Un Llais Cymru

One Voice Wales

Member Survey 2020

Member Survey

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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by One Voice Wales to obtain the views and opinions of Community and Town Councils throughout Wales to ensure that its work and priorities are in line with the views and expectations of its members and to provide a means for member Councils to suggest improvements in service delivery and ways of achieving its vision of : *"Working with local councils in Wales to shape places communities want to live in."*

The results are based on an analysis of a questionnaire sent by email to all member Councils. Detailed results are available in the Appendix. The report finds a very positive response to the work undertaken by One Voice Wales and confirms that it is considered an excellent and necessary service for Community and Town Councils, providing vital support for Clerks. Respondents consistently praised One Voice Wales for:

- the approachability of staff, their availability and excellent professional advice given promptly
- its good practice guidance
- its information on new legislation
- its information on current developments in the sector

- the training opportunities provided which are open to Councillors and Clerks
- its role in representing Community and Town Councils in Wales

It also has a number of recommendations for further consideration by One Voice Wales:

- considering how it can lead on the delivery of the Future Generations Act and Environment Wales Act
- continuing to develop good practice guidance
- developing a suite of templates for policies
- considering suggestions for increased resource capacity
- continuing to promote partnership working
- continuing to communicate achievements in the sector
- reviewing and considering best working practices for Councils due to the impact of Covid-19
- considering ways of improving attendance at national meetings and conferences/events
- how to improve on attendance at already well-attended area meetings
- considering ways of promoting the importance of being a Councillor and developing a recruitment programme
- seeking feedback on the new webinar training available from September 2020
- reviewing the design and layout of the much valued and regularly read ebulletin
- considering improvements to the website which is regularly consulted by members as a source of key information
- continuing its consultation process with Community and Town Councils across Wales

Background and Objectives

This report contains the results of One Voice Wales's first membership survey undertaken in order to obtain the views and opinions of Community and Town Councils throughout Wales to ensure that its work and priorities are in line with the views and expectations of its members. Membership is on an annual basis, and at the year end of 2019/20, 625 of the 735 local councils were members, comprising nearly 85% of all Community and Town Councils. The objective of One Voice Wales in undertaking the survey was to ensure that it is providing the service that members require, communicating in the right way and that Councils are happy with the way they are treated as a member and to seek means of improving service delivery. The survey was undertaken during a period of lockdown in response to Covid-19. In

response to the resulting changed circumstances, One Voice Wales has re-aligned some of its services to include the launch of webinar training to all Councils in September 2020.

Methodology

A bilingual survey on survey monkey was undertaken via an email sent to all member Councils in May. A reminder email was sent mid-way through the survey window to encourage more responses which were requested by 12th June 2020. The survey asked 34 questions and collected factual information about those responding in addition to opinions. Councils completing the survey were offered the chance to win two free places on any One Voice Wales Training Session/Conference in 2021. The detailed results of the survey are available in Appendix 1 to the report.

Results

1. **Respondent Information**
   A total of 332 member Community and Town Councils responded to the survey which is 52% of the current membership. This is an excellent response rate for a survey of its kind, since email surveys usually secure between 25-33% response rates. It is a good reflection on the level of engagement of member Community and Town Councils with One Voice Wales and the service it provides. It also gives an assurance that the results are reliable indicators of the views and opinions of member Councils about One Voice Wales and what it offers. However, it should be noted that while the survey secured a wide geographical spread of respondents from across Wales (Q2 Appendix 1) the response from rural areas was significantly higher than from urban areas. Over two thirds of responses (72%) came from the following rural areas: Powys (17%), Carmarthenshire (11%),Pembrokeshire (11%), Gwynedd (10%), Ceredigion (7%), Anglesey (4%), Vale of Glamorgan (4%) and Denbighshire (3%). Of those Councils responding:
   - Almost a third (32%) had been members since the beginning, a further third (39%) for over six years and just under a third (29%) being more recent members (less than 6 years). (Q3 Appendix 1).
   - A significant number operated either through the medium of Welsh (13%) or Bilingually (24%) while the majority (63%) operated through the medium of English (Q34 Appendix 1).
   - The spending power of respondents varies significantly from small rural communities to large towns as reflected in the precept received (Q 33 Appendix 1):
     15% having less than £5,000
     39% £5,000 - £30,000
     25% £30,000 - £100,000
     18% £100,000 - £500,000
     3% 0ver £500,000

2. Overall satisfaction with membership

The survey results (Q4 Appendix 1) confirmed an overwhelming satisfaction (93%) of member Councils with their membership of One Voice Wales, with the majority (51%) being very satisfied. A very small minority (6%) were neutral and less than 1% somewhat dissatisfied (0.3%).

