ITEM 7

Pilot of self-evaluation toolkit for community and town councils in Wales

Thank you for expressing an interest in taking part in a pilot for a new self-evaluation toolkit for community and town councils, your support for this work is much appreciated and we are delighted to welcome your council to the pilot.

This briefing paper sets out a little background on the toolkit and the task for your council as a participant in the pilot.

The toolkit

One Voice Wales, SLCC and Welsh Government have been developing a bespoke toolkit for community and town councils in Wales. The toolkit has been designed to help a council stay on top of financial management and governance requirements, and reflect on how it is serving its community.

The draft self-evaluation toolkit is attached.

DRAFT - Governance and financial manage

You will see the self-evaluation toolkit is made up of two parts:-

- ***Part 1: Governance and financial management health check***

  The health check is designed to be completed primarily by the clerk, working with the chair or a small group of members as appropriate, to assess whether fundamental governance and financial management arrangements, policies, etc are in place and highlight any action that needs to be taken.

- ***Part 2: Governance and financial management self-assessment***

  The self-assessment enables councillors to use the findings from Part 1, and other evidence, to reflect more deeply on how the council is operating, managing its finances and governing itself. This element of the toolkit also contains details of a range of resources that can be drawn upon to inform next steps following completion of the toolkit.

Both components of the toolkit cover five key areas of community and town council activity:-

- Vision, purpose and community planning
- Leadership and people
- Community engagement and partnerships
- Business processes
- Resources and financial management

Part 2, the self-assessment, also has an additional theme called evaluating impact which will enable the council to reflect on the benefit it brings to the community to inform its future work.

As explained in the document, the toolkit is designed to be used flexibly, enabling councils to decide when and how to focus its attention, and to spread the work out to a reasonable timetable.

The task for pilot councils

This pilot is a key stage in the development of the toolkit before it is shared with the sector for general use. We would like your council to 'road test' the toolkit in a real council environment, helping to shape the finished product.

For the purpose of the pilot, we would like you to:-

1) **Work through at least one theme in both Part 1 and Part 2 of the toolkit over the course of the next 6-8 weeks.**

   Guidance on how to use the toolkit can be found within the toolkit itself. For specific guidance on working through Part 1 see page 7, and for Part 2 see page 43.

   We would like your council to work through the theme 'Vision, purpose and community planning' in Part 1 and Part 2 of the toolkit, but please feel free to work through more themes.

   We would also appreciate the council looking through the whole toolkit to gain an overview of what it contains.

2) **Tell us about your experience of using the toolkit to inform its further development.**

   We will be arranging a series of virtual focus groups in the New Year, lasting around 90 minutes, to enable pilot councils to share their views on the toolkit.

   We will be in touch in due course with dates and arrangements for these. We will ask you to nominate one councillor and the clerk to attend one of the focus groups.

   At the focus groups, we will be seeking your views on:-
   - Using the toolkit in 'real life'
   - Benefits from using the toolkit
   - Content and format of the draft toolkit

   It may be helpful to make some notes of your views on these things as you are working through the toolkit.

Theme – Vision, purpose and community planning

A community and town council provides community leadership. In exercising this role it will benefit from having a clear vision for its community, developed in partnership / consultation with all sections of the community. This will inform council plans, budgets and activities to ensure the council best works with and in the interests of the community.

Statement	In place? (Yes/No)	Further information	Comments and actions
The council has a clear vision and plan for its community			
A vision and purpose statement has been agreed by the council		Having a clear vision and purpose agreed by all members will help your council in achieving for its community.	
The council has prepared and published a biodiversity plan		Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6 Councils have a duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions, and must prepare and publish a plan setting out what it proposes to do and report on the actions taken to improve biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience every three years. See Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1: Guidance for Section 6 – the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Frequently Asked Questions	
The council has completed an annual report on progress in meeting objectives		Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2021 – Section 40 places a duty on certain community and town councils to take all reasonable steps towards meeting the objectives included in the local well-being	

Statement	In place? (Yes/No)	Further information	Comments and actions
contained in the local well-being plan		plan that has effect in their areas. A community or town council is subject to that duty only if its gross income or expenditure was at least £200,000 for each of the three financial years preceding the year in which the local well-being plan is published.	
The council has prepared an annual report		Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 - From April 2022 community and town councils have a duty to prepare and publish a report about the council's priorities, activities and achievements.	

