

Un Llais Cymru



One Voice Wales

# **Community and Town Councils' Manifesto**

## **A NEW CONTRACT WITH COMMUNITIES...MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK FOR WALES**

## INTRODUCTION

Community and Town Councils are the most local part of our democracy and play an integral role in the functioning of communities in Wales. They provide our neighbourhoods, villages and towns with a democratic voice and a structure for taking action – real people power at grassroots level.

We need more local democracy with more empowered people and places. The 2016 Assembly election provides an opportunity for politicians of all parties to support our most local, an increasingly important, level of governance. A chance to demonstrate their commitment to citizen-led action, which protects local assets and services and delivers responsive services based on local priorities – all of which improves lives and enhances communities.

This manifesto sets out our positive offer to the next Government and creates a new vision of how better services could be delivered with local people. It outlines how we can help the next Government realise its ambitions for community empowerment, co-production and devolution.

This manifesto also arms the next Government with a range of policy ideas to unlock the power and potential of communities by helping community and town councils flourish in pursuing better lives for their residents. Our vision is to improve the quality of life for local communities through having vibrant, dynamic and effective community and town councils.

One Voice Wales wants to work with the next Government to turn this vision into a reality. We agree with SOLACE's<sup>1</sup> (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) principles for public services reform:

- ✓ **LOCAL SOLUTIONS** *have been proven to work most effectively in improving outcomes for communities, achieving greater efficiency and reducing costs.*
- ✓ **INTEGRATION** *has the potential to improve outcomes, transform services and deliver significant financial savings. It is the long-term priority of local councils across all service areas, and should be for the wider public services.*
- ✓ **ACCOUNTABILITY** *has to be re-invented in the light of pan-public sector whole-place approaches, and it needs to be comprehensible to the public.*

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<sup>1</sup> **OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS** : An alternative manifesto (Graeme McDonald© The Solace Group 2014)

- ✓ **A NEW CONTRACT WITH COMMUNITIES** is needed to restore trust and build a more sustainable, adaptive relationship between local state and citizen.

## **ABOUT COMMUNITY AND TOWN COUNCILS**

There are 735 Community and Town Councils in Wales, representing this tier of government closest to the people. They cover approximately 94% of the land area and 70% of the population of Wales.

The communities they serve range from small rural settlements to large towns and their budgets vary accordingly. However, what they all have in common is serving their communities and acting to improve the quality of life in their locality. This is achieved through exercising a range of statutory powers and duties – and much more.

Community and Town Councils are responsible to their local electorates for delivering a wide range of services and for the provision and upkeep of local amenities.

Each Council is made up of elected members, or in some cases co-opted members. In Wales there are approximately 8,000 Community and Town Councillors, who represent the interests of the community they serve as a whole. They are recognised as having a role in providing the voice of the citizen in the development and delivery of public services in Wales.

## **COMMUNITY AND TOWN COUNCILS – A WIDER ROLE**

Community and Town Councillors are committed to their communities and are an under-valued Wales-wide resource. Through their representative body, One Voice Wales, closer connections need to be made with Welsh Government departments.

In the future there will be an increased expectation on Community and Town Councils' resources by Unitary Authorities, and current arrangements for partnership working between both tiers of local government need to be further enhanced and reflected in joint Charter arrangements that establish a firm foundation for effective working

There is a need to support and build the capacity and skills of community groups to work in partnership with Community and Town Councils as well as raising the general awareness of the powers and responsibilities of this tier of local government.

Any place-based approach by Welsh Government and its delivery partners should explicitly take account of the role of Community and Town councils and connect them to the local infrastructure and development plans so that they can enhance the effectiveness of locally based approaches and help sustain the continuing benefit of local interventions.

The connections between the local and the national tiers of government require review to ensure that national and regional approaches can be better understood and effectively sustained at the local level and provide inter-connectivity with the future Public Service Board arrangements.

## **COMMUNITY AND TOWN COUNCILS – A WIDER ROLE**

Public agencies need to be more responsive to local needs and closer engagement with Community and Town Councils can assist in creating a greater awareness and understanding of local needs and requirements.

