



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: RE/616 /21

John Griffiths MS  
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

29 October 2021

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter requesting further information on some of the issues we discussed during my attendance at the Local Government and Housing Committee on 22 September.

At the meeting I promised to provide further detail on work of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (the Panel). The Panel is the independent body whose principal function is to make determinations on the salaries and payments principal councils, community councils, fire and rescue authorities and national park authorities make to their elected members. Its powers also include making recommendations on any proposed changes to the salaries of the chief executives of principal councils and chief fire officers.

The current remit of the Panel includes county and county borough councils, town and Community councils, national park authorities and fire and rescue authorities. The Welsh Ministers powers in relation to the Panel are limited, and are set out within the 2011 Measure, and the Local Government (Wales) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act").

In order to exercise its function the Panel:

- Has regular dialogue with members and officers of the bodies for which it has responsibility for setting remuneration;
- Undertakes an analysis of changes in appropriate comparable remuneration structure;
- Considers any specific issues that may impact on the appropriate level of remuneration for the bodies in question;

## Paper 2

- Engages with relevant bodies in Wales in relation to the remuneration of elected representatives i.e. the Welsh Local Government Association and One Voice Wales.

The Panel is required to produce an annual report, which will prescribe the payments and allowances for councillors and members of the organisations listed above, and may produce Supplementary Reports at any time that it considers necessary. In preparing its reports the Panel is required to take into account the likely financial impact of its decisions on the authority or authorities in question.

The Panel is currently consulting on its Annual Report for 2022/2023. The consultation will end on 26 November following which the Panel will consider any representations which will inform decisions about final determinations and content of the final Report. The consultation document can be found [here](#).

I also promised to provide an update on progress made in responding to the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales.

While the recommendations were for all sectors to consider and take forward, the Welsh Government set out a number of key actions it proposed to take in response. The previous Minister provided a written update on Welsh Government's work with, and support for, the community and town council sector in March 2020 [\[link\]](#). I have attached a more detailed update on the progress on the areas for action at **Annex A**. As outlined in the written statement, there are still some unresolved questions raised by the review which require further thought, and the need to focus on the pandemic has delayed giving them due consideration. I intend to revisit these questions this Senedd Term, working with our partners to develop clear proposals, some of which may require further legislation.

You requested further detail on the support available to council clerks, including training packages for people new to the role, and whether any work is being undertaken or is planned to update job descriptions to ensure candidates have a clear understanding of the role and have relevant experience.

In respect of Welsh Government support, in 2021-22, we have allocated around £70k to provide funding for the full cost of undertaking the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) for around 70 clerks. We also provide around £2k for additional general training for clerks, for example, for clerks new in post to undertake Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA); and other continuous professional development needs. To provide some context, in the previous two years, we offered £6k and £3k respectively to support and incentivise clerks' training and these were not fully spent. I am open to increasing the funding available if demand increased, and am working with One Voice Wales and the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC) to encourage this. The incoming requirement for community councils to publish training plans will provide insight into their training needs.

The Society for Local Council Clerks is the professional body for local council clerks and supports its members to gain the necessary knowledge, training and skills for their role. They offer a mentoring service for new clerks in Wales. They hold two webinars annually specifically aimed at new clerks and produce a check-sheet to support clerks who have recently started in their role. They provide advice on the role and job description of the clerk, including a specimen job description. One Voice Wales provides a range of services

and we understand that this would include support to councils wishing to appoint a new clerk.

You also requested more information about the arrangements to ensure Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) are democratically accountable.

CJCs aim to bring more coherence to, and strip out some of the complexity of, regional governance arrangements - strengthening local democratic accountability by ensuring that it is local elected members making decisions together about local government services in an open and transparent manner and for the benefit of their citizens and communities. The leaders of each constituent council will be the members of the CJCs and they will be accountable to their constituent councils for the decisions they make as part of their CJC.

A CJC will be required to put in place appropriate overview and scrutiny arrangements in consultation and agreement with its constituent councils. This will be an important part of the democratic accountability of the CJC. A CJC will also be required to have its own governance and audit sub-committee which will have the same functions as that of one in a local authority - including to review and scrutinise the financial affairs, risk management and internal control of a CJC.

Public accountability is also a key part of ensuring the democratic accountability of a CJC. A CJC will be required to encourage participation in its decision making by members of the public, ensuring that individuals are able to contribute to the shaping of services which they and their families rely upon and which have a significant impact on their daily lives. Members of the public will be also be able to access the meetings of a CJC, including viewing meetings, in the same way as they currently do for local authorities.

Officers of a Corporate Joint Committee will be subject to the same requirements in terms of conduct, transparency and accountability as employees of local authorities.

Finally, during the meeting I referred to the *Reforming Local Government Finance in Wales: Summary of Findings* report and said I would welcome the Committee's views on the options set out. The summary of findings can be found at <https://gov.wales/reforming-local-government-finance-wales-summary-findings>.

I have written separately to you and the Chair of the Finance Committee regarding the financial allocations made from the £2 billion unallocated in June's supplementary budget.

Yours sincerely,



**Rebecca Evans AS/MS**

Y Gweinidog Cyllid a Llywodraeth Leol  
Minister for Finance and Local Government

## **Annex A – Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales**

### **Welsh Government Areas for Action – Update**

#### **October 2021**

#### **THEME 1: Clarifying the role of the sector**

The Welsh Government has consistently confirmed the important role it sees for the sector, which has been highlighted by the contribution made to responding to the pandemic and supporting their communities. We have legislated to provide community and town councils with the potential to play a more substantial and more visible role in their communities.

For instance, we have provided community and town councils with a new general power of competence through the Local Government and Elections Act 2021. We have also placed a new requirement on the sector to reflect on how they engage, plan, undertake and report to their electorate by introducing annual reporting.