PART TWO

Theme – Vision, purpose and community planning

A community and town council provides community leadership. In exercising this role it will benefit from having a clear vision for its community, developed in partnership / consultation with all sections of the community. This will inform council plans, budgets and activities to ensure the council best works with and in the interests of the community.

The council has a clear vision and plan for its community	
Questions to consider	**Examples of evidence to review to inform assessment**
• Does the council have a plan for realising its vision and purpose? • Are you involving the whole community in developing that plan? • Does the council plan take account of its statutory obligations and functions? • Does the council keep its plan under regular review? • How does the council apply its vision when considering planning matters relating to the community?	• Documented vision, purpose and values statements • Community planning tools • Public consultation events and surveys • Press releases and articles • Statutory reports as appropriate for example: - Annual report on progress in meeting objectives contained in the local well-being plan - Published biodiversity plan and report - Annual report as required by Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
Further information Regardless of its size, having a clear vision and purpose agreed by all members will help your council in achieving for its community. An agreed vision and purpose will provide a clear focus for decision-making on how to utilise the budget and resources available to deliver the outcomes that the people in the community want to see.	

Involving the community in developing vision and purpose statements and the business plan ensures that the council can identify and act on the wants and needs of the community it has been elected to serve.

The council's business plan should reflect the agreed vision and purpose, provide an overall framework to focus the council's actions, and create the budget that determines the precept.

The values of the council will guide all aspects of its work and activities in terms of principle and practice. Councils can research the values adopted by other councils, normally displayed on their websites, and One Voice Wales can also supply examples to member councils to assist them in developing their own.

In considering what services to deliver, or what activities to support, councils should also take account of the assessment of local well-being for their area and the objectives contained within the local well-being plan. While only some community and town councils will be under a duty to take reasonable steps towards meeting those objectives, all councils have an important role to play in improving the well-being of their area and in doing so contribute towards improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. Councils may find it helpful to use the five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act to guide their planning and decision making – long term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement. More detail on the ways of working can be found in Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials

The council should keep its plan under regular review to ensure it remains up-to-date and relevant.

Relevant statutory obligations

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – From April 2022 community and town councils have a duty to prepare and publish a report about the council's priorities, activities and achievements. Councils must have regard to any guidance about annual reports issued by Welsh Ministers. See Part 3, Chapter 5 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - The Act places a duty on certain community and town councils to take all reasonable steps towards meeting the local objectives included in the local well-being plan that has effect in their areas. A community or town council is subject to that duty only if its gross income or expenditure was at least £200,000 for each of the three financial years preceding the year in which the local well-being plan is published. If a community or town council is subject to the duty, it must publish a report annually detailing its progress in meeting the objectives contained in the local well-being plan. Community or town councils which do not meet the criteria for

being subject to the duty in section 40(1) of the Act but which still wish to contribute towards meeting the local objectives in the local well-being plan are welcome to do so on a voluntary basis.

Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6. - Councils have a duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions and must prepare and publish a plan setting out what it proposes to do and report on the actions taken to improve biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience every three years. See also Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Factsheet: Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty and Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1: Guidance for Section 6 – the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Frequently Asked Questions

Resources and training

One Voice Wales has guidance on business planning and examples of business plans which are available to members. Researching the work of other councils can also be helpful in supporting the council to develop its own plan.

The Understanding Welsh Places website contains data and geographical information about local areas to help you identify opportunities for your community.

Planning Aid Wales provide planning training and guidance, community engagement tools and techniques including specific place plan support.

Shape my town – this is a practical toolkit to inspire local people to play a part in shaping their built environment

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials – sets out the seven well-being goals and the ways of working to go about achieving the goals.

Shared Purpose: Shared Future. Statutory guidance on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – SPSF 4: Collective role (Community councils) – guidance for community and town councils on their role in local well-being plans.

Commentary
Actions We will: •