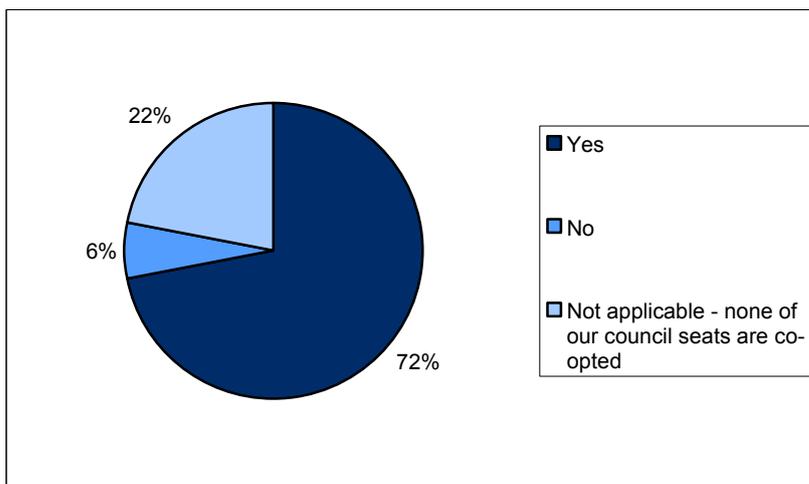
Figure 2.2: Proportion of councillors that are elected



Base: 390 valid responses

More than seven out of ten councils (72 per cent) advertised vacancies for co-option (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Proportion of councils that advertise vacancies for co-option



Base: 406 valid responses

2.1.2 Demographics of councillors

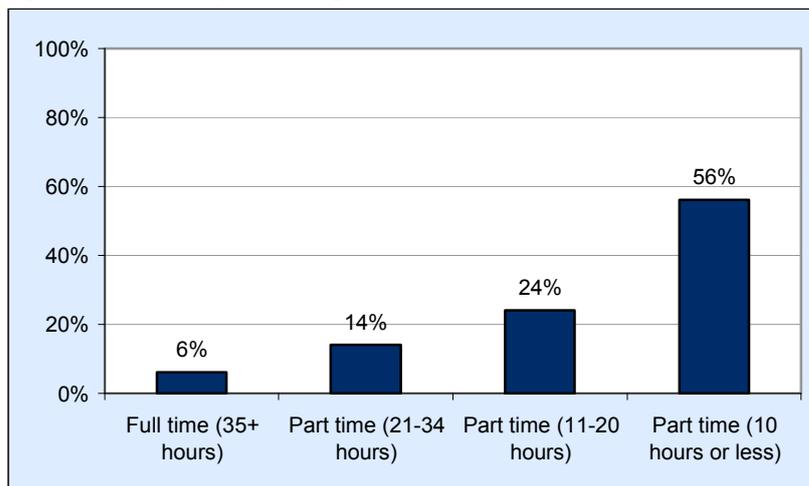
An overall gender imbalance remains in the demographics of councillors. In total, **69 per cent** of councillors were men and **31 per cent** were women in 2010, similar to the figures for 2002 (72 per cent men and 28 per cent women).

Respondents were also asked whether any youth members (between 16 and 25 years of age) sit on the council. Overall, **6 per cent** of councils had youth members.

2.3 Working hours of clerk

As Figure 2.4 shows, 6 per cent of clerks worked full-time hours (defined as a minimum of 35 hours a week) – similar to the proportion reported in 2002. All councils with clerks that worked full-time hours were either town or large community councils. More than half of the clerks (56 per cent) worked for 10 hours a week or less.

Figure 2.4: Weekly working hours of clerk



Base: 410 valid responses

2.4 Model Code of Conduct

The Model Code of Conduct⁶ for members has had almost universal take-up, with all but four of the responding councils adopting it.

2.5 Council precepts

Precepts are a source of income for community and town councils raised through council tax. While they are not the only means of income (indeed, a few community councils do not have a precept at all), they tend to be a major source of income for most councils. As *The Good Councillor's Guide* (2006: page 48)⁷ explains:

'The precept is determined by the community council and represents its share of the council tax. The precept demand goes to the billing authority (the county or county borough council) which collects the tax and distributes it to the community council.'

The precepts for community and town councils in 2010-11 varied widely from £0 to £913,610. The average (median) precept for 2010-11 was **£13,300**⁸.

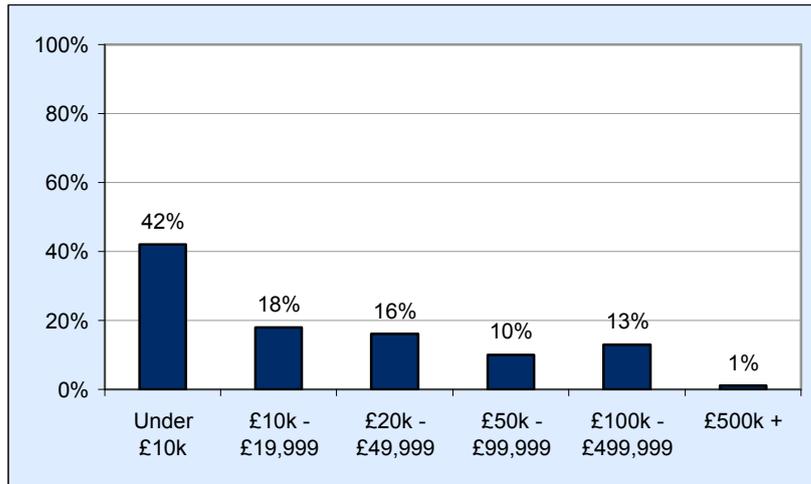
As Figure 2.5 (below) shows, more than four out of ten councils had precepts for the financial year 2010-11 of less than £10,000. At the other end of the scale, 14 per cent had precepts of at least £100,000.

