

# Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales

## Executive Summary





University of Wales, Aberystwyth  
Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences  
Regional Change and Development Research Group

# **Research Study into the Role, Functions and Future Potential of Community and Town Councils in Wales**

## **Summary Report**

Dr Michael Woods  
Dr Bill Edwards  
Dr Jon Anderson  
Dr Graham Gardner  
Rachel Hughes

**August 2003**



## INTRODUCTION

**S1** Community and town councils are the grassroots level of government in Wales. Serving populations ranging from 155 to 45,053 people, the 737 councils provide an important institutional vehicle for local collective action – to provide for and respond to local needs; to advocate community interests; and to organise and promote community events. Collectively, community and town councils across Wales engage some 8,000 individuals in voluntary service as councillors, and are responsible for managing an aggregate annual budget in excess of £25 million.

**S2** The existence of community and town councils enhances the local government system as a whole and provide a number of benefits to the communities that they serve. These include local responsiveness, the dedicated representation of local interests, the ability to mobilise community activity, and the capacity to provide additionality to the services and facilities operated by county and county borough councils. Compared with other forms of grassroots organisation, including community associations and residents' groups, community and town councils have a number of advantages that follow from their statutory foundation. These include accountability to local people through elections, stability and continuity, tax-raising powers and the capacity to act as a catalyst for promoting participation in public service.

**S3** There are, however, growing pressures for reform, both to the structure of community and town councils, and to their working practices. More active councils have found themselves limited in their capacity to act by legislative and financial constraints, and frustrated in their engagement with other bodies by poor liaison arrangements. At the same time, concerns have been expressed about the inclusiveness of some councils, the low level of contested elections, the procedures for consulting and communicating with local people, and the training and expertise of clerks and councillors. There are many good practices with respect to all these areas of concern, but the pattern of practice across Wales is variable. This study was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to examine these issues and to make recommendations as to the role, functions and future potential of community and town councils in Wales.

**S4** The report draws on information collected through a wide range of research methods including: surveys of all community and town councils and all county and county borough councils; case studies of twenty councils, including questionnaire surveys of councillors, interviews and focus groups; interviews with planning officers and other key stakeholders and informants; four public seminars; and the analysis of written submissions. Further details of the research and discussion of the issues are contained in the full report and in four research papers which are available on the study's website at [www.aber.ac.uk/communitygovernance](http://www.aber.ac.uk/communitygovernance). The remainder of this summary presents an overview of the key findings and recommendations.

## KEY FINDINGS

### The characteristics and distribution of community and town councils

**S5** The 737 community and town councils in Wales collectively cover 96% of the nation's land surface, and 70.1% of its population. There is complete territorial coverage by community and town councils in thirteen of the 22 county and county boroughs, yet there are also 115 officially-defined 'communities' in Wales for which no council exists. More than half of the population in Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taff are not served by a local-level council, along with around a third of the population in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Neath Port Talbot.

**S6** There are strong arguments for community councils to be established in all parts of Wales, especially if their role could be enhanced. As well as the benefits outlined in paragraph S2 above, uniform coverage across Wales would strengthen the capacity and visibility of this tier of government and help to address issues such as double taxation. There is evidence of support for the establishment of councils in communities where they do not currently exist. The current mechanism for establishing new councils is, however, perceived to be obstructive. Indeed it is arguably easier for an existing council to be dissolved. The threat of dissolution – which does not exist for equivalent councils in England – can militate against the stability and effectiveness of community and town councils.

**S7** The population size of community and town council areas range from 155 (Llanwrthwl, Powys) to 45,053 (Barry). Just over a fifth of councils serve a population of fewer than 500 people, and nearly half serve a population of fewer than 1,000 people. At the same time, there are eight councils with populations in excess of 20,000 people. The size of a community has a significant influence on the capacity of a council to raise funds, mobilise resources and provide services and amenities, and consequently places limitations on the future potential of smaller councils. However, there is considerable attachment to the present communities and resistance to any suggestion of a compulsory amalgamation of smaller councils. A mechanism exists under the Local Government Act (1972) for the voluntary grouping of communities under a common council (and for this process to be reversed), as has been successfully followed by Cwm, Waen and Tremeirchion Council in Denbighshire. We consider that this voluntary route offers a model for enhancing the capacity of smaller councils.

## The role of community and town councils in providing services and amenities

**S8** Community and town councils are responsible for the provision of a wide range of public services and amenities. At minimum, even small community councils will typically be responsible for signs, noticeboards, public seating, bus shelters and war memorials. Larger councils are not only likely to provide a more extensive range of facilities, but may also provide higher-order amenities such as community centres and indoor recreation facilities. A number of councils have also initiated innovative projects to meet specific local needs, including, for example, a community taskforce and a summer playscheme operated by Cwmbran Community Council, and a community resource centre developed by Offa Community Council.

**S9** There is significant interest from community and town councils, and particularly from larger councils, in increasing their role in the provision of services and amenities. Many local-level councils have argued that they are more able than principal councils to be responsive to local needs and accountable to the community, and that the enhancement of their role in service delivery would promote a sense of community 'ownership' of services, facilities and amenities, and act as a stimulus for greater participation by local residents as community and town councillors. The capacity of smaller community councils to take on additional functions is, however, limited by resources, expertise and the infrequency of council meetings. A number of smaller councils expressed concern that they would be 'forced' to assume additional responsibilities against their will if any significant transfer of functions were to be proposed. There are also issues concerning the loss of economies of scale and of the strategic co-ordination of services across a wider territory that need to be considered in evaluating the potential for responsibilities for specific services to be devolved to community and town councils.

**S10** Many of the 32 areas in which community and town councils have a statutory ability to act are concurrent functions held jointly with county and county borough councils. At present many of these functions are performed across large parts of Wales by the county or county borough council. As such, whilst we do not consider there to be a strong argument for increasing the statutory functions of community and town councils, we do consider that their involvement in service provision could be developed by encouraging the greater delegation of responsibilities for concurrent functions by county and county borough councils. The extent of the delegation of functions from principal councils to community and town councils in Wales is currently limited. Only around two-fifths of community and town councils have any responsibilities delegated to them by their principal councils, most frequently with respect to public rights of way, street lighting and street naming. The promotion of Charter agreements between county and county borough councils and community and town councils is recommended as a means of formalising the framework for delegating functions, encouraging the greater use of this facility.