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments in support of their overall satisfaction with membership (Q 5 Appendix 1). Responses indicated an overwhelming satisfaction with the service, particularly the access to excellent professional advice by friendly staff in a prompt manner, the accessibility of One Voice Wales and initial contact with the office, how it acts as an umbrella organisation responding to government changes and developments, provides an opportunity for Councils to showcase good practice via the awards scheme, regular committee meetings being a good source of information and the comprehensive and good value training offered. With reference to Covid-19 and lockdown respondents mentioned the usefulness of newsletters and updates in guiding and ensuring Councils do not act *ultra vires*. One Voice Wales is considered an excellent and necessary service for Councils and a source of vital support for clerks. One new clerk referred to the information provided as being invaluable. Of the very small minority who were neutral or somewhat dissatisfied with membership, comments included an issue with the quality of some of the training modules and that it would be beneficial for more training to be available locally. Also mentioned was the need for more 'plain English/Welsh' guides, sample documents/policies for new legislation etc, templates and training for tenders/contracts. An easier to navigate website and upgrading of the members' advice area would be a great improvement. Regarding meetings, it was mentioned that accessibility of national meetings would be improved by holding them in South, Mid and North Wales, while area meetings could be improved by a better response and input from member councils. The cost of being a member was raised as an issue by three Councils. While one Council considered that One Voice Wales supports larger Community and Town Councils another referred to the fact that One Voice Wales is an excellent source of support for small Councils.

3. Reasons for Membership of One Voice Wales

Respondents were asked to prioritise their reasons for membership of One Voice Wales from a list of seven areas (Q11 Appendix 1).

The following results are in priority mean score order:

Networking opportunities for Councillors and Clerks –	4.42
Training access –	4.04
Being part of a representative group for the local council sector –	4.01
Improvements of the governance of the Council –	3.92
Access to advice-	3.90
To be kept abreast of developments –	3.86
Assurance of correct practice –	3.38

4. **Support for different aspects of One Voice Wales' Working and Achievements**

   Respondents were given the chance to state whether they agreed with seven statements about One Voice Wales (OVW) (Q32 Appendix 1). Results indicate strong agreement with:
   OVW Staff are approachable – 91%
   OVW Staff are knowledgeable – 90%
   OVW is the representative body for Community and Town Councils in Wales – 89%
   OVW is dedicated to Community and Town Councils - 87%
   The Council Values its membership of OVW – 81%
   OVW can access a wide range of people and organisations – 70%
   OVW achieves a lot on behalf of its members – 61%

5. **Prioritisation of One Voice Wales' Work to Achieve its Vision**

   - Respondents were asked to rank in importance which aspects of work from a list of ten help One Voice Wales in achieving its vision of working with local councils in Wales to shape places communities want to live in. (Q30 Appendix 1)

     Five areas stood out as priorities for over two thirds of respondents:
     Supporting the Council with advice – 92%
     Providing information on latest developments/legislation – 81%
     Representing Town and Community Councils in Wales – 79%
     Providing examples of good practice – 77%
     Providing training for Councillors – 70%

     Around a third of respondents prioritised the following three areas:
     Providing networking opportunities – 33%
     Working with partner organisations – 30%
     Providing opportunities for the Council's work to be recognised and rewarded – 28%

     Less than 20% considered the following two areas to be a priority:
     Promoting membership – 19%
     Attracting commercial support – 17%

   - Respondents were given the opportunity to suggest anything else they considered One Voice Wales should be doing to achieve its vision (Q31). 144 responses were received; many of the responses said that no change was necessary and that within the resources available One Voice Wales was working at full-capacity and achieving excellent results. A number of respondents considered that One Voice Wales should be better funded and that this would help in achieving the