⁶ The Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order 2008 is available here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2008/788/contents/made>

⁷ Welsh Assembly Government (2006). *The Good Councillor's Guide: For Community and Town Councillors*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. Available here: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/communitytowncouncils/publications/goodcouncillor/>

⁸ The median (i.e. middle value) is considered to be more representative of the average precept as it is not skewed by unusually high values to the same degree as the mean average. According to the Welsh Assembly Government's (2010) *Local Government Finance Statistics*, the mean average precept for all community and town councils in Wales for 2010-11 was £24,838.

Figure 2.5: Council precepts 2010-11



Base: 399 valid responses

2.6 Services and amenities provided by councils

Respondents were asked which services and amenities they provided to their community, either solely, or in partnership with another organisation (Table 2.1). The services and amenities most commonly provided by community and town councils were grants (63 per cent) and playing fields, open spaces, village greens or commons (59 per cent).

Table 2.1: Services and amenities provided by councils

Service or amenity	Proportion of councils providing service of amenity (%)^a
Grants	63
Playing fields, open spaces, village greens or commons	59
Community events	50
Village hall or community centre	44
War memorials	39
Cemeteries or churchyards	31
Street lighting	30
Recycling facilities, skips or litter bins	24
Allotments	13
Other services and amenities provided by councils included:	
Bus shelters	
CCTV	
Christmas lights	
Litter / waste bins	
Noticeboards	
Public conveniences	
Public footpaths	
Seating	
Base: 413 valid responses	
(a) The table sums to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question	

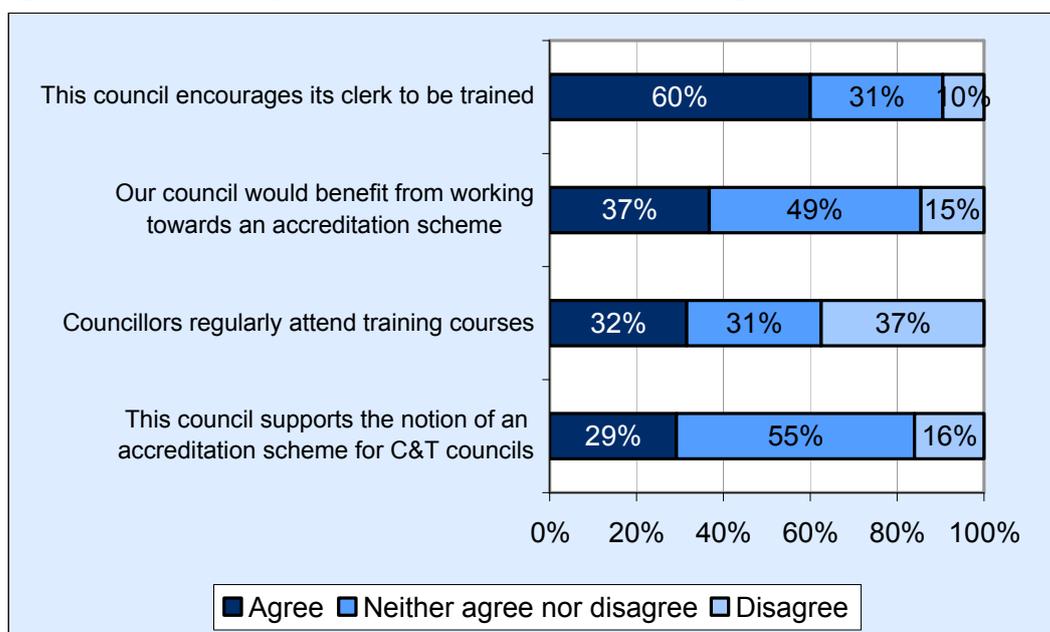
2.7 Welsh language

More than half of councils (53 per cent) reported that they have a Welsh Language Scheme, while just over four out of ten councils (43 per cent) provided services in Welsh.

3. Skills and training

Councils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to skills and training⁹. As Figure 3.1 shows, six out of ten respondents (60 per cent) agreed that the ‘council encourages its clerk to be trained’. Less than one out of three respondents (29 per cent) agreed that their council supported the notion of an accreditation scheme¹⁰ for community and town councils but a greater proportion (37 per cent) agreed that their council would benefit from working towards an accreditation scheme. Around one third of respondents (32 per cent) agreed that councillors regularly attend training courses.

Figure 3.1: Community and town council skills and training



Base: 411 valid responses

Totals may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

⁹ Respondents could answer ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘disagree’, or ‘strongly disagree’. For the purposes of this analysis, the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ categories have been collapsed into a single category, as have the ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ categories.

¹⁰ This refers to a possible accreditation scheme for community and town councils in Wales – included in the proposed Local Government Measure – which may be similar to the ‘Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme’ in England. To achieve Quality Status, parish and town councils in England must demonstrate that they have reached the minimum benchmark standard required by passing several tests.