**S11** An expanded role for community and town councils in the provision of services and amenities would generate new pressures on councils in terms of personnel, financial management, legal liability and technical knowledge and expertise. In the public interest it will be necessary to ensure that councils drawing down delegated functions are able to respond satisfactorily to these pressures. It is recommended that to be eligible for the delegation of functions, community and town councils should be required to first pass an 'accreditation test' by meeting criteria related to the ratio of elected members to co-opted members, training, frequency of meetings, public participation in council meetings and consultation and communication with the community.

**S12** The accreditation criteria will favour larger community and town councils. In order to make the opportunity to apply for delegated functions as inclusive as possible, accreditation might also be awarded to groupings of councils. Such groupings might, for example, follow the model of good practice of Hawarden, Shotton and Broughton and Bretton councils in Flintshire, which have pooled resources to operate a joint maintenance service responsible for street lighting, playing fields and building maintenance, and a joint administrative service.

**S13** Partnership working also offers the opportunity to increase a council's sphere of activity, both in terms of partnership between councils and partnerships with other bodies, including local community organisations and county and county borough councils. At least a fifth of councils are involved in some form of partnership working, including members of independently constituted partnership organisations, and co-funded partnership projects. Principal councils are the most frequent partners, but partners are also widely drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Projects undertaken through partnership working include closed-circuit television (CCTV) schemes, the provision of bus shelters and play equipment, skateboard parks, heritage schemes and museums, building refurbishment or redevelopment, and environmental initiatives such as tree-planting, land reclamation and creating wildlife areas and walks.

**S14** Challenges can also arise in the practice of partnership working, especially if other partners include principal councils and public agencies. As volunteers, representatives from community and town councils believe that they are less well prepared and less able to contribute to business than the professional officers representing other partners. As such, councillors may have less of an influence on the agenda and decisions made by partnerships than they desire. Improving the effectiveness of partnership working by community and town councils requires greater awareness of the circumstances of local-level council representatives by other partners, particularly public sector partners, but also better advice and training for local councillors involved in partnership activity.



## The representational role of community and town councils

**S15** The representation of local interests is a crucial part of the work of community and town councillors, and is regarded by three out of four councillors as one of the key means by which they can 'best serve' their community. Community and town councils engage with a wide variety of bodies, at differing scales and with varying degrees of frequency, and even small community councils may typically have up to a dozen items of correspondence with external bodies, including principal councils, to report at their meetings.

**S16** The greatest challenges faced by community and town councils in representing local interests are insufficient time, resources and information. Consultation exercises often require a response on a timescale that is mismatched with a council's schedule of meetings. Consultation documents may be bulky or inappropriately pitched and difficult to circulate to members. When councils attempt to initiate contact with outside bodies they can experience difficulty in identifying the appropriate contact points. More generally, councils have expressed concern about poor feedback and slow responses to correspondence. These challenges and problems can be addressed through the adoption of good practice on both sides. Consulting organisations need to be aware of the constraints and capacities of community and town councils, and need to identify clear liaison procedures. Equally, community and town councils need to ensure that their committee structure and cycle of meetings enables them to participate effectively in consultation exercises.

**S17** The most important external relationship of most community and town councils is that with their local county or county borough council. A typical community council will deal with upwards of half-a-dozen matters of correspondence from, or to, the principal council at each meeting. The quality of this relationship, however, varies significantly, with concerns expressed by community and town councils about the absence of clear contact points, poor co-ordination between different principal council departments, contradictory advice issued by different departments, letters and e-mails that are not replied to, and a lack of feedback on complaints made about joint projects and initiatives.

**S18** There are, however, many examples of good practices that should be adopted more widely. These include regular liaison meetings between the county or county borough councils and local community and town councils, the designation of a community council liaison officer within a county/county borough council, and the representation of community and town councils on principal council area committees (or their equivalents). A Charter agreement, such as that adopted by Caerphilly County Borough Council, can help to formalise and promote good practice.

**S19** Community and town councils have a particularly important role to play in commenting on planning applications. It is estimated that most planning departments send notifications of between 500 and 1500 applications to community and town councils each year, and receive responses to over 80% of applications. In the vast majority of cases the community council's view corresponds with the decision of the principal authority planning committee. However, tensions are created when the recommendation is not followed, usually because the community council's position is not compatible with agreed planning policy or planning law. Such tensions could be alleviated through a better flow of information, including the circulation of planning newsletters, training and information events, enhanced feedback and the involvement of community and town councils in the strategic planning process.

**S20** There is also potential for the opportunities that exist for community and town councils to contribute to the planning process to be increased. The successful experiment by Monmouthshire County Council of permitting community and town council representatives to address meetings of the planning committee could be more widely adopted, as could the practice of inviting community and town councillors to attend site visits. In the longer term, planning authorities might wish to consider delegating decisions on minor planning matters to accredited community and town councils on the model pioneered by Taunton Deane Borough Council in Somerset. The community and town councils associations have also argued for the introduction of a third-party right to appeal against the granting of planning permission. This issue is more complex, raising concerns about the cost and efficiency of the planning system, but should be researched further by the Welsh Assembly Government.

**S21** Community and town councils are directly represented on a wide range of bodies within, or with a remit including, their communities. These are frequently organisations and committees to which they provide financial support, but also include primary school governing bodies to which they have a statutory right of appointment. Arrangements of this nature are mutually beneficial, providing accountability for public funds, democratic legitimacy, and helping to ensure co-ordination of community activities. There is scope for community and town councils to be represented on other publicly-funded bodies and initiatives, including secondary school governing bodies and the partnerships established under the Communities First, Business Improvement Districts and Rural Community Action programmes. The representation of community and town councils on national park authorities should also be considered.

**S22** The community and town council sector as a whole is represented at a national level by its representative associations. The forthcoming merger of these organisations into a single association, One Voice Wales, will enhance the quality of this representation. One Voice Wales has the potential to play a leading role in the future development of community and town councils and it will be important to ensure that it adopts a structure and a remit which maximise its capacity to perform this role effectively.