vision. It was suggested that harnessing Clerks on an ad-hoc basis had benefits for both extending its resource and would assist in the development of Clerks. The availability of a central list of experienced former Clerks would help Councils in the absence of their Clerk, particularly with the pressures of audit. Another suggestion in relation to Clerks was to explore options with a view to ensuring equitable salaries and duties across Wales. Promoting the importance of being a Councillor was suggested with support and a recruitment programme to encourage young councillors to become involved. Promoting collaborative working, cooperation and networking at a local level between councils, (including partnership meetings with County Councils) and clerks was considered important and seeking ways of how to encourage more councillors to attend regional meetings. Having more regional events for information and support would also be welcomed. Some suggested that it would be beneficial for One Voice Wales staff to attend Council meetings across Wales to give a short presentation on the benefits of membership and how by working together Councils can be part of the vision. It was appreciated that this would have resource implications for the office, which could be addressed by holding virtual/online meetings. Continuing to communicate achievements would encourage a growth in membership. Some considered that One Voice Wales focussed on serving large councils and that different approaches should be used for large and small councils, including helping smaller councils with no IT expertise and assisting them to balance an increased workload. A comprehensive 2-3 day induction course for clerks and councillors was suggested. Mention was made of the importance of volunteering and that training and policies do not currently cover this area. Smaller Councils would also value more locally based training venues and information on Place Planning for those with limited staff resources. Having suites of policy templates for all would save duplication of efforts across councils. It would also be beneficial to review and consider best working practices for councils in light of the impact of Covid-19, to seek information from both Community and Town and Councils and work with Welsh Government to agree on new guidance and recommendations on new working practices. It was further suggested that One Voice Wales should lead on the delivery of the Future Generations Act and Environment Wales Act. Other possibilities included working with organisations which are part of the Welsh Government Rural Development Programme to deliver projects and pursuing green economy to financially support the work of councils. Another suggestion was to have a “good Council” grading structure similar to England. Finally, to continue with the consultation process to seek the views of Community and Town Councils across Wales.

6. Attendance at One Voice Wales Committees

One Voice Wales organises a number of committees during the calendar year, ranging from those which are regionally based (area meetings) to national meetings. These provide opportunities for members to come together to discuss matters and share experiences.

- Almost two thirds of respondents attended area committee meetings (65%). (Q6). These meetings:
  - are held on a regional basis and the 16 are split up as follows geographically:

  North Wales: Ynys Môn, Meirionnydd, Arfon/Dwyfor, Conwy and Denbighshire, Wrexham and Flint;
  Mid Wales: Maldwyn, Brecon and Radnor, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire;
  South Wales: Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Monmouth and Newport, Bridgend/Vale of Glamorgan/Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff/Merthyr Tydfil/Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent/Torfaen;
  - are usually held four times a year
  - provide opportunities for two members of each Council to attend
  - are business focussed to enable as much exchange of information between local councils, the identification of good practice initiatives and consideration of issues relating to the Community and Town Councils to occur, including feedback/comments on national developments.
  - provide an opportunity for specific topics to be addressed by guest speakers and for member councils to raise matters that can be passed on to the National Executive Committee (NEC) for consideration.
  -are serviced by regional Development Officers who are the primary point of contact for member councils and are actively involved in the delivery of services and in promoting One Voice Wales at a local level.
- The Larger Councils Committee meets four times a year and the criteria for membership is for Councils with 2500 dwellings or above, comprising 14% of all councils in Wales. Member Councils can nominate one representative to attend the meetings although many Councils nominate both the representative and the Clerk to attend the meetings. While the Committee was established to meet the particular needs of larger Community and Town Councils, smaller Councils are also able to participate in any events organised by the committee, thereby ensuring that all member Councils can benefit from it. The work of the committee is guided by an annual work plan setting out key areas of concern to Larger Council. In terms of attendance, less than 20% of respondents (16%) who qualified to attend due to their size threshold attended the nationally organised Large Councils meeting (Q9). There is lack of complete clarity as to why this should be the

case with a significant minority citing location of meetings (22%), lack of member availability (23.%), content of agendas and relevance (6%) and day of the week (5%), while the majority said it was for “other” reasons (61%). (Q 10 Appendix 1) This indicates an area for potential improvement to ensure that meetings are better attended, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.

- Just over a quarter of respondents (27%) said their Council was usually represented at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) (Q12 Appendix 1), with only a small minority considering that it was a good way of: finding out about current developments (13%) and driving national policy (10%). A third did not attend because they considered the location of the meeting was difficult (35%), just over a quarter said it did not interest their Council (26%) and a very small number attributed it to speakers not being of interest (2%). A minority said that the day of the week (Saturday) was inconvenient for them (14%) and would be more likely to be represented on a weekday (13%). The AGM is scheduled to coincide with the OVW Annual Conference in September, and 21% had attended in 2018/19, with a further 45% being interested in attending in future. (Q26 Appendix 1) This indicates an area for potential improvement to ensure that meetings better attended.