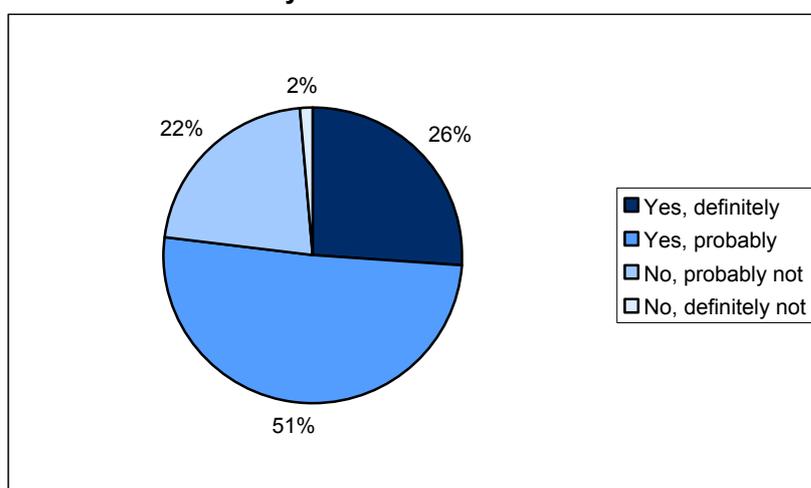
Around **three out of ten councils** (29 per cent) reported having a training budget. Of those councils that had a training budget, the amount of money set aside for training varied widely from as little as £30 to as much as £7,000.

3.1 Power of Wellbeing

The **Power of Wellbeing** is a discretionary power that enables local authorities to do anything (unless explicitly prohibited under legislation) that they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing of their area.

Around three quarters of councils responded that they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ use the Power of Wellbeing if extended to community and town councils (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Do you envisage that your council would use the Power of Wellbeing, if extended to community and town councils?



Base: 395 valid responses

Total does not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

3.1.1 What do councils envisage they would use the Power of Wellbeing for?

Councils who responded that they probably or definitely would use the Power of Wellbeing were asked what they envisage they would use it for. The following main themes emerged from the responses:

- While there may be no specific plans at present, the Power of Wellbeing would allow councils to respond more effectively and with greater flexibility to the needs of their communities.

‘The community council is well placed to recognise and respond to developing local needs which are not met from existing services. As a local body the council should be in a position to respond promptly and efficiently to these changing needs. In this time of economic uncertainty the ability of a local community council to respond in this way is more important than ever.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

- The Power of Wellbeing would be used to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of communities.

‘To do whatever would be required to promote or improve the economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing of the area, provided that sufficient funds could be generated either by increases in the Precept or by taking on local services from the Unitary Authority with the necessary budget coming with the service from the Unitary Authority.’ **Town Council, North Wales**

- In certain areas, councils envisaged using the Power of Wellbeing to promote tourism which in turn could lead to better economic performance of communities.

‘Working towards a new tourism base to include countryside park, sporting activities including mountain biking which in turn will increase visitor numbers and have local people develop bed and breakfast accommodation and attract small retail and maintenance outlets.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

‘To encourage development to make our seaside town more attractive as a tourist destination in the off season to ensure year round employment for our citizens.’ **Town Council, South West Wales**

- Some councils cited that the Power of Wellbeing would be used to enhance community spirit through the staging of more social events.

- The Power of Wellbeing, according to some councils, would facilitate improved maintenance of specific services and amenities, such as street lighting, footpaths, housing and village halls.
- In addition, councils named a range of specific community schemes and projects that could stand to benefit from using the Power of Wellbeing.

Some cautionary points were also made by councils who envisage using the Power of Wellbeing. First, some respondents cautioned that they would require guidance on how to use the Power of Wellbeing effectively; second, it is apparent that the usefulness of the Power of Wellbeing may be constrained by tight finances; and finally, there was some uncertainty over whether the Power of Wellbeing would provide statutory consent to take certain issues forward, such as bringing broadband to isolated rural communities.

3.1.2 What would stop councils from using the Power of Wellbeing?

Councils who responded that they probably or definitely would **not** use the Power of Wellbeing were asked what would stop them using it. The following main themes emerged from the responses:

- A major concern amongst councils was that they **lack the necessary financial resources** to use the Power of Wellbeing. A concern related to this was that the council was too small and/or the councillors would not have the time to put the Power of Wellbeing to effective use.

‘Most of the councillors work full time, so have limited time available to pursue initiatives.’ **Community Council, South West Wales**

- In some councils, it was felt that the powers they currently have are sufficient to meet community needs.

‘We already make extensive use of powers under Sections 137 and 145 to assist the local community. It is considered that further powers would simply lead to a higher

precept and undertaking functions which should be the responsibility of the Unitary Authority.' **Town Council, Mid Wales**

- Some councils felt that they did not have a sufficient understanding of the Power of Wellbeing and would therefore not be confident in using it.

4. ICT and communications

4.1 Council websites

Overall, **around a half of councils reported having a website** (47 per cent). This has increased significantly since 2002 when it was reported that less than a fifth of councils had a website.

Councils that reported having their own websites were asked what they provided. Almost nine out of ten councils with websites (88 per cent) provided council minutes, while six out of ten (62 per cent) provided council meeting agendas (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: What is provided on council websites?

	Proportion of councils with websites that provide information (%) ^a
Council minutes	88
Council meeting agendas	62
Budget summary for council	27
Consultations	20
Surveys	14
Community plan	11
Web forums	10
Other information provided by councils on websites included:	
Contact information	
Councillor profiles	
Events	
Information about the area / tourist information	
Links to local organisations	
Newsletter	
Base: 191 valid responses	
(a) The table sums to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question	

Of the councils that did not have a website, 56 per cent reported that it was not a priority for them to have one, while 42 per cent had no-one to maintain a website (see Table 4.2).

