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# Impact of Community and Town Councils across Wales

Evidence briefing paper



Un Llais Cymru



One Voice Wales

# Key Messages

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## **Community and Town Councils are filling critical gaps created by the cost-of-living crisis**

Rising inflation paired with a real term cut in local authority revenue spending means that many universal, non-statutory, and preventative services across Wales have been cut at a time when financial insecurity is leading to worsening mental and physical health. Across many parts of Wales, Community and Town Councils are stepping in to provide valuable services to their local residents like warm hubs, foodbanks and community activities.

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## **Having been quantified for the first time, we can see that the impact of Community and Town Councils is significant**

This research represents the first attempt to quantify the social impact of the work done by Community and Town Councils to address cost-of-living issues. Our analysis estimates that in 2025, nearly £26 million of social value was generated, equivalent to £4.86 for every £1 spent. Our analysis covered a third of the 731 councils across Wales, although this sample probably includes many of the most responsive councils to the cost-of-living crisis, this overall figure is still likely an underestimate of the national impact.

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## **Structural barriers are limiting the ambition and potential of Town and Community Councils**

Our survey results identified a significant cohort of active councils that were keen to expand the number of cost-of-living activities they delivered as well as a number of councils that wanted to start delivering a cost-of-living activity for the first time. However, a lack of staff and financial capacity are proving to be significant barriers to expansion of activity in this space.

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## **One Voice Wales plays an important role in enabling the sector to deliver positive impacts**

Councils highly value the support that One Voice Wales has offered them to support their delivery of cost-of-living activities and have expressed a desire for this support to expand with more training, signposting to funding and showcasing of good practice.

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## **Strengthening the sector requires support beyond One Voice Wales**

Many councils have expressed a desire for additional funding outside of their precept to ensure they don't negatively impact their residents to expand their provision. Furthermore, councils have expressed a desire for more formal working arrangements with local authorities to avoid duplication and coordinate support for local people.

## The cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis remains the top concern for the British public in 2026<sup>1</sup>, with the Office for National Statistics estimating that overall price levels have risen by over 27% between March 2021 and the end of 2025<sup>2</sup>. In Wales, this rise in inflation has been coupled with a real term cut in the spending power of local authorities. On a per-person basis, the real revenue expenditure still remains lower than they were in 2010.

In practice, this means cuts to universal, non-statutory and preventative services at a time when financial precarity is creating more challenges for individuals and communities across Wales. By squeezing public services and individual incomes, the cost-of-living crisis has worsened mental and physical health, grown social isolation, and increased household reliance on borrowing, fuelling the crisis to continue.

In many localities across Wales, Community and Town councils have stepped into the gap created by a growing need for support and shrinking public services to deliver warm hubs, childcare services, free and reduced cost food schemes and many other activities that address local needs. Responding to the needs of councils for guidance and support on how best to address the cost-of-living crisis in their local area, One Voice Wales established a dedicated team to provide resources and facilitate peer-to-peer learning to improve the overall capacity of the sector to better deliver these services across Wales.

## Research overview

Those working within the Community and Town Council sector, and the people who benefit from their support, already recognise the value and impact of their work, but until now this impact has not been understood in quantitative terms. We distributed a survey to all 731 Community and Town Councils in Wales which sought to collect quantitative data on the cost-of-living activities that they deliver in their areas. We fed the 237 responses into a social return on investment model to analyse the types of activities being delivered by Community and Town Councils.