## The engagement of community and town councils with their communities

**S23** One of the great strengths of community and town councils is that they are closer to local people than any other tier of government. Yet, in practice, the quality and openness of interaction with the public by local-level councils can vary significantly. Historically, many community and town councils relied on informal interaction between their members and local residents, who knew each other as neighbours, customers, co-workers, or fellow members of clubs, sports teams, churches and chapels. The changing nature of Welsh society has undermined these traditional informal relationships. 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.

**S24** Members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of community and town councils, but may only speak at the discretion of the chairperson. Around about a quarter of community and town councils have introduced a formal period for public participation in their meetings, and as many again permit electors to speak on a more occasional, informal, basis. In the majority of cases, regular public attendance at council meetings is small; however, the formal provision of opportunities for participation is an important democratic initiative, and, when used, can help to ensure that the council is responsive to local concerns, and to encourage public interest in council business.

**S25** The language of council business can be a sensitive and controversial topic. In 18% of community and town councils, Welsh is the sole or predominant language used in meetings. Similarly, around 12% of councils record their minutes in Welsh only, and a very small minority circulate agendas only in Welsh. Such practices reflect the importance of the Welsh language in the communities concerned and are to be commended for helping to keep Welsh at the heart of community life. However, they can also be perceived by the non-Welsh speaking residents of those communities as exclusionary practices that restrict democratic participation. Community and town councils are now required to produce a Welsh Language Scheme. This requirement will help to ensure that agenda, minutes and other appropriate documents are accessible to all members of the community, but it will also generate additional resource demands that need to be monitored, and, if necessary, assisted.

**S26** The connectivity of a council to its community and the effectiveness of its representation of local interests is enhanced by regular consultation with local residents. The most appropriate means of public consultation will vary with the size of the community and the nature of the subject under consideration. Since 1999, more than half of the community and town councils in Wales have organised public meetings, and a quarter have conducted surveys of various types. A smaller number have held formal polls of local electors.

**S27** More routinely, the principles of open government should require that community and town councils are proactive in conveying information about their meetings and activities to local people. The most appropriate means of doing this will again vary, but may include initiatives such as the production and distribution of newsletters and/or annual reports, or maintaining a detailed website.

**S28** Community and town councils have an advantage over other community groups in that their legitimacy stems from an electoral mandate. Yet, in practice, only a minority of community and town councils have required contested ballots to elect their members in recent years, and many have struggled to attract candidates. In the last set of full elections in 1999, contested ballots were held in just over a fifth of community and town council wards. In nearly a third of wards, fewer candidates were nominated than the number of seats available, whilst in around 40 wards, no candidates at all were nominated. There is a need to encourage greater participation in community and town council elections, which may involve initiatives to publicise elections and to reduce the cost of organising elections which can act as a disincentive to smaller councils to actively encourage candidates.

## **Local council finance and evaluation**

**S29** Community and town councils in Wales collectively manage an aggregate budget of approximately £25 million per annum. Of this sum, £18.9 million is raised through the precept, with an estimated further £5-6 million obtained from other sources of income. Around two-fifths of the aggregate income of community and town councils is raised by the 30 largest councils, whilst councils serving communities of less than 500 population have an annual income of less than £3,000. The dependence of individual councils on the precept also varies, with four councils setting a zero precept in 2002-3 due to the sufficiency of other income.

**S30** Patterns of expenditure by community and town councils are equally variable, and depend on the size of the council and the range of services and facilities that it provides. The clerk's salary, insurance and audit fees are the only areas of expenditure incurred by all, or virtually all, councils, and account for just over a fifth of the aggregate expenditure of local-level councils. Other significant areas of expenditure include village and community halls, office costs, lighting, parks and salary costs of staff other than the clerk.

**S31** Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a local authority 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 Assembly Government – raised to £5 per elector in 2000 and now linked to inflation. Around three-quarters of community and town councils incurred expenditure under this provision in 2001-2, with the estimated aggregate expenditure amounting to just over £2 million. There is some call from community and town councils for the ceiling on Section 137 expenditure to be abolished. However, there are no more than half a dozen councils spending close to the limit at present and the majority of councils are spending less than 10% of their permitted expenditure. As such, we consider that there is little evidence to support either the abolition or the raising of the spending limit in the near future.

**S32** The developing role of community and town councils will create new demands on council finance, not just for the enhancement of delegated functions, but for administrative support, consultation exercises and to service greater involvement in planning, partnership working and representational activity. It has been argued that in order to fund such developments, community and town councils should be given a proportion of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and/or proceeds from non-domestic rates. These proposals are problematic both in principle and in practice, including concerns about the cross-subsidisation of areas with local-level councils by those without, and of rural communities with few rate-paying businesses by small towns and urban communities; and about the financial management structures in place for many smaller community councils.

**S33** Additional funds for community and town councils may be more appropriately provided centrally through the use of direct grants from the Welsh Assembly Government. Initiatives that might form part of an initial tranche of direct grants could include a Local Democracy Fund to cover costs associated with elections to community and town councils; a Business and Community Grant Scheme to support initiatives that are of primary or substantial benefit to local businesses; and a Welsh equivalent of the English 'Vital Villages' programme to permit community and town councils to access funds for community development projects.

**S34** The expansion of community and town council involvement in the provision of services and amenities carries the potential risk of aggravating the problem of double taxation. This arises where 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. The problem of double taxation can be reduced by adherence to principles of good practice. Where functions are delegated by principal councils to community and town councils, appropriate funding should also be transferred, such that there is no additional demand placed on the precept.

Double taxation is more difficult to address where it results from the established provision of concurrent functions by both principal councils and local-level councils. There are a number of strategies that could be adopted to this effect, but different strategies are likely to be appropriate in different contexts and more needs to be known about current practices before definitive guidance can be issued.

**S35** Principles of transparency, professionalism and public accountability should be followed in all financial procedures of community and town councils. These principles are already upheld by the vast majority of councils, but the further development of their role will bring new challenges and responsibilities. Adherence to an appropriate audit regime and the production of an annual financial statement should be cornerstones of a council's financial management practices. Larger councils may additionally find it useful to participate voluntarily in the Wales Programme for Improvement and a protocol should be developed to facilitate this.

**S36** The principles listed above should not just apply with respect to the management of a council's finances, but should be followed in all areas of council activity. The adoption of business plans and targets by community and town councils provides a framework for monitoring and self-evaluation that can assist local electors in making judgments about the performance of councils.