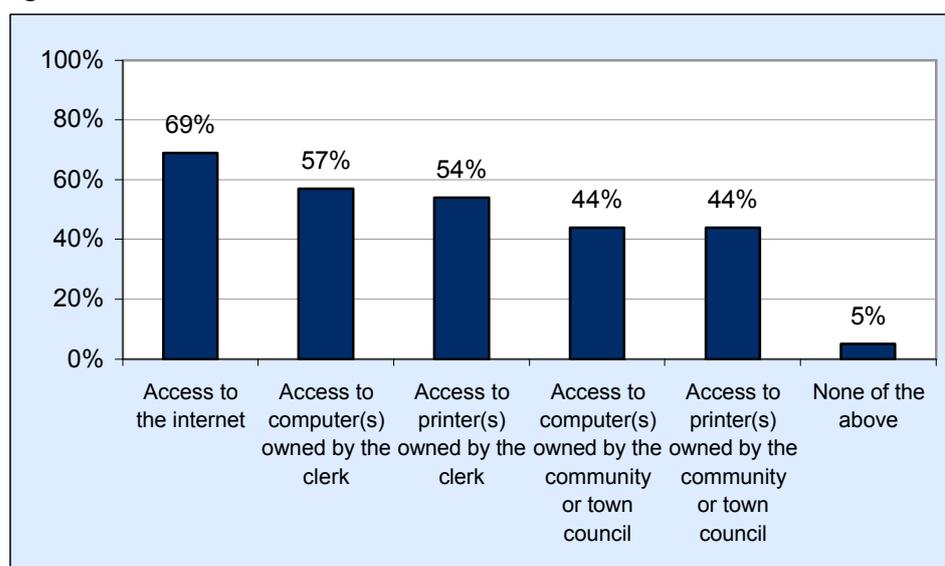
Table 4.2: Reasons that councils do not have websites

Reason	Proportion of councils without websites (%) ^a
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
Other reasons for not having a website included:	
Council has pages on unitary authority / One Voice Wales / other website	
Issues with maintaining a bilingual website	
Slow internet connections in the area	
Website is currently being developed	
Base: 219 valid responses	
(a) The table sums to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question	

4.2 ICT access

As Figure 4.1 shows, **seven out of ten councils had access to the internet** (69 per cent). More than half of councils had access to computers and printers owned by the clerk, while 44 per cent had access to computers and printers owned by their council. This represents a significant increase compared with 2002 when it was reported that 37 per cent had access to a computer owned by the council. Overall, **one out of twenty councils** (5 per cent) did not have access to a computer, printer, or the internet.

Figure 4.1: ICT access of councils



Base: 413 valid responses

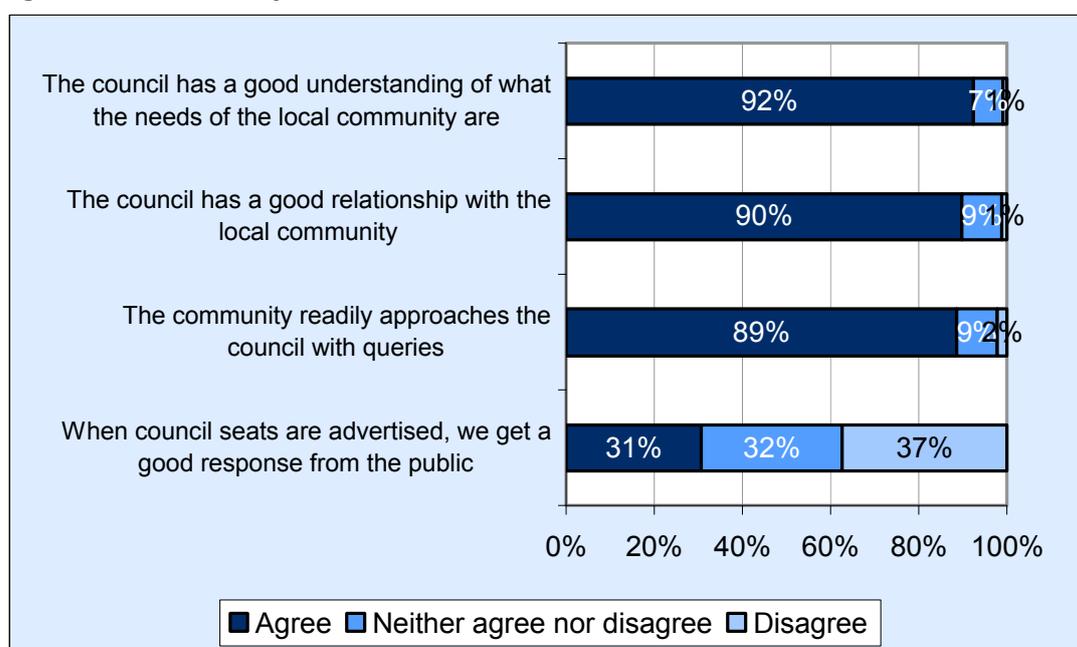
5. Interaction with communities

Councils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to their interaction with communities¹¹.

Responses were generally positive, with around nine out of ten councils agreeing that they have a 'good understanding of what the needs of the local community are'; that they have a 'good relationship with the local community'; and that 'the community readily approaches the council with queries'.