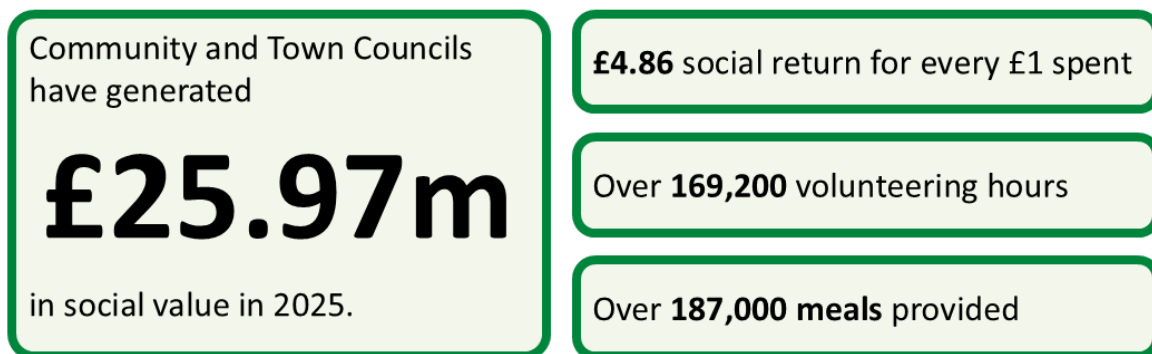


<sup>1</sup> YouGov, [Britons and cost of living](#), January 2026

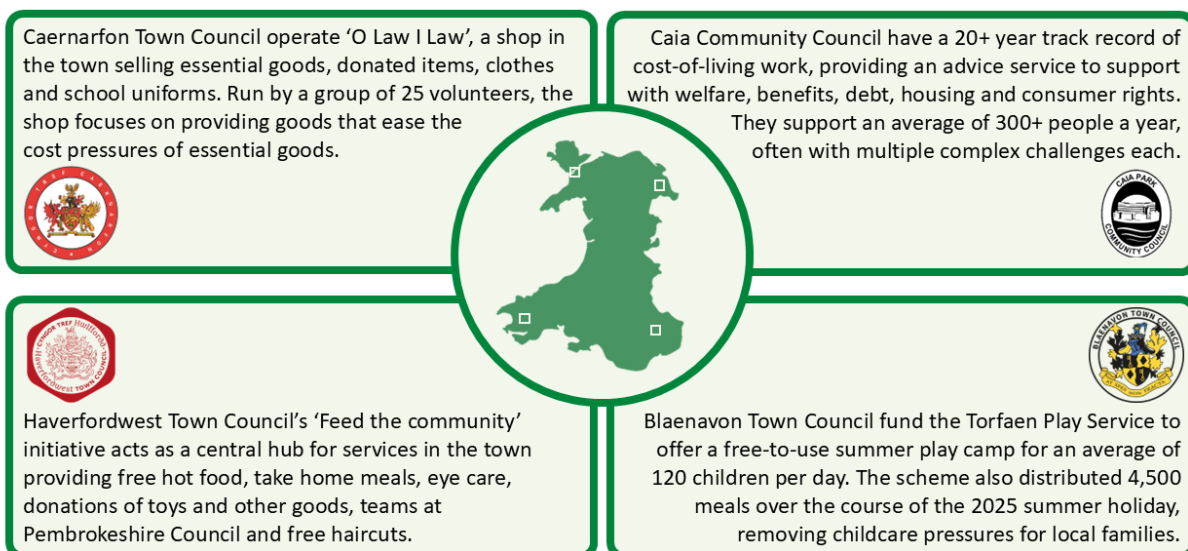
<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, [CPIH Index](#), February 2026

## What are Community and Town Councils doing now?

The results of our research shows that Town and Community Councils have generated social value through a wide range of activities to address cost-of-living pressures over the past year. Some activities provide direct financial benefit to local residents like support with payments, initiatives like foodbanks and community pantries or the provision of childcare and other free activities. Work by Community and Town councils also generates indirect value, by supporting peoples' mental and physical health and combatting digital exclusion or social isolation. By analysing the quantitative data provided by these councils, our modelling has shown that Town and Community Councils have generated substantial social value across Wales in the past year. Although the data likely reflects a cohort of the most responsive councils to the cost-of-living crisis in Wales, a sample of 237 responses means it is likely that this figure is an underestimation of the total value generated by the sector as a whole.



Community and Town Councils are some of the best-placed entities to identify hyper-local challenges that have emerged as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and provide solutions that best suit the needs of their residents. Our main research report several cases of impactful support provided by Community and Town Councils.



## What could the sector do in the future?

The social impact that our research has uncovered so far does not fully reflect what the sector could achieve with more support. Our survey evidence also indicated that Town and Community Councils faced significant barriers which restricted their abilities to expand their cost-of-living provision or to start delivering cost-of-living activities for the first time.

