



## **MINUTES**

**of the quarterly meeting of the Association held on  
Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at 10.30am  
Festival Church, Towyn & Kinmell Bay, LL22 9NR**

### **Present were:**

Cllr Ian Hodge	Chair & Holywell Town Council
Cllr Norma Davies	Vice Chair & Flint Town Council
Cllr Joan Butterfield MBE	President & Rhyl Town Council
Cllr J Chamberlain-Jones	Rhyl Town Council
Cllr Lynette Edwards	Caerwys Community Council
Catherine Evans	Towyn & Kinmell Bay Town Council
Cllr Paul Fletcher	Abergele Town Council
Cllr Linda Griffiths	Towyn & Kinmell Bay Town Council
Cllr Patrick Hessom	Mostyn Community Council
Cllr Carol Holliday	Prestatyn Town Council
Cllr Alan Manship	Connah's Quay Town Council
Cllr Alan Owen	Connah's Quay Town Council
Cllr Debbie Owen	Connah's Quay Town Council
Cllr Lorraine Rathbone	Buckley Town Council
Cllr Shirley Jones-Roberts	Abergele Town Council
Cllr Bernise McLoughlin	Towyn & Kinmell Bay
Cllr Ted Palmer	Holywell Town Council
Cllr Jackie Webster	Conwy Town Council
Cllr Adrian West	Prestatyn Town Council
Robert Robinson MBE	Secretary & Llanfair Caereinion Town Council

### **Apologies received from:**

Cllr Vivienne Blondek	Buckley Town Council
Cllr Michael Davies	Beaumaris Town Council
Cllr Alan James	Rhyl Town Council
Cllr Peter Morton	St Asaph City Council
Gareth Nickels	Rhyl Town Council
Cllr Michael Pearce	Llandudno Town Council
Cllr Andrew Wood	

### **1. Welcome**

The meeting received a welcome from the Chair.

The meeting also received a welcome to the meeting by Cllr Bernise McLoughlin of Towyn and Kinmell Bay Town Council who hosted the meeting.



## 2. Minutes of the last Quarterly Meeting

The meeting considered and approved the minutes of the last quarterly meeting held in July 2024.

## 4. Visiting speaker

The presentation from Fields in Trust has been postponed until a later date.  
The meeting received a presentation from the North Wales Homeless Project.

## 5. Actions taken from the last meeting

The meeting noted the actions from the last meeting as set out below:

No	Subject	Status
1	Issue minutes and post of web site	Completed
2	Meeting with TFW and Welsh Government on rail matters (Chair of both rail committees and secretary to attend)	Completed.
3	Invite Fields in Trust to the October meeting	Completed.
4	Circulate information on VAT partial exemption rules to member councils.	Completed
5	Contact both Welsh and National government to seek a change to the £7,500 limit for partial exemption VAT for local councils.	Completed
6	Complete Association Audit of accounts for the year ending 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024	Accounts with the auditor.
	Invite the gentleman to the next meeting to explain Homeless project in North Wales.	Completed
7	Clarification of cost of ministers of Welsh Government campaign	Completed
8	Letter to be sent continuing to protest against extra Senedd members and that any lists should be on merit and not gender specific.	Completed



## **6. Consultation with Welsh Government**

The meeting received presentation slides regarding the review into Town and Community Councils.

After discussion on each topic a letter was prepared for presentation to the Welsh Government.

The meeting noted that the Chair and Secretary will be attending a committee of Ministers and Senedd Members in Cardiff on 27<sup>th</sup> November on the subject.

**See appendix A.**

## **7. Executive**

The meeting noted the executive meeting minutes from the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

## **8. Finance and governance**

The meeting noted the current bank balances at £4,350.

The meeting considered a new bank mandate with the following members to be signatories:

Cllr Ian Hodge  
Cllr Peter Morton  
Cllr Adrian West  
Robert Robinson.

The meeting noted progress with the 2023-2024 audit.

## **9. Transport update**

The meeting received a report on a meeting held with the Senedd and Transport for Wales. (see appendix B)

## **10. Date of next meeting**

The meeting noted the date of the next meeting on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at 10.30am in Beaumaris.