We regularly communicate with community and town councils through national events arranged by the Society for Local Council Clerks and One Voice Wales. One Voice Wales work with communities locally to promote the value of community councils. We think this is a role best suited for those who are closest to the communities. Our role is to support them in good governance.

Our sector partners are taking forward work to clarify roles regarding the services community and town councils could deliver. One Voice Wales and the WLGA have established a Task and Finish Group to explore asset transfer and service delegation, and develop place-based planning. We agree with them that decisions on clarifying ‘who does what’ should be made locally and not imposed by national government.

#### **THEME 2: Increasing democracy and participation**

The review recommended that community boundaries should be reviewed regularly. It also recommended actions to increase democratic access to, and participation in, the councils.

Using existing powers to ensure Community Reviews are conducted on a regular basis is a proportionate response to ensuring that individual boundaries remain relevant. The Boundary Commission for Wales have just completed a cycle of electoral reviews which are being brought into force ahead of the next ordinary local government elections. Some of these have made changes to community council arrangements, and the recommendations from the community review in Monmouthshire are also being implemented. Following the completion of this exercise, the Welsh Government will work with local authorities to reflect on the process and plan ahead for the next cycle. For instance, it might be sensible to review the timings of community reviews to ensure they can complete in good time inform the electoral reviews.

In respect of engaging with their communities and increasing participation, we are encouraging community and town councils to make more use of free tools and

## **Annex A – Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales**

### **Welsh Government Areas for Action – Update**

#### **October 2021**

platforms. We have provided specific support by using evidence gathered from community and town councils to prepare and publish a digital media guide, '[Connecting with your Local Community](#)' in January 2021.

To improve public awareness and access of the work of community and town councils, the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 provided for community councils to make arrangements to enable virtual access to council meetings. On the issue of public participation in meetings, there appears to be little impact of annual public meetings on public participation in England. Therefore we have taken a more regularised approach - from May 2022, a member of the public will have a right to make reasonable representations on a business item at any community and town council meeting. We feel this will remove barriers for the members of communities to engage with their council.

We have also taken steps to encourage more people to stand for election to community and town councils. In October, we launched an Access to Elected Office Fund to support disabled candidates seeking election in next year's local government elections. The fund pays for practical support to allow disabled people to fully participate in the political process.

We have funded One Voice Wales to develop promotional films to share across a variety of media platforms.

We recognise that this work is a continual and sustained process. In order to inform how we might take this forward, we have:

- Issued a survey to community councillors to find out more about their experiences and barriers to inform the next iteration of this work;
- Commissioned a literature review of the remuneration of councillors in other countries; and
- Commissioned an omnibus survey to examine to better understand public perception of councils and councillors.

### **THEME 3: Building capacity**

The key action under this area was to provide access to the general power of competence to eligible community councils, which we did under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This provision comes into force from May 2022. There has been extensive engagement on the proposal to provide access to the general power, the intention to attach conditions, and what those conditions would be.

From early 2020, we have provided funding for around 70 full-funded places for the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) to support introduction of the general power.

## **Annex A – Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales**

### **Welsh Government Areas for Action – Update**

#### **October 2021**

We have consistently made funding available for community and town councils to develop joint delivery arrangements through a grant to encourage such arrangements. However, the appetite from the sector was not as we might have anticipated and for 2020-21 onwards the resources for joint working were redirected to support an increased emphasis on financial management and governance training.

#### **THEME 4: Building capability**

We work with the sector bodies One Voice Wales and the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC), through the National Training Advisory Group (NTAG) to identify core training needs for clerks and councillors.

Whilst there is no appetite for mandatory core training from the sector, the Welsh Government has provided bursaries to incentivise training for councillors and clerks in specific areas, particularly around financial management and governance. This includes the aforementioned CiLCA bursary for community and town council clerks.

To support continuous improvement in the sector, we are exploring how we can do more to support the sector to self-evaluate and self-improve. There is work underway on a self-assessment tool which is to be piloted this autumn. The self-assessment tool, co-produced with One Voice Wales and SLCC with advice from Audit Wales, is intended to support councils to understand their audit obligations, and assist them to improve their governance arrangements.

#### **THEME 5: Improving relationships**

One Voice Wales and the WLGA took the initiative to establish a Task and Finish Group reviewing how to strengthen key relationships between community and town councils and principal councils – including whether to make certain structures mandatory. This was paused during the pandemic, but the expectation is this work will be restarted.

We remain concerned about instances where working relationships break down within community and town councils. The Welsh Government has facilitated engagement between the Ombudsman's office and the sector's representative bodies and they are collectively developing a guide for community and town councils in relation to officer complaints about bullying and harassment by individual councillors. This is expected to be published by One Voice Wales and SLCC in the coming months.

A written statement was recently issued on the [Review of the Ethical Standards Framework for Wales](#), which recommended some changes to the core Code of Conduct. The self-assessment toolkit for community and town councils includes a checklist item to ensure that all councillors have read and agree with the Code of Conduct.

**Annex A – Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales**  
**Welsh Government Areas for Action – Update**  
**October 2021**

**THEME: Improving accountability**

Provision was made in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to require community and town councils to report annually to their communities. The guidance for annual reporting will support councils to be transparent to their communities on recent activities and their plans for the future.

The guidance will also encourage councils to work within the cycle of engage, plan, undertake and report. This approach will be reinforced within the self-assessment toolkit for community and town councils. The Good Councillors Guide, which sets out what is expected and what good practice looks like, is in the process of being updated before the local government elections in May.

Community and town councils will also be required to prepare and publish a training plan for councillors and clerks. It is important for councils to be transparent about their training needs and priorities to provide confidence that it has the skills needed to support their communities.