

Chief Executive Report: Summary of One Voice Wales Consultation Event

Date: 1st October 2024

Reason For Report

I attended the One Voice Wales Consultation Event held on 1st October 2024, where the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee's inquiry into the role, governance, and accountability of community and town councils in Wales was discussed. The inquiry aims to evaluate the value of these councils, their adaptability to an evolving local government landscape, governance and scrutiny arrangements, the use of digital technology, and how new powers support community needs.

The consultation period remains open until 18th October 2024. One Voice Wales has established a working group to coordinate its contributions, with the first meeting held on 18th September 2024. This event provided member councils the opportunity to discuss the inquiry and share feedback on the key issues at hand.

As a result of my contributions during this event, One Voice Wales has invited me to be a guest speaker at one of their upcoming webinars on the cost of living, which I have accepted. Additionally, I will be attending the Stakeholder event at the Senedd on 23rd October.

<https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Id=44071>

Key Issues Highlighted

During the event, it was emphasised that concerns have emerged regarding:

- The increasing number of unqualified audit opinions from Audit Wales.
- A noticeable democratic deficit due to a decline in elected council vacancies.

This inquiry is particularly timely as it comes amidst ongoing discussions about community identities and the impact of the Community Boundary Review. I noted One Voice Wales's recommendation for comprehensive engagement with the sector in 2025-26, aligning with a Cabinet Secretary review planned for that period.

One Voice Wales is actively promoting best practices and raising standards within community and town councils, effectively responding to challenges such as those posed by the coronavirus crisis.

Achievements and Best Practices

The following achievements and best practice examples were discussed in relation to the inquiry's terms:

- ✓ **Role and Value of Councils:** The One Voice Wales Awards celebrate exemplary practices. For instance, Pontypool Community Council received the award for Best Annual Report, while Blaenavon Town Council was recognised for Best Community Engagement.

- ✓ **Sector Adaptability:** A new governance framework is being established, alongside a Memorandum of Understanding with the WLGA, to enhance collaboration within local governance structures.
- ✓ **Governance and Transparency:** One Voice Wales is promoting good governance practices through model financial regulations and the Finance & Governance Toolkit.
- ✓ **Digital Engagement:** Initiatives such as the Digital Community of Practice and enhanced social media presence are improving engagement and participation among councils.
- ✓ **Community Support:** Councils are leveraging their new powers effectively to address local challenges, focusing on biodiversity initiatives and responses to the cost-of-living crisis.

Conclusion

In summary, the event provided valuable insights into the ongoing challenges and opportunities for community and town councils. There are no specific financial or staffing implications associated with this report, as it was produced within existing resources.

Recommendations:

I recommend that the council;

1. Consider the matters discussed during this consultation event.
2. Review the draft response I have prepared.
3. Agree on a strategic approach moving forward in response to the inquiry.