**14. Actions to be taken forward**

The actions to be taken forward from the meeting are:

Subject	Action by
Publish minutes of the meeting	Secretary
Prepare letter to Welsh Government and publish on website and email to members by 8pm same day of the meeting for comment by 10.30pm.	Secretary
Publish letter to Welsh Government on Town & Community Council review	Secretary
Complete bank mandate	Secretary



**APPENDIX A**

18<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Local Government and Housing Committee  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff

Dear Sir

**Re Community and Town Councils**

The above Association represents approx. 30 of the larger town and community councils in north and mid Wales including Holyhead, Rhyl, Prestatyn, Holywell, Abergele, Shotton, Llandudno, Conwy, Buckley, St Asaph, Connah's Quay, Hawarden, Caerwys, Ruthin, Llanfair Caereinion, Mostyn, Flint Beaumaris and others.

I write with regard the consultation into Community and Town Councils. The Association met earlier today to discuss the consultation and wishes me to provide their views – please see attached report.

We look forward to attending your committee on 27<sup>th</sup> November in Cardiff. Attending will be Cllr Ian Hodge and myself. I have been asked if we can bring our Vice Chair as well (making 3). No doubt you will let me know.

Thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully

*Robert A Robinson*

Robert A Robinson MBE FRICS FSLCC  
Secretary



**REPORT ON TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS  
for the  
Local Government and Housing Committee Inquiry**

**1. Introduction**

The Association presents this report in response to the request for information from the Local Government and Housing Committee of the Welsh Government.

The Association has not recorded here a wealth of information which is out there on the subject as the committee will be aware of it.

**2. Representation**

The North & Mid Wales Association of Local Council has been in place for over 40 years representing approx. 30 of the larger Town and Community Councils mainly along the North Wales Coastal area.

**3. How information was gathered**

The Association hosted a meeting (face to face and by zoom) with its members at Towyn & Kimmell Bay with a considerable time of the meeting spent considering the consultation and putting together a presentation of the members views.

This report sets out their views evidence by their own council experience both with their town council and with the county councils.

**4. Overview viewpoint**

The views of our members vary from council to council – depending upon their size. The larger councils have a different approach to those with much smaller budgets. However, there are many subjects upon which the viewpoint is common.

It should be noted that council's which have engaged with us (and indeed One Voice Wales) generally are those who are getting more right than wrong. Those council's which do not respond tend to be those who are not doing so well or have any real interest in the subject.

**5. The role of town & community Councils in Wales**

The role of town and community councils was identified as:

- i) Primary – representing the local community.
- ii) Consultations including planning matters.
- iii) Delivering some local services.
- iv) Working with the local community to create a community feel.



Members are aware of the duties and powers of local councils, particularly regarding budgets, meetings and governance.

The members believed if councils were to be enlarged with more responsibility that consideration should be given to councillors 'being paid' for what will be a position with more responsibility and more time needed.

There was also a feeling that those seeking to be nominated for election should attend a pre-election meeting so that they understand how the council works and what is involved.

## **6. Local service delivery**

Members are concerned about the reductions in local services by principal councils (indication is that from April 2026 the county councils will only carry out such activities as it has a duty to do). The feeling was that county councils were 'dumping' services on town councils without financial support causing larger than justified council tax rises. This leaves a lot of small local services in danger unless someone else steps up to take them over.

Numerous examples of working with county councils were given, some good but mainly poor. Relationships with the county council (in general) were cited as generally poor.

The key issues raised were:

- i) Funding via the precept – possible large rising.
- ii) Double taxation (the county councils have been given the money but are not delivering the local services in some areas).
- iii) The capacity of smaller councils to carry out such functions.

Unless councils are enlarged service delivery locally will prove exceedingly difficult. It has been suggesting in the past that smaller councils 'cluster' and this might be worthy of discussion.

## **7. The value of town & Community Councils in Wales**

The members felt that the town and community were typically fair value for money, delivered local services well and add value by knowing their local area and resident's needs.

A local council can deliver services at much less cost than the principal authorities.



The need for training was sited. Members present nearly all had a training plan which was being implemented directly through external sources.

The need for a good town clerk (qualified) was highlighted.