## Councillors and clerks

**S37** There are some 8,000 community and town councillors in Wales. They are drawn from all walks of life, but they do not proportionately reflect the composition of the population of the whole. Nearly three out of four community and town councillors are men, compared with just under half of the population. Four out of ten are aged over 60, compared with less than 30% of the adult population. Fewer than one in a hundred councillors are aged under 25, and fewer than one in six are aged under 45. Further analysis of a survey of councillors on 17 case study councils revealed that only a third were in full-time employment, two out of five were retired and nearly three-quarters have either lived in the community all their life or have been resident for more than 20 years. All councillors in the survey were white.

**S38** Councils whose membership does not reflect the diversity of the communities 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. Councils need to work to increase their inclusiveness through initiatives that engage with under-represented groups including women, ethnic minorities, young people, disabled communities and other hard-to-reach groups.

**S39** The time commitment made by many community and town councillors is considerable. The 146 councillors surveyed for this study spent an average of 13.2 hours per month on council activity, with one councillor devoting up to 120 hours each month to the council. This time commitment includes not just 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, attendance at civic events, and representation of the council on other bodies and at meetings and conferences.

**S40** The time and costs involved in participating fully in council activity can 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 disposable income. There is a strong argument for the remuneration of community and town councillors, both as a reward for the increasing demands of the role, and in order to encourage broader participation. The introduction of remuneration would be controversial. It would be strongly opposed by many councillors. However, we conclude that on balance the introduction of a basic allowance for council members, and of regulations to permit councils to reimburse the costs of childcare and relief care for dependent adults incurred by attendance at meetings, would be a positive contribution to increasing the inclusiveness of councils.

**S41** Since April 2002, community and town councillors have been subject to the same ethical framework as members of county and county borough councils. The introduction of the new code of conduct was controversial in many councils, but may be regarded as an important step in acknowledging the increasing responsibilities of community and town councils, and hence the renewed emphasis on assuring high standards of integrity and professional conduct. At the same time, the uniform application of the code to all councils failed to recognise the diversity of community and town councils and there is a case for reviewing the appropriateness of the code in its present form for smaller councils.

**S42** The developing role of community and town councils will also have implications for the role and conditions of employment of clerks. Only one in twenty councils currently employ a full time clerk, and a similar proportion have volunteer clerks. For two-thirds of councils the clerk is the only employee, and even in larger councils the clerk may only be supported by junior secretarial or maintenance staff. 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. The resources available to a clerk may also be limited, with sixty percent not having access to a fax machine, forty percent having no access to a photocopier, and twenty percent not having access to a computer. As councils develop their role, both the number and nature of the personnel they employ, and the resources provided, will need to be reviewed.

**S43** The most fundamental requirement for any future development of the role of community and town councils, is for the more comprehensive training of both clerks and council members. At present, only a quarter of clerks have participated in any formal training courses, and formal training of councillors is even more restricted. It should become the normal expectation that clerks to community and town councils will have completed a formal training programme and training of council members should become a routine practice. One Voice Wales has an important role to play in facilitating these opportunities by developing and hosting a comprehensive suite of training provision for councillors, clerks and other council personnel.

## Conclusion

**S44** The summary of findings presented here will inevitably dilute some of the diversity of the community and town council sector in Wales by seeking to draw general conclusions. There are numerous examples of open, inclusive and professional local-level councils in Wales who are making a real difference to their communities through a wide range of imaginative initiatives. However, there is also a small minority of councils in Wales that are inactive, closed and disconnected from their communities. The central objective of future policy relating to community and town councils must be to promote good practice and to ensure that all communities in Wales are able to benefit from strong local-level councils. The recommendations contained in this report are intended to meet three broad objectives:

- To professionalise the conduct of government by community and town councils.
- To formalise relationships between community and town councils and other bodies, including principal councils and the Welsh Assembly Government.
- To encourage and support all community and town councils to take advantage of the opportunities open to them.

**S45** This report should be understood as a snap-shot study of community and town councils at a particular moment in time. There is a need to ensure that appropriate information continues to be collected from and about community and town councils on a regular basis in order to monitor the implementation of the recommendations made here, and to inform the future development of policy.

**S46** The recommendations made in this report are addressed to a number of authorities, agencies and organisations, including primarily the Welsh Assembly Government, but also One Voice Wales, the county and county borough councils, community and town councils themselves, and a range of other institutions. Where possible, recommendations have been made that could be introduced within the powers of the National Assembly for Wales, however, in a few cases primary legislation would be required. Details of the legislative requirements are documented



in an appendix to the full report. Similarly, the full report identifies those recommendations with cost implications for the Welsh Assembly Government. The majority of recommendations are not dependent on either legislation or the identification of significant new funds and could be implemented over the relatively-short term future. It is anticipated that the implementation of all recommendations could be completed within a 5 year period.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The characteristics and distribution of community and town councils

#### Recommendation R3.1

The Welsh Assembly Government should encourage the creation of councils in those communities where they do not currently exist. There are four options that could be examined in this respect:

- Greater awareness of the opportunities that currently exist for new community councils to be established can be promoted through information campaigns by the Welsh Assembly Government and One Voice Wales and community development initiatives. These might include workshops, press advertisements and an accessible guide to establishing local councils on the Welsh Assembly Government or One Voice Wales' website.
- The legislative framework could be revised to introduce a right of local government electors to petition for the establishment of a new community council (with a petition requiring the signatures of 250 local government electors or 10% of the electorate, whichever is greater, to be accepted); and empower principal authorities to create new community councils by order. These changes would bring the legislative framework in Wales in line with that for England established by the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.
- All county and county borough councils containing communities that are not served by a town or community council could be required to organise polls in each such community on the option of establishing a council. There could be a further requirement for the polls to be repeated at a regular interval in those communities where there is no support for a council at present.
- The Welsh Assembly Government could seek primary legislation to bring into existence community councils for all communities in Wales.

### **Recommendation R3.2**

The Welsh Assembly Government should sponsor legislation to repeal Section 28, paragraph 4 of the Local Government Act 1972, that permits a community or town council to be disbanded. The recommendations for the development of the roles performed by community and town councils set out in the main report will require that councils are able to operate with a security of tenure. Procedures for the appropriate alteration of communities for reasons of geographical or population change already exist within the powers of the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales.