Responses were less positive with regard to the response from the public when council seats are advertised (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Community and town council interaction with communities



Base: 413 valid responses

Totals may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Councils were asked to rank the three most common reasons that their community (including community groups) interacted with their council. As Table 5.1 shows, the two most common responses were 'local problems' (94 per cent) and 'planning' (75 per cent).

¹¹ Respondents could answer 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of this analysis, the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories have been collapsed into a single category, as have the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories.

Table 5.1: Most common reasons that community interacts with council

Reason	Proportion of councils ranking reason in their top three (%) ^a
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, library services)	29
Campaigning	14
Other reason provided by less than 2 per cent of councils:	
Community resilience planning	
Base: 413 valid responses	
(a) The table sums to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question	

Councils were also asked to rank the three most common methods used by their local community to contact the council. As Table 5.2 shows, the most common method reported was by telephone (88 per cent).

Table 5.2: Most common methods used by community to contact council

Reason	Proportion of councils ranking reason in their top three (%) ^a
Telephone	88
Face to face	77
Post	70
Email	51
Other reason provided by less than 4 per cent of councils:	
Forms on council website	
Base: 413 valid responses	
(a) The table sums to more than 100 per cent as respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question	

5.1 Community engagement and complaints procedure

More than half (55 per cent) of the councils had a complaints procedure, while 45 per cent did not. Overall, one out of ten councils (10 per cent) had a community engagement policy in place, while nine out of ten (90 per cent) did

not. However, among the councils that did have a community engagement policy, almost none had a budget specifically allocated to it.

5.1.1 Comments about the relationship between council and its community

Councils were asked whether they had any further comments about the relationship with their community. The following main themes emerged from the responses:

- There was a strong feeling among many of the smaller community councils that they had very good relationships with their community, due to the community being 'close-knit', and the accessibility and approachability of the councillors.

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

Community Council, South West Wales

'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!'

Community Council, South East Wales

- Ways in which councils actively engaged with their communities included holding regular surgeries or general meetings; publishing minutes from council meetings in a local newspaper, community website or noticeboard; and encouraging greater participation from younger members of the community through establishing youth councils.

'We operate a very successful Youth Council with the High School which feeds directly into the council committee structure. We hold regular public meetings and consultations as well as actively seeking opinions on what is happening.'

Town Council, Mid Wales

'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.' **Community Council, Mid Wales**

- Some councils commented that the development of community websites had helped to foster better communication within the community.

'Having a community website, funded by the council, which includes council pages has greatly increased communication within the community.' **Community Council, South East Wales**

- There was concern among some councils about the community they serve not being interested in engaging with the council.

'The community has little interest in the running of the Community Council.'
Community Council, Mid Wales

'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.' **Town Council, South East Wales**

'The council tries to engage with the community through open meetings, coffee mornings and evenings, exhibitions etc but the response is generally poor.'
Community Council, North Wales

- Another apparent concern was that members of the community often did not know what the different responsibilities of the community and town council and county council were.

'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.' **Community Council, South East Wales**

'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.' **Town Council, North Wales**

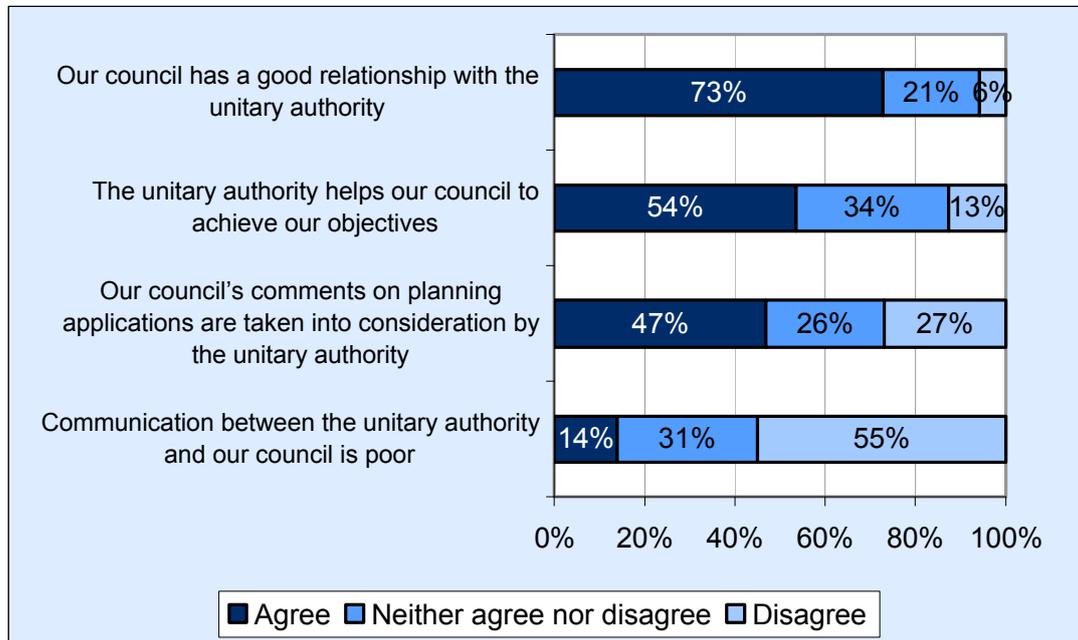
6. Interaction with unitary authorities

Councils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to their interaction with their unitary authority¹².

