

Excellence, Innovation and Improvement; Capacity, Capability and Culture

This year's One Voice Wales National Conference & Awards Ceremony held at the Royal Welsh Showground, offered an engaging and informative day, culminating in the announcements of the One Voice Wales National Awards Programme 2026 winners.

The event provided a wonderful opportunity to showcase the dedication, innovation, and community spirit within Community and Town Councils.

This prestigious awards event celebrated the outstanding examples of good practice and community projects & initiatives delivered by Councils across Wales. Delegates turned up in large numbers to highlight and honour this collective achievement.

But this was not just a day of celebration and congratulations. Delegates contemplated an important period in the history of Community and Town Councils due to the many recent changes across Wales and beyond.

The election of a new Welsh Government was a milestone in the political, social and cultural life of the nation. Changes at Westminster would also impact on the political landscape. Potential devolution to Wales and within Wales, could lead to a new future.

Councillor Mike Theodoulou, Chair of One Voice Wales, set the context for these important discussions as he opened the event, this year sponsored by [MVI Audio Visual](#).

To continue proceedings, Rhys Maher, from Wavehill Research highlighted some of the critical challenges facing our communities. Rhys set the context of the current cost-of-living crisis which continued to affect so many communities. Importantly though, he described the way in which many Councils across Wales had responded to this challenge.

A recent Social Impact Assessment undertaken by Wavehill contained evidence to demonstrate the way in which the actions of Community and Town Councils had helped their residents navigate some very difficult challenges.

With cost-of-living pressures rising sharply for households across Wales, Community and Town Councils continued to be one of the most immediate and visible layers of local support to which communities could turn.

The Social Impact Assessment provided important evidence of the contribution being made by so many Councils and the wider social value generated through local action, partnership working, volunteering, and preventative community support, much of it delivered through the most acute period of cost-of-living pressures.

The Assessment highlighted the evidence-based outputs and key themes of this important work. £25.97m of value had been created for communities across Wales, For every £1 Councils invested, communities gained nearly £5 in value.

Questions came in both Welsh and English from delegates as the conference seized on the impact of Community and Town Councils in this important area.

Heather Ferguson, Head of Policy and Engagement, National Lottery Community Fund Wales then told the packed hall how Lottery funding could help sustain communities, delivering a comprehensive package of support for all types of communities. Factors such as local impact, local identity, collaboration, diversity and inclusion played important parts.

Heather described the detailed funding arrangements and the requirements which applicants needed to follow. She also presented a case study of a project which had benefited from £63,300 of grant funding and outlined initiatives planned for the future.

Rachel Carter, Local Places for Nature Officer in One Voice Wales, continued the theme of local impact, as she explained the importance of local environmental factors to communities. How we managed our environmental assets and habitats were critical to biodiversity planning and securing a better future for future generations, she said. Collaboration, collective action and networking were critical to success. Rachel's team were committed to helping Councils meet their biodiversity obligations, through initiatives such as a grants programme and digital training opportunities.

Rachel's colleagues were also on hand to help run a range of "market stalls" which showcased the work of One Voice Wales. The stalls displayed the work of Local Places for Nature and Cost-of-Living crisis and provided an opportunity for delegates to view the One Voice Wales website.

A key feature of the day was an important address from the Chief Executive of One Voice Wales, Lyn Cadwallader.

Lyn underlined the challenges facing Councils. But he also identified the unique opportunity to influence the role of Community and Town Councils and define their very purpose. Councils were at a crossroads, he advised.

The election of a new Welsh Government created a new landscape for the future of local government. A new vision was within our grasp. Issues around the capacity and capability needed to be addressed to improve confidence in the work of Councils and encourage engagement with communities. The development of a new cultural identity would set the framework for this work.

The Chief Executive highlighted many tools available to Council to improve the way they worked, such as the Finance and Governance Toolkit. The One Voice Wales Manifesto set down key themes for the future of the Community and Town Council sector.

The Chief Executive took questions from an enthusiastic audience as he invited feedback on the development of a Capacity, Capability and Culture Programme for Community and Town Councils to take these matters forward. Delegates asked

about mandatory training for Councillors, equality and diversity, relationships with Welsh Government and the media and the effectiveness of Charters.

One Voice Wales could take a proactive approach in the development of a Capacity, Capability and Cultural programme. An audit of existing arrangements could commence this initiative. One Voice Wales had an important opportunity to develop a legislative programme to help establish the purpose of the Community and Town Council sector, taking advantage of the opportunity arising from the election of a new Welsh Government.

The One Voice Wales Awards demonstrated the potential of Community and Town Councils to meet this challenge. Megan Reeves and Steve Kochar from Award sponsors [Unity Trust Bank](#) showcased the work of the bank and introduced the awards to an excited ensemble of guests and delegates.

The award categories reflected the many challenges which Councils were required to meet, addressing issues around governance, democratic health, digital solutions and sustainability. Contributions to the environment, culture and tourism were also recognised, alongside work for particular groups within society.

Here is the full list of independently assessed winners. Other Councils whose achievements were commended and highly commended will feature on our website.

Best governance initiative

Bridgend Town Council

Best environmental project

Mumbles Community Council

Best youth engagement initiative

Abergavenny Town Council

Best democratic health initiative

(No outright winner)

Best heritage and culture initiative

Bridgend Town Council

Best older persons initiative

Rossett Community Council

Best use of digital resources

Bridgend Town Council

Best tourism initiative

Bridgend Town Council

Best devolution of service or asset project

Pontyclun Town Council

Best sustainability initiative

Criccieth Town Council

Best community engagement initiative

Criccieth Town Council

Best cost-of-living crisis initiative

Talgarth Town Council and Haverfordwest Town Council

We also presented two special awards for the best larger and smaller Councils. These awards, named in honour of former President Caerwyn Roberts, went to Bridgend Town Council and Criccieth Town Council respectively.

Well done to all the winners!

Councillor Theodoulou drew the proceedings to a close, encouraging Councils to continue this success but also to rise to the challenge of preparing for a new and exciting future. 2026 was a unique opportunity to change our culture and learn lessons for the future. Collaboration would be key. "Learn how to achieve through others" was his message to delegates.