### **Recommendation R3.3**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government, in consultation with One Voice Wales, issue guidance to community and town councils on the formation of grouped community councils and on the development of partnership and federation arrangements for joint-working by community and town councils with respect to specific functions. The benefits of such arrangements should be promoted. However, the decision of individual councils to enter into such arrangements should remain voluntary. There is no case at present for a systematic community review to be undertaken, nor for the obligatory amalgamation of communities, but this issue should be kept under review.

### **Recommendation R3.4**

Procedures already exist for issues concerning community boundaries and the subdivision of communities into wards or new communities to be addressed through the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales. There is no case for these procedures to be reformed, although the awareness of these procedures among community and town councils could be raised through coverage of the topic as part of training for clerks and councillors.

## **The role of community and town councils in providing services and amenities**

### **Recommendation R4.1**

The Welsh Assembly Government should sponsor legislation to require all county and county borough councils to introduce a 'Charter' agreement with community and town councils in their areas, including procedures for the delegation of a specified range of functions to accredited community and town councils. The Charter should specify procedures for the financing of delegated functions and for revoking delegation. A Charter should be produced in negotiation between a county or county borough council and its local community and town councils and its content should reflect local circumstances. The Welsh Assembly Government should have the responsibility for monitoring the production and implementation of the Charters to ensure fair and consistent practice.

### **Recommendation R4.2**

Guidance should be issued to local authorities by the Welsh Assembly Government on the requirements of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations with respect to the delegation of functions to community and town councils. In many cases where delegation involves the transfer of staff resources, it may be more appropriate for community and town councils to 'buy' the time of a principal authority employee rather than for personnel to be transferred to a new employer.

### **Recommendation R4.3**

Community and town councils should review the appropriateness of their own structures and business procedures for the demands of assuming additional delegated functions. This may include reviews of committee structures, the frequency of meetings, the job descriptions of personnel, and the authorisation of clerks and sub-committees to act on behalf of the council on urgent matters between meetings.

### **Recommendation R4.4**

The expansion of the role of community and town councils in the provision of services and amenities will require the Welsh Assembly Government and One Voice Wales to review the training needs of councillors, clerks and other personnel on a range of managerial and specialist topics. One Voice Wales should ensure that training on these issues is available to councils. (See also recommendation R8.10)

### **Recommendation R4.5**

We recommend that in order to draw down delegated functions under a Charter agreement, a town or community council must first be required to pass an accreditation procedure. The accreditation procedure should require councils to meet specified criteria on the ratio of elected to co-opted members; the training or experience of the clerk; training undertaken by councillors; the management structure, including the committee structure and the frequency of meetings; and mechanisms for public engagement and accountability. The procedure should be structured in a clear and simple manner, with self-assessment to be undertaken by councils and accreditation to be awarded by the appropriate principal authority. The Welsh Assembly Government should have the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the accreditation process, and councils denied accreditation should have a right of appeal to the responsible Minister.

#### **Recommendation R4.6**

The Welsh Assembly Government and One Voice Wales should encourage smaller councils to qualify for accreditation through working with other councils. One model would be to form a 'grouped council' using the existing procedures as contained in the Local Government Act 1972. However, we recommend that legislation to introduce Charter agreements should give legal recognition to a new model of 'joint delivery partnerships' whereby two or more councils may form a partnership to deliver one or more functions. The 'joint delivery partnerships' would be managed by a joint committee of the participating councils and would require formal legal recognition in order to specify procedures for funding and personnel management. The 'joint delivery partnerships' would be entitled to receive partial accreditation with respect to specified functions.

#### **Recommendation R4.7**

Charter agreements should require community and town councils to stipulate procedures for user feedback and evaluation of services and amenities provided by the council. The nature of the procedures adopted will vary with the nature of the service or amenity and the size of the council and of the user-group.

#### **Recommendation R4.8**

The Welsh Assembly Government should sponsor primary legislation to extend the remit of the Local Government Ombudsman for Wales to cover maladministration in accredited community and town councils.

#### **Recommendation R4.9**

We recommend that more community and town councils follow the practice of partnership working between councils and local organisations, agencies and businesses in order to secure resources for initiatives, facilities and events within the community. Examples of good practice in partnership working should be widely disseminated through One Voice Wales.

#### **Recommendation R4.10**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should fund a position in One Voice Wales of a consultant/animateur to provide community and town councils with advice on identifying and developing initiatives to address locally-defined needs, on accessing different sources of funding, and on partnership working.

### **Recommendation R4.11**

The development of the role of community and town councils will create new personnel positions both with community and town councils and with partnerships in which they are involved. These positions may include community development workers, town co-ordinators, technical officers and youth workers. Model job specifications for these positions should be disseminated through One Voice Wales, based on examples of good practice.

## **The representational role of community and town councils**

### **Recommendation R5.1**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should review the list of topics on which community and town councils have a statutory right to be consulted. We do not envisage that the list needs to be substantially extended, but consider that some amendments may be required to reflect changing circumstances.

### **Recommendation R5.2**

We recommend that county and county borough councils should undertake a review of their procedures for communicating and consulting with community and town councils. As part of the review, examples of current good practice, such as, for example, enabling local council clerks to access the principal authority intranet, may be incorporated into working practices. The WLGA and One Voice Wales both have a role to play in identifying and disseminating good practices of this kind.

### **Recommendation R5.3**

Charter agreements between county and county borough councils and community and town councils (see recommendation 4.1) should outline the agreed procedures and principles for interaction between the two tiers of local government, including commitments by the parties to adopt good practices.

### **Recommendation R5.4**

We recommend that all county and county borough councils designate a Local Councils Liaison Officer. The liaison officer would be responsible for issues relating to the Charter, for supporting liaison meetings with community and town councils, and acting as a first contact point for community and town councils on any matter concerning the principal authority.

### **Recommendation 5.5**

We recommend that county and county borough councils adopt the good practice of organising regular liaison meetings with community and town councils in their areas.

### **Recommendation R5.6**

We recommend that community and town councils should be fully involved in the development and implementation of Community Strategies. Where the Community Strategy has involved the creation of new area fora or partnerships (or where it has built on existing area committees), the inclusion of representatives from community and town councils on these committees is recommended as good practice. In most cases it would be appropriate for local councils within an area committee's territory to be represented by one or two non-voting members. Where area committees also include representatives of public agencies and community groups they may play an important role in improving the representation of community interests across a range of domains.