The most positive response was for 'our council has a good relationship with the unitary authority', with three quarters of councils (73 per cent) agreeing with this statement. Over half of councils responded positively to statements regarding communication with the unitary authority (55 per cent disagreed that communication was poor) and that the unitary authority helps their council to achieve their objectives (54 per cent agreed).

Responses were less positive for the statement 'our council's comments on planning applications are taken into consideration by the unitary authority', with a quarter of councils (27 per cent) disagreeing.

Figure 6.1: Community and town council interaction with unitary authorities



Base: 413 valid responses

Totals may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

¹² Respondents could answer 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of this analysis, the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories have been collapsed into a single category, as have the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories.

6.1 Charter and service level agreements

Charter agreements set out the terms of engagement between unitary authorities and community and town councils. Around **two thirds of councils** (65 per cent) were working towards a charter agreement with their unitary authority. Of the 35 per cent of councils that were **not** working towards a charter agreement with their unitary authority, the main reasons given were:

- Charters were yet to be proposed but in some cases, the intention is there to start working towards one;
- A perceived lack of initiative on the matter from the unitary authorities;
- With One Voice Wales acting as an intermediary on behalf of some councils with the unitary authority, it was perceived that a charter agreement was not necessary;
- A lack of need for establishing a charter. In particular, some councils felt that it would not bring any benefit to their communities; and
- Some councils were not aware of the existence of charters, or did not have a clear understanding of what they are.

Service level agreements are arrangements whereby a unitary authority delegates funding to a community or town council for an agreed range and level of services to be delivered. Overall, **16 per cent of councils** had a service level agreement with their unitary authority (84 per cent did not). Councils that had service level agreements in place were asked what services they had taken on from unitary authorities. Responses to this question included:

- Maintenance of amenities such as public footpaths, public conveniences and bus shelters;
- Funding of staff e.g. youth workers;
- Community and town council forums;
- Match funding schemes with unitary authority; and
- School governing bodies.

6.2 Co-option to local authority committees

Around **one quarter of councils** (26 per cent) had members that were co-opted to local authority committees. The committees that council members were co-opted to included:

- Community and town council forums;
- Community liaison committees;
- Planning committees;
- Police forums;
- School governors; and
- Standards committees.

6.2.1 Comments about the relationship between council and unitary authorities

Councils were asked whether they had any further comments about the relationship with their unitary authority. A wide range of comments were given, some positive about the relationship, while others were critical. The following main themes emerged:

- The main complaint was that unitary authorities were viewed as being **slow in responding to correspondence from councils**, although this may differ between departments within the same unitary authority.

‘On a personal level, there is a good relationship with the [County Council Officers]. The main complaint is that the [County Council] take so long before responding to correspondence.’ **Town Council, North Wales**

- While the relationship at an institutional level was sometimes viewed as cumbersome, on a personal level (e.g. dealing with individual officers), the relationship was often seen as better, or being variable from individual to individual.

‘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.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

‘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.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

- There were particular concerns that councils’ views on planning issues are not always taken into account by unitary authorities.

‘Councillors are concerned on some planning issues the Councils views are not taken into consideration and we do not receive any feedback.’ **Community Council, Mid Wales**

‘Correspondence remains unanswered for months on end, joint projects are dropped with no explanation or apology and councils are frequently ignored by the planning department.’ **Community Council, North Wales**

- Community council forums and liaison meetings were identified as a positive way for councils and the unitary authority to interact, as were having county councillors attend community council meetings.

‘One of our most effective interactions is through the [Forum], attended by council clerks and chairmen, managed by the one stop shop personnel, who then liaise with [County Council] departments. We meet at least nine times a year.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

‘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 [County Council].’ **Community Council, North Wales**

‘Excellent town and community council forum meetings held quarterly.’ **Community Council, North Wales**

- Some specific issues were highlighted by councils situated in national park areas, where the National Park Authority and County Council may have conflicting views or policies. As one community council stated: 'In this area we have a unitary authority and a National Park Authority. There can be issues over who does what'.
- Where charter agreements are in place, some were viewed as not working as well as intended.

'The unitary authority seldom meets its own Charter for the response times to written communications.' **Town Council, North Wales**

7. Interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government

Councils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements relating to their interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government¹³.