7. Attendance at One Voice Wales Conferences and Events

A number of conferences are organised annually and a third of respondents indicated that they have attended One Voice Wales Conferences (35%) (Q7 Appendix 1). Attendance however, varies from conference to conference:

- The Innovative Practice Awards Conference provides an opportunity to showcase Community and Town Councils, the services they provide for their local communities and the commitment and work of Community and Town Councillors, Clerks and staff. The innovative practice recognised plays a key part as evidence base to Welsh Government, Unitary Authorities, the third sector and other key partners to highlight the good work local councils are doing in their communities. The results of the survey show that a minority of Councils had attended the Innovative Practice Awards Conference and Ceremony in 2018/19 (12%) while over a third were interested in attending in the future (38%) (Q24 Appendix 1). This indicates an area for potential improvement in attendance at the conference, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.
- The Innovative Practice Conference runs every year in July. This conference provides an opportunity to listen to a range of speakers on relevant topics, workshop sessions and learning about good practice from selected Councils. The results of the survey show that a minority

of Councils had attended the Innovative Practice Conference in 2018/19 (12%) while 40% were interested in attending in the future. (Q25 Appendix 1). This indicates an area for potential improvement in attendance at the conference, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.

- The Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the sector is held at the end of September or beginning of October. The conference with guest speakers is held in the morning, and the afternoon is dedicated to the Annual General Meeting where in addition to dealing with internal governance matters, consideration is given to approved motions submitted by member Councils where a formal vote is taken. Approved motions are then pursued by the Chief Executive and staff of One Voice Wales. The day enables councillors to hear directly about developing policy and service delivery agendas. The survey results show that a minority of Councils (21%) had attended the Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting in 2018/19 while 45% were interested in attending in future. (Q26 Appendix 1). This indicates an area for potential improvement in attendance at the conference, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.
- A Joint One Voice Wales/Society of Local Clerks Council Conference is held annually which provides a significant opportunity for Councillors and Clerks to come together to hear about developments in the sector. The survey results show that just over a quarter of respondents (27%) had attended the conference in 2018/19 while a further half (49%) were interested in attending in future. (Q28 Appendix 1) This indicates an area for potential improvement in attendance at the conference, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.
- Respondents were also asked whether they had attended the Joint One Voice Wales Conference with Planning Aid Wales. (Q29 Appendix 1) While a minority of 16% had attended in 2018/19, a further 45% indicated that they would be interested in attending in future. This indicates an area for potential improvement in attendance at the conference, as is evidenced by the interest shown in future attendance.

8. Attendance at One Voice Wales Training Sessions

One Voice Wales currently has 22 training modules offered on a regional basis. While they have been developed especially for Councillors, Clerks are also welcomed to attend. All the training modules have been designed to meet the needs of Community and Town Councils in Wales and new training programmes are introduced as the demands on the sector change. Since the survey was conducted, and in response to Covid-19 One Voice Wales has decided to offer webinar training to all Councils from September 2020.

- Over two thirds of member Councils responding had attended One Voice Wales Training Sessions (71%) (Q8 Appendix 1).

- A majority (54%) said that members of their Councils had attended training courses in 2018/19 and the same number (54%) said they would be interested in attending in the future. A minority indicated that they would not be interested in doing so (12%). (Q27 Appendix 1)

9. Communications

The survey included an opportunity to collect the views of respondents on different forms of communications from One Voice Wales: the E-Bulletin, the Website and Social Media.

E-Bulletin

The E-Bulletin is distributed monthly to all member Councils and stakeholders including third sector and public sector partners. It contains the latest information of relevance to Community and Town Councils, including consultations affecting the sector, examples of good practice and good news stories.

- A high majority of Clerks (87%) said that they received and read the bulletin regularly, with over a half always reading it (53%) (Q13 Appendix 1). A small minority sometimes read it (9%), while 5% said they did not receive a copy.
- A majority of Councillors (60%) received and read the bulletin regularly, with almost a third always reading it (31%) (Q14 Appendix 1). A quarter sometimes read it (26%), while 5% did not receive a copy.
- Over three quarters of respondents (79%) were pleased with the content and design of the bulletin, with a further 14% considering it to be fair.
- Respondents were given the chance to elaborate in an open question to comment on its content. (Q16 Appendix 1) While a majority were pleased with the content as noted above expressing that it was both interesting and informative, constructive comments were suggested for further consideration by One Voice Wales. Suggested changes included: reviewing the design and layout, including how it is presented bilingually, reducing the number of advertisements, categorisation of the content to draw attention to essential information, having a format which would make it easy to print hard copies to circulate to councillors without email, including more information on community enterprise solutions to local challenges. Some suggestions conflicted each other, with a suggestion both to publish more often and less often.

- Of particular interest to respondents reading the Bulletin was news about new legislation (86%) and good practice (71%). Just over a half were interested in current developments in the sector (54%) while a further third were also interested in news from other Community and

Town Councils (38.30%) and details of up-coming training courses (37%). Of least interest was news from partner organisations (11%).