### **Recommendation R5.7**

It is good practice for community and town councils to be involved as fully as possible in all stages of the planning process. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should encourage the greater use of community plans, community appraisals and Planning for Real exercises organised by, or in conjunction with, community and town councils to inform preliminary strategic planning. We also recommend that principal authorities should identify ways of improving the provision of information on planning to community and town councils, including, for example, the circulation of planning newsletters to councils and the hosting of open evenings for community and town councillors and clerks in planning departments.

### **Recommendation R5.8**

We recommend that principal planning authorities introduce mechanisms to enable community and town councils to address planning committees on applications concerning their community. In order to regulate this process, the procedure employed by Monmouthshire County Council whereby one representative from a local council may make a 10 minute presentation if 48 hours notice is given, is recommended as a model of good practice.

### **Recommendation R5.9**

We recommend that community and town councils should establish planning committees to enable appropriate consideration to be given to applications within the timescale requested. Where the volume of applications does not warrant the formation of a committee, consideration should be given to calling special meetings of the council to discuss significant applications.

### **Recommendation R5.10**

Consideration should be given by principal planning authorities to the delegation of the responsibility for decision-making on relatively minor planning applications to selected community and town councils, following the model pioneered by Taunton Deane Borough Council in England. It is recommended that delegation should only be made to accredited community and town councils where all council members have completed training on planning matters.

### **Recommendation R5.11**

The Welsh Assembly Government should commission research to examine the arguments for and against the introduction of a third party right to appeal against planning decisions and consider the probable consequences of such a measure.

### **Recommendation R5.12**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should produce in association with One Voice Wales a 'Community and Town Councils Charter' stating the procedures and principles to be followed in the Assembly's interaction with local councils. The content of the Charter may include commitments to designate a community and town councils liaison officer for the Assembly, to designate liaison officers in each of the key departments with most frequent contact with community and town councils, and to more clearly signpost material relating to community and town councils on the Assembly's website.

### **Recommendation R5.13**

We recommend that public agencies and other bodies undertaking consultations involving community and town councils follow models of good practice. These may include the distribution of summary reports as opposed to full reports in the first instance, the greater use of consultative fora involving a number of councils, and, where possible, regard for the meeting cycle of councils. One Voice Wales has a role to play in advising organisations on these matters.

### **Recommendation R5.14**

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.

### **Recommendation R5.15**

Community and town councils have many shared interests with the voluntary sector at a community level and face many common challenges. We recommend that strong links should be built between One Voice Wales and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, and between the area committees of the new association and the county voluntary councils.

### **Recommendation R5.16**

We recommend that community and town councils should be incorporated into the Welsh Assembly Government's e-government strategy. All community and town councils should have a publicly advertised e-mail address at which they can be contacted by members of the public and by other organisations. Electronic communication should be developed as the primary means of communication between the Welsh Assembly Government and community and town councils, and the use of electronic communication between local councils and other bodies should be encouraged.

### **Recommendation R5.17**

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider granting community and town councils within a secondary school catchment area the right to appoint a member of the school governing body. Further consultation would be required on the appropriate mechanism for appointments, and on the delimitation of catchment areas.

### **Recommendation R5.18**

We recommend that the review of National Park Authorities should consider whether community and town councils wholly or partly within a national park should have representation on the authority. The review is advised to examine the models employed in England to nominate parish council representatives to National Park Authorities.

### **Recommendation R5.19**

We recommend that guidance be issued to all Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies on the representation of community and town councils and their interests. The guidance should acknowledge that the appropriate mechanisms will vary according to the scale at which the ASPB operates, its remit and the composition of its management board, and should present a number of models which may include the direct representation of individual community and town councils on boards; indirect representation on boards through One Voice Wales; a right of councils to nominate candidates to be considered for appointment to the board; or formal consultation or liaison arrangements.



### **Recommendation R5.20**

It should be open to community and town councils to be represented in the governance structures of the proposed Business Improvement Districts. In order to address concerns about the possible overlap of functions, we recommend that One Voice Wales should be fully consulted in the process of developing the proposals for BIDs.

### **Recommendation R5.21**

Guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government on the implementation of the Communities First programme and of the Rural Community Action programme should be revised to refer to the inclusion of community and town councils on local partnerships established under these schemes as an issue for consideration.

### **Recommendation R5.22**

One Voice Wales will have an important role to play in enhancing the representation of issues of concern to local councils. The association itself will have the opportunity to advocate community and town council issues directly to the National Assembly for Wales and to engage with other national and regional organisations and agencies. In order to fulfil this potential effectively, we recommend that:

- The new organisation will need a strong central office and chief executive or policy officer to enable it to engage effectively with the Welsh Assembly Government
- The organisation will also need to ensure that its structure enables it to continue to effectively represent local council concerns at a regional level within Wales
- The organisation needs to be sensitive to the range and diversity in the size, budget, activity and therefore interests of community and town councils in Wales if it is to effectively represent them
- The organisation needs to maximise its membership among community and town councils in Wales. To do this it will need to be able to demonstrate that it is offering value for money to subscribers.

### **Recommendation R5.23**

We recommend that the remit of One Voice Wales include the representation of community and town council interests to national and regional organisations, the promotion of good practice, raising awareness of community and town councils and acting as a 'clearing house' for training for local council members, clerks and other personnel.

### **Recommendation R5.24**

In order to encourage councils to subscribe to One Voice Wales, it may be appropriate that some of the training and advice services be restricted to members only, or be provided to members at a subsidised rate.

## **The engagement of community and town councils with their communities**

### **Recommendation R6.1**

The Welsh Assembly Government should issue guidance to community and town councils on engagement with the community. The guidance should include:

- i. Recommendation that all community and town councils make provision for public participation at full council meetings. The nature of this provision may vary according to the circumstances of the council, but may typically involve a ten-minute slot for questions early in the agenda. It may also be appropriate in some circumstances to require that notice be given to the clerk in advance of any questions that are to be raised.
- ii. Re-affirmation of the legal requirement for community and town councils to display notice of meetings in a public place within the community, and to provide access to the minutes of meetings to any local government elector from the community. A very small number of councils do not at present appear to be fulfilling these requirements.
- iii. Encouragement to community and town councils to ensure that agendas, minutes and other appropriate documents are accessible to all members of the community, including, where appropriate, the bilingual production of these documents.