### **8. Is the sector fit for purpose in an evolving local government**

Generally the viewpoint is:

- i) 1/3<sup>rd</sup> yes they are fit for purpose.
- ii) 1/3<sup>rd</sup> are OK.
- iii) 1/3<sup>rd</sup> are not fit for purpose.

The areas of concern are generally around the smaller councils.

The viewpoint is evidenced by the Audit Wales reports on governance issued by them at presentations and in their annual report.

One major issue for councils is finding a good and qualified clerk, essential to the good administration of any council. Many members have experience this over the past years at various times.

It was also noted that a sizeable number of councils either have no clerk or have issues between the clerk and councillors (both ways).

### **9. Governance and scrutiny**

Members were in support of the need for good governance and scrutiny and felt that the sector is doing better in recent years.

Audit Wales has reported on the defects found when completing annual returns with papers. The number of qualified annual returns is of some concern.

There have been complaints on occasions that the audit office is 'difficult' and only reports on papers given (without seeking more information from the authority concerned).

Training was still considered an issue even with the offer of online courses.

It was also noted that 'more rules' comes with a 'price tag' and that this must be recognised and must not progress to a level where it starts to impact on delivery of services.

### **10. Accountability and transparency**

The accountability and transparency of local councils is improving but still a long way to go.





Hybrid meetings have helped in many cases and being able to video council meetings also can help.

The information published by councils on websites is still patchy. The election of councillors is another issue of which social media criticism was highlighted as one of the things which put people off standing.

### **11. Scope of digital technology**

The use of digital technology was discussed with the following items of note:

- i) All member councils have a website.
- ii) Many member councils have a social media presence.
- iii) Many member councils use email to issue agenda and papers (some give the option of email and or paper based)  
continued
- iv) All member councils host hybrid meetings or offer them on advance notice.
- v) The main issue for provision is for the smaller councils who do not have their own premises but meet in church halls etc. Some have no internet in rural areas (or not strong enough signal). Others have to bring their own screens/computers etc to each meeting.
- vi) Help with financing these facilities would be welcomed.
- vii) In person still is considered the best option for meetings although the benefits of hybrid and video link meetings were recognised.

There are issues around those with illnesses (particularly those who cannot hear or see) when using digital technology.

The issue of the Welsh language was also pointed out. Most local councils have their material printed in English with Welsh available upon request. The main reason for this was the cost of translation. Funding to help this would be good but it would need to be ongoing and not time limited.

There was a feeling that digital on its own is not enough and that there is still a need in many communities for paper based material as well.

### **12. New powers and responsibilities to support local communities**

Members welcomed the new powers and responsibilities but were concerned that they needed proper funding to ensure activities could be sustainable.

### **13. The future of town and community councils**

Members are aware of the need for local councils to 'step up to the plate' to help retain some services locally. However, many smaller councils will find this difficult.



Enlarging local councils may help with this but has two dangers:

- i) The loss of local contact if such councils become too large.
- ii) The cultures of local councils can be vastly different.

#### **14. Funding**

The main concern for members is the level of funding required to administer a council in today's world. More legislation and governance requirements requiring more time by the Clerk which in turn has a cost implication.

Members would welcome some direct Welsh Government funding – not via the county councils.

There is an issue around partial exemption VAT for small and medium councils. The limit of £7,500 has been the same for over 20 years and will not be enough if local councils take on many more services. In many cases registering fully for VAT can be a disadvantage.

#### **15. Elections**

The members agree with accountability and transparency and this applies to election of members.

The guidance is that co-option should be the 'last resort.' However, for many councils an election costs around £3,000 a time. This can influence the budget. Members would like to ask the Welsh Government to fund local elections to encourage more to take place.

#### **16. Other comments**

Other subjects raised by the members at the consultation meeting included the feeling that 'North Wales' and 'Mid Wales' are often forgotten in favour of South Wales. The appointment of a North Wales Minister may help but to date it does not appear to be the case.

#### **17. Further information**

The details of the members response can be expanded upon at the meeting scheduled to take place in the Senedd on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

The above information is based upon our member's views expressed to us. Member councils were also encouraged to respond direct to the survey.