The survey found that 61% of respondents delivered at least one cost-of-living activity. Among these councils, 37% reported that they would like to deliver additional cost-of-living services. Among the remaining 39% of survey respondents that noted that they did not deliver any cost-of-living activities, 46% noted that they would like to deliver one.

The results of our survey show that there is a positive correlation between the precept income a council receives and the number of individual cost-of-living activities they deliver in their local area. Unsurprisingly, a larger budget provides councils with the financial capacity to deliver more services, but nearly a third of Community and Town Councils receive a precept income of less than £10,000 a year, barely enough to pay for one part time clerk.

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*“We will be unable to provide any further activities in the future without significantly increasing the precept ... that just doesn’t feel right for us to do when there’s a cost-of-living crisis” – Community Council*

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Community and Town Councils face a clear tension when setting their budget: more funding often allows them deliver activities that tangibly improve the lives of people in their local communities whilst also running the risk of depriving them of income. This is borne out in our survey data, which shows that lack of staff capacity and lack of funding were the two largest barriers faced by Community and Town councils when it came to delivering cost-of-living activities.

One Voice Wales provides a range of advice, support and advocacy services on behalf of Community and Town Councils to better enable them to deliver for their residents. This includes training, webinars and online resources to provide clear guidance to councils on the best practice for delivering a wide range of activities, an online cost-of-living forum to support peer-to-peer learning between different councils, and a newsletter to highlight grant funding opportunities.

To support them into the future, Councils want One Voice Wales to expand their cost-of-living work by providing more training, examples of good practice and support to write grant applications. Beyond One Voice Wales, the most common need expressed by councils was funding from sources outside of their precept and greater collaborations with the local authorities to coordinate support more effectively.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This research represents the first attempt to monetarily quantify the impact of the work done by Community and Town Councils across Wales to address the effects of the cost-of-living crisis in their localities. Our social impact modelling estimates that in the past year alone, nearly £26 million has been generated in social value by the councils that responded to our survey, constituting a social return on investment of £4.86 for every £1 spent by councils. It is likely that this figure is an underestimation of the total value generated by the sector as a whole.

There is a strong enthusiasm among many Community and Town Councils to either expand their current cost-of-living delivery or to deliver their first cost-of-living activity. However, there are several barriers which are currently restricting councils from delivering local services to their full potential, chief among these are restricted staffing and financial capacity.

Councils view One Voice Wales as a trusted source of advice on all aspects relating to the management of Community and Town councils, especially the training and information sharing work to better enable councils to deal with the cost-of-living crisis locally.

Based on the findings of our research, we have proposed the following recommendations for policy makers:

1. **Continue to support One Voice Wales' Cost of Living Team:** Respondents to our survey provided positive feedback about all aspects of the support offered by One Voice Wales, particularly praising the webinars, guides and signposting to grants.
2. **Expand available sources of funding:** For smaller councils in particular, there can be a strong tension in increasing the precept to support the delivery of cost-of-living activities. Community and Town councils need a more diverse range of funding sources to expand their support delivery without potentially impacting the disposable income of local residents. This could be done either through expanding the eligibility criteria of certain grants or by offering new direct funding sources to Community and Town Councils.
3. **Improve monitoring and data collection on outputs:** As Community and Town Councils continue to deliver frontline support for their residents, a more structured approach should be taken to monitoring the inputs and outputs of the support provided to support future planning and strengthen the case for external funding.
4. **Improve collaboration with local authorities:** the working relationship between Community and Town Councils and local authorities across Wales varies in its frequency and structure, many respondents to our survey noted that engaging with local authorities could be challenging and time consuming. A more formalised working relationship between these tiers of local government may improve the efficiency of local support delivery. A potential model to follow are the tenants for working with Community and Town Councils established by Carmarthenshire County Council.

# About the authors

Wavehill: Social and Economic Research are a research consultancy with expertise in policy evaluation and impact analysis. Wavehill was commissioned by One Voice Wales to undertake a survey and social return on investment analysis of the cost-of-living activities delivered by Community and Town Councils across Wales. The findings in this document are based on the research commissioned by One Voice Wales.

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