### **Recommendation R6.2**

The Welsh Language Board should monitor the adoption and implementation of Welsh Language Schemes by community and town councils in order to assess the potential need for further guidance on the practical aspects of implementation and for financial support.

### **Recommendation R6.3**

Guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government to community and town councils on engagement with the community (see recommendation 6.1) should include encouragement for more community and town councils to undertake consultations with their wider community through public meetings and surveys. Credit for such initiatives may additionally be incorporated into the accreditation procedure proposed in recommendation 4.5.

#### **Recommendation R6.4**

We recommend that the accreditation procedure for community and town councils should require the submission of a policy statement on the dissemination of information to the community. Good practice in this regard may vary depending on the size of the community and the council's relationship with the local newspaper or papur bro. However, we recommend that where the coverage of council meetings and work in the press is limited, community and town councils should consider producing their own regular newsletters.

#### **Recommendation R6.5**

Guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government to community and town councils on engagement with the community (see recommendation 6.1) should additionally encourage:

- i. All community and town councils to produce an annual report to be disseminated free of charge within the community, by means appropriate to the size and situation of the community.
- ii. Community and town councils to develop web-sites and e-mail facilities as a means of communication with local residents. The Welsh Assembly Government should work with One Voice Wales to provide advice to community and town councils on the development of IT facilities, including advice on funding.

#### **Recommendation R6.6**

One Voice Wales should work with appropriate partners to provide advice to community and town councils on the establishment of 'one-stop-information points' at which residents would be able to access information from a range of partner organisations, including, potentially, county and county borough council services, public utilities, public transport, public access to the countryside information, housing associations and the employment service.

#### **Recommendation R6.7**

We recommend that One Voice Wales should be represented on the Working Party established following the Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales to promote participation in the 2004 local government elections. The remit of the Working Party should be expanded to include the elections to community and town councils.

### **Recommendation R6.8**

The Welsh Assembly Government should consider providing direct grants to county and county borough councils to finance all costs incurred in the organisation of elections and by-elections to community and town councils. The distribution of the 'Local Democracy Fund' would be calculated by a formula based on the number and size of local councils in an authority area and recent evidence of electoral activity. This initiative would remove the financial disincentive for community and town councils proactively to promote elections and encourage candidates.

### **Recommendation R6.9**

We re-iterate the recommendation of the Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales that the Welsh Assembly Government issue guidance to community and town councils that vacancies to be filled by co-option should be widely advertised in their areas, with particular attention paid to informing local community groups and young peoples' organisations about these vacancies.

## **Local council finance and evaluation**

### **Recommendation R7.1**

The recent amendments to the controls on spending under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 are judged to have accommodated the needs of most councils and it is considered that there is no case for the limit to be removed. As an additional measure, the Minister could be empowered to permit individual councils to exceed the limit for a limited period on a case-by-case basis. Such councils would be required to have met the accreditation criteria described in section 4, to demonstrate a record of good financial management, and to demonstrate that the exception would not substantially increase the overall council tax demand for households in the community.

### **Recommendation R7.2**

The Welsh Assembly Government should review the approval procedure for borrowing by community and town councils in order to improve the simplicity and flexibility of the system. The review should include consideration of the removal of the fixed borrowing limit.

### **Recommendation R7.3**

Charter agreements between county and county borough councils and community and town councils should stipulate the funding arrangements for all delegated functions. We recommend that financial support for delegated functions should normally be provided to the appropriate community and town councils by the

principal authority, calculated on the basis of expenditure on the function in the relevant community over the previous five years. Any additional expenditure required to enhance or develop the delegated service or amenity should be sourced from the community or town council precept or other income.

#### **Recommendation R7.4**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should undertake a joint review with the Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales of current practices in the funding of delegated functions and of current procedures for avoidance of double taxation. The review should aim to identify and agree models of good practice that might be disseminated through the issuing of guidance to local authorities from the Welsh Assembly Government. The review should include consideration of three potential models identified by the present study:

- i. that the delegation of functions should be accompanied by the transfer of appropriate, ring-fenced, funding;
- ii. that local authorities should consider, where practicable, the use of 'special expenses' provisions to set variable council tax demands in different communities within a principal authority area with regard for facilities provided by a community or town council that are elsewhere provided by the principal authority;
- iii. that principal authorities should negotiate local agreements with the appropriate area committee of One Voice Wales on the inclusion of concurrent functions in the calculation of council tax and precept demands.

#### **Recommendation R7.5**

The Welsh Assembly Government should commission further research on the extent to which services and amenities related to concurrent functions are delivered by community and town councils or principal authorities. The research should inform the further development of policy and guidance on double taxation.

#### **Recommendation R7.6**

We conclude that it would be neither appropriate nor practical for community and town councils to be permitted direct access to the Revenue Support Grant or to non-domestic rates at the present time. We further conclude that agreement would be unlikely to be forthcoming from the principal councils in Wales for the top-slicing of the Revenue Support Grant to fund additional payments to community and town councils. As such we recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should examine possible alternative mechanisms for directly funding community and town councils.

### **Recommendation R7.7**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government introduce a Business and Community Grant Scheme to support initiatives that are of primary or substantial benefit to local businesses (e.g. CCTV and tourism promotion). It may be appropriate for the scheme to be administered by One Voice Wales on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government providing that appropriate fiscal and managerial standards can be guaranteed.

### **Recommendation R7.8**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government should introduce a new programme to provide funding for community initiatives for which community and town councils would be eligible to apply. We envisage that the range of initiatives eligible for funding under the programme might include the development of community action plans, the improvement or protection of local services, community transport schemes and projects to tackle social exclusion. We recommend that the programme should be modelled on the Countryside Agency's 'Vital Villages' programme in England, but should be accessible to all community and town councils.

### **Recommendation R7.9**

We recommend that guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government to community and town councils on engagement with the community (recommendation 6.1) should advise that all councils prepare and disseminate an annual financial statement. This should clearly indicate expenditure on statutory functions, delegated functions and under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, as well as income raised through the precept, transferred from principal authorities, awarded as grants or received from other sources. All ring-fenced and direct grant income should be clearly indicated.