Social Media

There is minimal following of One Voice Wales on social media by respondents to the survey (Q18 Appendix 1) : 5% followed on Facebook and 4% on Twitter, while 91% did not follow any posts on social media.

Website

The One Voice Wales website gives access to advice and information, policy and best practice, training opportunities, conferences, committees and it also has a supplier's directory. Three quarter of respondents to the survey regularly visited the website (75%) with 9% using it at least on a weekly basis (Q19 Appendix 1). A quarter (25%) did not make use of the website.

Users were asked to indicate for what purpose they accessed the website and invited to comment on what they liked most and least about the website and what other information they would like to see on it.

- A majority of respondents indicated that they accessed the website for information on good practice (69%), new legislation (62%) and current developments in the sector (52%). A quarter accessed it to obtain information on upcoming training courses (27%), while a smaller minority visited to obtain news about other Community and Town Councils (13%) and partner organisations (6%). (Q20 Appendix 1)
- In answer to the open question on what they liked most about the website (Q21), respondents provided varied responses, including up to date information on legislation, the availability of model policy templates, good practice guides, support and guidance, online basic training, the 'contact us' form. It was also considered to be user friendly, accessible and easy to navigate by many.
- In answer to the open question on what they least liked about the website (Q22), respondents mentioned the lack of search function, that the home page had too much information, needed modernising and that one possible improvement would be having the menu listed on the left of the page rather than on the right. Many would like more draft template policies, more information on audit and a better categorisation of information while others mentioned that case studies of good practice and video/clips would be welcomed. Some disliked the need to remember the password for the site.
- In answer to the open question on what other information they would like to see on website (Q23) there were a number of interesting ideas for further consideration, which in some areas replicated the responses to Q22 above. Answers included requests

for more information on good practice, template model policies and procedures to ensure coverage of all areas within the responsibility of Community and Town Councils, a specific section for small community councils, best practice case studies in a concise format on a template provided for this, examples of innovative projects and grant sources, and ideas for revenue making in the community. Expansion of supplier information was mentioned and again the need for a comprehensive search function. It would also be useful to have a news archive of important information from the e-bulletins, a news section for the latest legislation and differences between England and Wales and copies of One Voice Wales press releases. Information on national pay scales would be welcomed. An interesting idea was to introduce a Clerks Diary, with pointers as to what activities should be undertaken monthly, information on the financial cycle and a list of what Councils can and cannot do. A further suggestion was the establishment of an email facility which could be sent out to all Community and Town Councils for any issues arising.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this first members survey provides clear and strong evidence that member Councils are satisfied with the services that One Voice Wales provides, the means of communication used and how members are treated. The survey has also given members a chance to suggest ways that One Voice Wales can make improvements. Respondents have welcomed the chance to be consulted in this way and that this should continue.

Respondents consistently praised One Voice Wales for:

- the approachability of staff, their availability and excellent professional advice given promptly
- its good practice guidance
- its information on new legislation
- its information on current developments in the sector
- the training opportunities provided which are open to Councillors and Clerks
- its role in representing Community and Town Councils in Wales

One Voice Wales is considered an excellent and necessary service for Councils, providing vital support for Clerks.

Based on the survey's results it is recommended that One Voice Wales:

- considers how it can lead on the delivery of the Future Generations Act and Environment Wales Act

- continues to develop good practice guidance to ensure comprehensive cover
- develops a suite of templates for policies to save duplication of effort across Councils
- considers suggestions for increased resource capacity e.g. through funding opportunities and harnessing Council Clerks on an ad-hoc basis
- continuing to promote partnership working
- continuing to communicate achievements in the sector
- reviews and considers best working practices for Councils due to the impact of Covid-19
- considers how to improve on attendance at national meetings and conferences/events due to the interest shown in future attendance
- can improve on already well-attended area meetings by encouraging even more Councillors to attend
- considers ways of promoting the importance of being a Councillor and developing a recruitment programme
- once up and running to seek feedback on the new webinar training available from September 2020
- reviews the design and layout of the ebulletin, a much valued resource which is read regularly by the majority of respondents
- considers improvements to modernise and enhance the content of the website which is regularly consulted by members as a source of key information
- continues its consultation process with Community and Town Councils across Wales

Thanks

One Voice Wales is very appreciative of the time member Councils have taken in responding to the questionnaire survey and the suggestions received. It is committed to utilising the information gained, seriously to consider the results and implement improvements.

Appendix

ABOUT ONE VOICE WALES

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

"Working with local councils in Wales to shape places communities want to live in"

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

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

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