

Local Councils set new standards across Wales!

Community and Town Councils across Wales, met up recently for their 2024 awards ceremony at the Royal Welsh Showground in Builth Wells, sponsored by [Utility Aid](#).

The annual awards ceremony, hosted by [One Voice Wales](#) - the principal representative body for Community and Town Councils - celebrated and showcased the work of local councils across various strategic and operational categories.

In opening the event, Councillor Mike Theodoulou, Chair of One Voice Wales, paid tribute to the achievement of so many Councils who deliver grassroots services at the heart of their communities. He also spoke about the cultural change affecting the Community and Town Council sector arising from such challenges as climate change, the cost-of-living crisis, post-covid pressures.

The Chair also referenced devolution of powers and responsibilities to *and* within Wales. Big challenges lay ahead, and the awards would help to spread the learning.

The Chief Executive of One Voice Wales, elaborated on these challenges and achievements in his keynote address. He thanked Councils for engaging with the event and praised their commitment to the sharing of good practice.

These were also times of achievement and change for One Voice Wales itself, Lyn advised the crowded arena. Record membership levels, growing partnership arrangements and a tangible commitment to deliver sustainable and digital solutions.

A comprehensive programme of training opportunities would help local councils navigate a rapidly changing world, as Lyn urged Councillors to take advantage of the training and development opportunities provided by One Voice Wales.

Dedicated staff were in place to help One Voice Wales advise the sector and assist with policy development and governance. The organisation was building the capacity to support the ambitions of its 670 member councils. Biodiversity and sustainability were at the top of the agenda. A new website would be developed. The democratic health of the nation would be championed. New ways of digital communication would take the organisation – and the Community and Town Council sector – forward. Exciting times lay ahead, declared Lyn.

Lyn took questions across a range of areas – the importance of training, concerns about bullying & harassment, disability, equality and even a discussion around the One Voice Wales logo!

But the day was not just about backslapping and self-assessment. There was work to be done. Delegates participated in a series of Innovative Practice Sessions, facilitated by One Voice Wales staff, which identified and disseminated Best Practice in areas such as environmental projects, community engagement, youth engagement and cost-of-living actions.

A workshop about tourism and heritage was typical of the information sharing that took place on this busy day. Delegates listened with interest as colleagues from

Blaenavon, Criccieth and Tregaron described an exciting and colourful set of tourism and heritage initiatives. The session was a microcosm of Community and Town Council life, highlighting the terrific work of local councils across urban, coastal, and rural communities, from heartlands of the Welsh language to the industrial valleys of South Wales. Each Council would leave a legacy for future generations. The workshop demonstrated and epitomised how the whole of Wales benefits from the work of Community and Town Councils.

All eyes were on the awards though, and the afternoon session lifted the lid on the winners. Record entry levels made it a tough job for the judges, but the trophies were eventually decided. Here is the full roll of honour. Details have already been shared across social media.

1. Best Annual Report
Pontypool Community Council
2. Best Environmental Project
Criccieth Town Council
3. Best Use of Digital Resources
Abergavenny Town Council
4. Best Community Engagement Initiative
Blaenavon Town Council and Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council (Joint Winners)
5. Best Tourism Initiative
Criccieth Town Council
6. Best Sustainability Initiative
Presteigne and Norton Town Council
7. Best Youth Engagement
Llanelly Community Council
8. Best Heritage Initiative
Blaenavon Town Council
9. Best Devolution of Service or Asset Project
St Clears Town Council
10. Best Community Initiative including Cost-of-Living Actions
Cwmbran Community Council
11. Best Democratic Health Initiative
Llanelli Town Council
12. The Caerwyn Roberts Best Local Council Service of the Year
Criccieth Town Council

This had been a celebration of local council life. A celebration of the people and communities of Wales.

Councillor Theodoulou drew proceedings to a close, describing a wonderful day. But he issued a challenge. Society expectations were ever-growing, public scrutiny was at an all time high. He encouraged delegates to go back to their communities and share their experiences. "Talk to the people" he urged. The voice of Community and Town Councils must be strong, for there is much work to be done.

What a day.

David Collins

Governance and Policy Practice Development Officer/Swyddog Datblygu
Arfer Llywodraethu a Pholisi

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