Community and Town Councils will be expected to take on more responsibilities and this implies a greater need for enhanced relationships with the Unitary Authorities. The Well Being of Future Generations Act will mean increased and different duties for Unitary Authorities and Community and Town Councils which will likely create need for policy and strategy to be informed by local knowledge and evidence-based policy making. In terms of the introduction of a sustainability duty for the sector, there will be a need for resources to be made available to pump-prime the key strategic activities that will be required to undertake robust community planning and engagement with local electors. Research should be informed by community perspectives because some policies impact adversely on local communities but the Councils are still required to enact the policies despite the adverse impact.

## **OUR OFFER**

Provide the communities of Wales with effective, accountable and democratic representation.

Be fiscally responsible, using our statutory powers and using the local precept to take action on locally determined priorities.

Use our grassroots knowledge to work in partnership with other councils and bodies to deliver public services and also investigate alternative delivery models for sustainable local services taking on more responsibility where this is appropriate.

Work with local businesses and other partners to support local economic growth and regeneration.

Plan for the future by protecting local assets and shaping development such as new homes and shops.

Modernise how we operate, ensuring Community and Town Councils are resilient, efficient and effective, including driving up standards of practice.

## **OUR ASK: Stronger local democracy**

Promote and support the creation of new Community and Town Councils, including the introduction of a New Council Development Grant and introducing a community 'right of appeal' where a request to set up a new council is rejected.

Strengthen the standards regime governing councillor behaviour by allowing Community and Town Councils to refer alleged breaches to the 'county –wide' Standards Committee for breaches of the code of conduct.

Support the sector to create an improvement and development strategy, providing a framework for good governance, community engagement and council improvement.

Work with the sector to encourage more people to become councillors, making it easier for people to stand and serve, promoting contested elections and establishing a national democracy fund.

Introduce a duty to ensure community and town involvement in public service board scrutiny processes.

Support the development of models of scrutiny where Community and Town Councils play a part in monitoring other public bodies and their commissioned services.

## **OUR ASK: Fairer funding**

Ensure the Revenue Support Grant and the range of specific grant funding from the Government is passed on to Community and Town councils by Unitary Authorities where appropriate.

Reform the business rate system to provide a 5% share for Community and Town Councils to help them support local economic development, regeneration and growth.

Serious consideration should now be given for Community and Town Councils to receive funding directly from the Welsh Government. For example, the introduction of a Community and Town Council Improvement Grant programme would encourage innovation and may provide the necessary resource to pump prime the transition of assets or services between the two tiers, something which is absent at the present time.

Ensure communities benefit from development through stronger measures to provide community and town councils with a greater share of Community Infrastructure Levy than the current 15% 'meaningful amount'.

Work with One Voice Wales to support the organisation playing a greater role in accessing European funding for the benefit of Community and Town Councils and the communities they serve.



## **OUR ASK: more powers**

Through the Reform of Local Government Bill introduce measures to reform the laws governing the administration of Community and Town councils, which will include new powers to deliver local services.

Promote use of the Power of Well Being and remove barriers to the use (e.g. expenditure limit) of this 'right to innovate'.

Strengthen the role of Community and Town Councils in the planning system by coordinating policy to focus on places and supporting communities to shape the place they live in by putting 'Place Plans' on a statutory footing.

Introduce a 'right to engage' which will help Community and Town Councils work more equitably and effectively with Unitary Authorities and other public services.

## **REPRESENTING COMMUNITIES – DELIVERING DEMOCRACY**

There are 735 Community and Town Councils in Wales...

... And 8,000 councillors making a difference in their community providing £36.5 million of voluntary contribution each year to Welsh society.

£45 million is invested in communities every year in Wales by Community and Town Councils.

The number of people represented by Community and Town Councils in Wales has been steadily increasing, with over 2.1 million people already benefiting from their work.



## **ABOUT ONE VOICE WALES**

One Voice Wales is the national representative organisation for Community and Town Councils throughout Wales. The vision subscribed to by One Voice Wales is:

*“Working with local councils in Wales to shape places communities want to live in”*

One Voice Wales aims to support Community and Town Councils in achieving this vision and has adopted the following Mission Statement to guide its work:

*“To represent the interests of Community and Town Councils; raise awareness and understanding of this primary tier of government; and work collaboratively with our partners to ensure the sector contributes fully to the goal of developing dynamic and sustainable communities in Wales.”*

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