**Robert A Robinson MBE FRICS FSLCC Secretary to the Association**



## **APPENDIX B**

### **MINUTES**

Meeting between Russell George (Senedd), Transport for Wales and the Association

held by video link on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2024 at 10am  
Cambrian and North Coast Lines

#### **1. Present were:**

Russell George Senedd Member  
Cllr Ian Hodge Chair of the Association  
Cllr Trevor Robinson Chair Cambrian Lines Committee  
Robert Robinson Secretary to the Association  
James Price CEO Transport for Wales  
Jan Chaudhry-van-der-Velede  
Gethin Jones Transport for Wales  
Steve Whiteley Transport for Wales  
In attendance Diane Ellis

#### **2. Issues from last meeting**

The main issues surrounded actions agreed at previous meetings which have not been taken forward.

#### **3. Improvements**

The improvements observed on the network included:

- i) Slight improvement in train punctuality. (told 93% - actually out of Shrewsbury 65%)
- ii) Extra train on Cambrian 1630 out of Shrewsbury welcome.
- iii) No cuts in services welcome
- iv) Station staff at main interchanges working well.
- v) On board staff still amazing.
- v) Lifts at Newtown welcomed.

#### **4. Current issues**

The current issues are either still outstanding or need thought:



A	Welshpool Station footbridge	Agreement still not in place, now more than overdue.
B	Welshpool Station improvements	Study completed, no action to improve to date whilst other stations are being improved.
C	Prestatyn Station overcrowding	Still issues of trains not letting passengers on at rush hour periods.
D	Trains between Chester and Shrewsbury	Size of units – confirmation awaited.
E	Main Line train formations: TFW confirmed that with the 21 units predominately being used for the Cambrian Lines only that (with very few exceptions) will all comprise 4 carriages between Birmingham International and Aberystwyth.	Written confirmation awaited.
F	Station Audit meeting	To be arranged but no action to date.
G	Disabled meeting held	No action – still stations not dementia friendly (particularly Welshpool)
H	Deganwy crossing (Llandudno branch)	Still awaiting news.
I	Meeting with Colin Lee still not held	Regarding the splitting of trains on paths to both Holyhead/Cambrian together.
J	Minister promised a meeting on the rail surveys and A55 issues. Still not happened.	No action from WG end.
K	Cambrian Lines stock	158's v 197's timing.
L	Overcrowding still an issue. More surveys in 2025.	How do we move this issue forward.
M	Signage at Shrewsbury and Birmingham still not clear. Meeting with Shrewsbury station manager suggested by TFW.	Not arranged to date.



Note: Still a lot of comments around the new units – uncomfortable ride in particular. It is accepted that we ‘are stuck with them’ for quite a while.

**5. Actions to be taken forward:**

Ref	Subject	Action
A	Welshpool Station footbridge	TFW to investigate and report back by 30/9/24
B	Welshpool Station improvements	TFW to investigate and report back by 30/9/24
C	Prestatyn Station overcrowding	TFW to investigate and report back by 30/9/24
D	Trains between Chester and Shrewsbury	Meeting with Colin Lee as promised at the last meeting to be arranged.
E	Main Line train formations: TFW confirmed that with the 21 units predominately being used for the Cambrian Lines only that (with very few exceptions) will all comprise 4 carriages between Birmingham International and Aberystwyth.	To be discussed at meeting noted in D above.
F	Station Audit meeting	Date to be arranged.
G	Disabled meeting held	TFW to investigate and report back by 30/9/24
H	Deganwy crossing (Llandudno branch)	Russell George to pass on request for information to Network Rail.
I	Meeting with Colin Lee still not held	See D above
J	Minister promised a meeting on the rail surveys and A55 issues. Still not happened.	Copies of emails etc to be sent to Russell George so he can follow this up.
K	Cambrian Lines - 197 stock introduced.	Expected later in 2025 or early 2026.



L	Overcrowding still an issue. More surveys in 2025.	The Association will action these.
M	Signage at Shrewsbury and Birmingham still not clear. Meeting with Shrewsbury station manager suggested by TFW.	TFW to investigate and report back by 30/9/24
N	Slides with 93% train reliability presented issued by TFW.	Robert Robinson to supply a copy of the slides to TFW.

Target timescale for actions to be completed is 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024.