### **Recommendation R7.10**

The implementation of the new audit regime for community and town councils and the consequences of any additional resource demands need to be investigated, evaluated and reviewed by the Welsh Assembly Government. In particular, the appropriateness of the regime for very small community councils should be reviewed.

### **Recommendation R7.11**

The participation of larger community and town councils in the Wales Programme for Improvement should be encouraged. We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government and One Voice Wales should jointly develop a protocol to enable the voluntary participation of larger local councils in a truncated Wales Programme for Improvement regime. We do not consider that it would be appropriate to reduce the threshold for mandatory inclusion in the Wales Programme for Improvement.

### **Recommendation R7.12**

We recommend that all community and town councils should be encouraged in guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government to engage with their communities (recommendation 6.1) to agree a four-year action plan, specifying targets and proposed initiatives. The action plan should be a publicly-available document. The council should annually review progress with the implementation of the action plan.

## **Councillors and clerks**

### **Recommendation R8.1**

Action is required to strengthen the inclusiveness of community and town councils. Community and town councils should actively seek to increase representation from women, ethnic minorities, disabled communities and other hard-to-reach groups. Councils should review the influence of their structures, working practices, meeting times and locations, and communication and consultation strategies in facilitating or restricting participation by different groups within the community. Councils that are inclusive are more responsive to the needs and interests of their community and can more effectively serve that community.

### **Recommendation R8.2**

We recommend that community and town councils should be actively engaged in the development of the Welsh Assembly Government's Childrens and Young People's Framework, working closely with Children and Young People's Partnerships and with existing and new youth councils and fora. Community and town councils should be encouraged to work with their local youth council or forum to define how they intend to meet the needs of children and young people in their areas, identifying initiatives that may be funded under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **Recommendation R8.3**

We re-iterate the recommendation of the Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales that the minimum age for candidates in local government elections be reduced from 21 to 18, "not in the expectation that many 18 year old candidates will suddenly emerge, but rather because it will enable community councils to co-opt those aged 18 and over to fill vacancies, and so perhaps persuade such young people in due time to move forward to stand for county/county borough councils."

#### **Recommendation R8.4**

As a further measure, consideration should be given by the Welsh Assembly Government to legislation to permit all community and town councils to co-opt up to two non-voting representatives from residents of the community aged between 16 and 25. This would enable all local councils to increase youth representation, including those in which elections are fully contested and casual vacancies routinely result in contested by-elections.

#### **Recommendation R8.5**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government amend the Local Authorities (Allowances for Members of Community Councils) (Wales) Regulations 2002 to permit community and town councils to pay an annual 'basic allowance' to members in respect to time spent on council duties outside of meetings and costs incurred (e.g. telephone and postage expenses). The 'basic allowance' might be payable to the chair of the council, or to all members, within a nationally agreed framework, and should be met from locally-generated revenue income (e.g. the precept). We recommend that the introduction of a 'basic allowance' scheme by a council should require the support of a majority of members of the council.

#### **Recommendation R8.6**

We recommend that community and town councils should also be permitted to choose to reimburse costs of childcare and relief care for dependent adults incurred by members for the duration of attendance at council and council committee meetings, or participation in other appropriate council business.

#### **Recommendation R8.7**

Consideration should be given by the Welsh Assembly Government to permitting local groupings of community and town councils, and area committees of One Voice Wales, to reimburse the expenses of councillors representing a group of councils on an external body for which remuneration is not otherwise available. Funds for this could be obtained through a levy on all participating community and town councils.

#### **Recommendation R8.8**

We recommend that the operation of the Code of Conduct for community and town councillors over its first year of enforcement should be reviewed by the Welsh Assembly Government and, if desirable, revised in so far as the code applies to community and town councillors. These may include relaxing the requirements on the declaration of interest or other elements of the code for councils that do not seek accreditation under the scheme proposed in recommendation 4.5.

#### **Recommendation R8.9**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government issue guidance to community and town councils and to principal authorities to clarify the requirements of the new standards regulations with respect to the participation of councillors who are members of both a principal authority and a community or town council in decision-making at both levels, notably with respect to planning applications.



### **Recommendation R8.10**

A comprehensive training package should be developed under the guidance of One Voice Wales for community and town councillors, clerks and other council personnel. The package needs to include provision for a number of specific and different training requirements. These include:

- Induction training for new clerks, covering all aspects of a clerk's work including finance, administration, law, etc.
- Refresher training for established clerks, focusing on changes in law and regulations.
- Induction training for new councillors, including training on the local government system and law, partnership working and the planning system.
- Refresher training for established councillors, focusing on new regulations and policy changes.
- Training for other local council employees, for example finance officers, secretarial staff, community workers.
- Specialist training on specific topics, for example bidding for grants, engaging with young people, and community development.

### **Recommendation R8.11**

We recommend that One Voice Wales should act as a 'clearing house' for accredited training courses, which may be delivered by a range of providers. Funding should be provided by the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that the opportunity for training is available to all.

### **Recommendation R8.12**

Community and town councils should introduce procedures for the 'mentoring' of new members by experienced councillors. Advice on the form, nature and organisation of such mentoring arrangements could be provided by One Voice Wales.

### **Recommendation R8.13**

Additionally, we recommend that One Voice Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, the Society of Local Council Clerks and the principal authorities should collaborate on the production of a range of information resources for local councillors and clerks. These may include a handbook for local councillors, and a range of internet-based resources.

## Conclusion

### **Recommendation R9.1**

We recommend that the Welsh Assembly Government or the Local Government Data Unit should collect by means of annual returns from community and town councils, information on the gross income and expenditure of councils, the proportion of income sourced from the precept, direct grants and other sources, and expenditure under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

### **Recommendation R9.2**

One Voice Wales is encouraged to undertake a regular census of its members in order to compile information that would permit the on-going assessment of the needs and requirements of community and town councils, including in particular, data relating to:

- election results and turnout; co-options; casual vacancies and the action taken to fill them;
- the participation of council employees and members in formal training courses and workshops;
- the demographic composition of council membership.

### **Recommendation R9.3**

Consideration should be given by One Voice Wales to finding ways of 'celebrating' the achievements of community and town councils and raising public awareness of councils' work. Possible initiatives that might be explored could include annual awards, special supplements in the Western Mail and Daily Post, and working with broadcasters to develop storylines involving community councils or councillors on Pobl y Cwm.