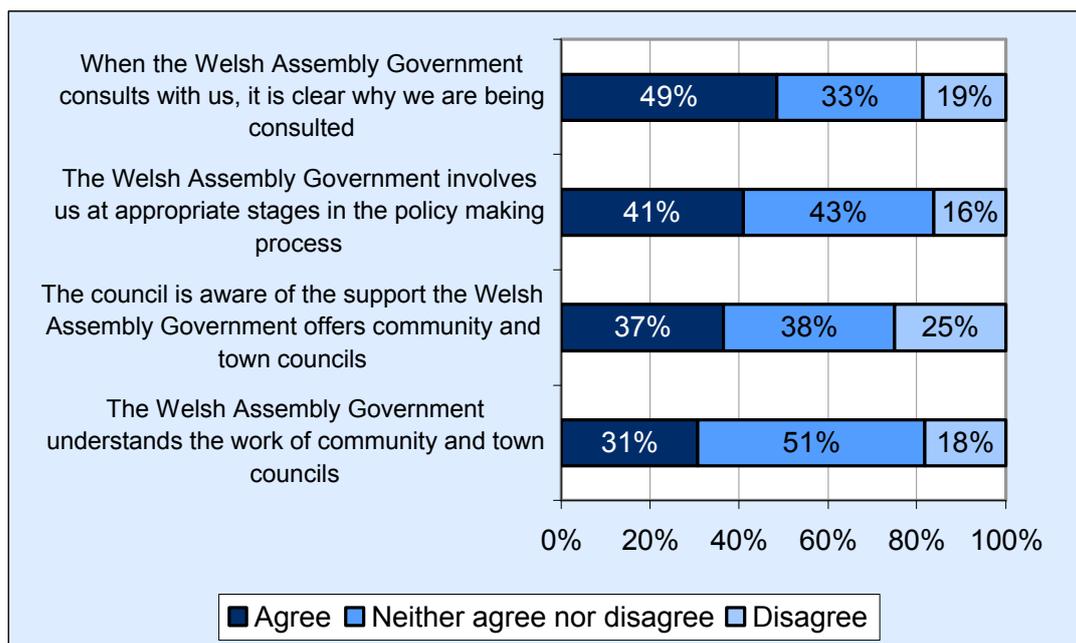
With regard to the statement, 'when the Welsh Assembly Government consults with us, it is clear why we are being consulted', around half of the councils (49 per cent) agreed, while 19 per cent disagreed, and 33 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Responses to the other statements were less positive, with 41 per cent of councils agreeing that the Welsh Assembly Government involves them 'at appropriate stages in the policy process'; 37 per cent agreeing that they are 'aware of the support the Welsh Assembly Government offers' them; and 31 per cent agreeing that the Welsh Assembly Government 'understands the work of community and town councils'.

In comparison to questions regarding council interaction with their communities and unitary authorities, the questions regarding interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government elicited **a relatively high proportion of neutral responses**. In particular, around a half of councils (51 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'the Welsh Assembly Government understands the work of community and town councils' (see Figure 7.1).

¹³ Respondents could answer 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of this analysis, the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' categories have been collapsed into a single category, as have the 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' categories.

Figure 7.1: Community and town council interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government



Base: 409 valid responses

Totals may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

7.1.1 Comments about the relationship between council and the Welsh Assembly Government

Councils were asked whether they had any further comments about their relationship with the Welsh Assembly Government. The following main themes emerged from the responses:

- Many of the comments made were in regard to **the Welsh Assembly Government’s approach to consulting with councils**. While councils welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the policy making process, there were certain complaints, as follows:
 - The detailed language that consultation papers are written in makes them difficult to understand.
 - Some councils questioned the relevance of the consultations they were sent.

'As a small council the information received from the WAG often seems very detailed and confusing and often irrelevant.' **Community Council, Mid Wales**

'Information passed on to the Town Council by the WAG is often wordy and leaves councillors and clerk puzzled as to its relevance to our Town Council.'

Town Council, North Wales

- Consultation documents tend to be lengthy and time consuming.

'We often get very 'beefy' correspondence from the WAG. It is impossible to fully consider it.' **Community Council, South West Wales**

- The volume of consultations sent to councils was considered burdensome.

'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.'

Community Council, South East Wales

- Councils are not given sufficient time to consider and respond to consultations.

'Consultation is often too late and the timetable for Councils that only meet monthly is often unrealistic.'

Town Council, North Wales

'The timetabling of Consultations needs to be managed better.'

Community Council, North Wales

- Feeling among some councils that the involvement of councils in the consultation process is tokenistic.

'It is felt that any documentation received is as a result of the Welsh Assembly Government going through the motions and that their interest in Community Councils is one of tokenism'

Community Council, South East Wales

- Some councils responded that the Welsh Assembly Government has a better understanding of (and is better at communicating with) unitary authorities than community and town councils.
- It was perceived that the Welsh Assembly Government had a lack of understanding of the role councils in small rural communities.
- Better access to information was required by some councils about how the Welsh Assembly Government can help them, particularly in regard to access to grants and funding.

‘The WAG should communicate directly with councils when publishing financial support. In this area the designation of funds to county supported organisations needs to be looked at. Poorer and ill informed councils miss out to larger councils with expertise and skills to hand. WAG should insist on equality of opportunity for all levels of population.’ **Community Council, North Wales**

‘Community Councils should have more assistance from WAG in relation to the provision of training and assistance in the production of Community plans [...] and clear guidance on what funding is available and how it can be accessed as it is very difficult for p/t Clerks to be able to address all these areas in the limited time available.’ **Community Council, South East Wales**

Appendix A: Questionnaire



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Community and Town Councils Survey 2010

We would be grateful if you could contribute to the Welsh Assembly Government's understanding of the work of community and town councils by completing this survey. The survey will inform a report on community and town councils in Wales to be published by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The survey should take about **20 minutes** and should be completed by the Clerk on behalf of your community or town council. All answers are confidential and no individuals will be identified in the report.

Respondent information

Please tell us who this form was completed by in case we have any queries about this questionnaire. We will not be passing this information to anyone outside the Welsh Assembly Government.

1) Name

2) Job title

3) Email address

4) Telephone number

5) Name of community or town council

6) Which unitary authority is your council located in?

Profile of your council

In this section, we would like to find out more about the profile of your community or town council.

7) How many councillor seats does your community or town council have?

8) How many vacant councillor positions are there?

9) Of your current councillors, how many are elected?

10) Of your current councillors, how many are co-opted?

11) Do you advertise vacancies for co-option?

 Yes No Not applicable – none of our council seats are co-opted

12) Of your current councillors, how many are men?

13) Of your current councillors, how many are women?

14) Do you have any youth members (aged between 16 and 25 years) that sit on the council?

 Yes No

15) Is the clerk of your community or town council employed on a full-time or part-time basis?

 Full-time (35 hours a week or more) [Go to question 17] Part-time (Less than 35 hours a week) [Go to question 16]

16) How many hours per week does the clerk of the community or town council work?

10 hours a week or less

Between 11 and 20 hours

Between 21 and 30 hours

Between 31 and 34 hours

17) Has your council adopted the 2008 Model Code of Conduct for members?

Yes

No

18) What was the total income of your community or town council in the financial year 2009-10?

19) What was the value of your community or town council's precept for the financial year 2010-11?

20) Which of the following services and amenities do you provide to your community, either solely, or in partnership with another organisation?

Allotments

Cemeteries or churchyards

Community events

Grants

Playing fields, open spaces, village greens or commons

Recycling facilities, skips or litter bins

Street lighting

Village hall or community centre

War memorials

21) Please add any other services or amenities not listed above that you provide to your community, either solely, or in partnership with another organisation.

22) Does your community or town council provide any services through the medium of Welsh?

Yes

No

23) Does your community or town council have a Welsh Language Scheme?

Yes

No

Skills and training

In the statements below, a possible **accreditation scheme** for community and town councils in Wales may be similar to the 'quality parish and town council scheme' in England. To achieve Quality Status, parish and town councils in England must demonstrate that they have reached the minimum benchmark standard required by passing several tests.

24) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Councillors regularly attend training courses					
This council encourages its clerk to be trained					
This council supports the notion of an accreditation scheme for community and town councils					
Our council would benefit from working towards an accreditation scheme					

25) Does your community or town council have a training budget?

Yes [Go to question 26]

No [Go to question 27]

26) How much money is set aside for your council's training budget?

For the question below, the **Power of Wellbeing** refers to a discretionary power that enables local authorities to do anything which they consider is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing of their area.

27) Do you envisage that your council would use the Power of Wellbeing, if extended to community and town councils?

Yes, definitely [Go to question 28]

Yes, probably [Go to question 28]

No, probably not [Go to question 29]

No, definitely not [Go to question 29]

28) What do you envisage your council would use the Power of Wellbeing for?

29) What would stop your council using the Power of Wellbeing?

IT and communications

30) Does your community or town council have a website?

Yes [Go to question 31]

No [Go to question 33]

31) Please enter your community or town council website address:

32) Which of the following does your website provide? Please tick as many as apply.

Council meeting agendas

Council minutes

Consultations

Surveys

Budget summary for council

Community plan

Web forums

Other, please specify:

[Go to question 34]

33) Why does your community or town council not have a website? Please tick as many reasons as apply.

It is not a priority for our council

The community would not make use of it

The council cannot afford a website

There is nobody to maintain a website

Other, please specify:

34) Which of the following does your community or town council have? Please tick all that apply.

Access to computer(s) owned by the community or town council

Access to computer(s) owned by the clerk

Access to printer(s) owned by the community or town council

Access to printer(s) owned by the clerk

Access to the internet

Interaction with communities

35) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The council has a good relationship with the local community					
The community readily approaches the council with queries					
When council seats are advertised, we get a good response from the public					
The council has a good understanding of what the needs of the local community are					

36) Typically, how many members of the community tend to attend council meetings in a single month?

37) From the following list, please rank the three most common reasons that your community (including community groups) interacts with your council.

Funding issues

Campaigning

Local problems

Planning

Community or town council services (e.g. community hall, fete, library services)

Unitary authority services (e.g. refuse collection)

Community resilience planning

38) From the following list, please rank the top three methods most used by the local community to contact your council.

Email

Face to face

Forms on council website

Post

Telephone

39) Does your community or town council have a complaints procedure?

Yes

No

40) Does your council have a community engagement policy?

Yes [Go to question 41]

No [Go to question 42]

41) How much money is allocated to the community engagement policy?

42) If you have any further comments about the relationship between your council and its community, please write below.

Interaction with unitary authorities

43) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our council has a good relationship with the unitary authority					
The unitary authority helps our council to achieve our objectives					
Our council's comments on planning applications are taken into consideration by the unitary authority					
Communication between the unitary authority and our council is poor					

Charters are agreements which set out the terms of engagement between local authorities and community and town councils.

44) Are you working towards a charter agreement between the unitary authority and your council?

Yes [Go to question 46]

No [Go to question 45]

45) What are the reasons that the unitary authority and your council are not working towards a charter agreement?

46) Is there a service level agreement between the unitary authority and your council?

Yes [Go to question 47]

No [Go to question 48]

47) What services have you taken on from the unitary authority? Please write below.

48) Does your council currently have any members co-opted to local authority committees?

Yes [Go to question 49]

No [Go to question 50]

49) Please list the committees they are co-opted to.

50) If you have any further comments about the relationship between your council and its unitary authority, please write below.

Interaction with the Welsh Assembly Government

51) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Welsh Assembly Government understands the work of community and town councils					
When the Welsh Assembly Government consults with us, it is clear why we are being consulted					
The Welsh Assembly Government involves us at appropriate stages in the policy making process					
The council is aware of the support the Welsh Assembly Government offers community and town councils					

52) If you have any further comments about the relationship between your council and the Welsh Assembly Government, please write below.

Thank you for taking part in the survey.