# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Democratic Health of Community and Town Councils** |
| **DATE** | **26 April 2023** |
| **BY** | **Rebecca Evans MS, Minister for Finance and Local Government** |

Community and town councils are democratically elected and operate at the most local level of democracy. I wish to provide an update on two key strands of work to support and develop the community and town council sector to play their role effectively.

The first key strand is about our shared interest in securing a healthy democracy at every level of government. My officials have completed their analysis of May’s community and town council elections, and the data raises serious concerns around the level of engagement between communities and their councils. At May’s elections, only 22% of the 7,883 seats were contested. 62% of seats were uncontested – meaning that no election was held – and 16% of seats were unfilled, to be filled through further election or by co-option.

In my Written Statement on this topic in July 2022, I referred to two key issues. The first was ensuring that people have a genuine choice as to who represents and serves them. The second was about ensuring that people feel being part of this level of democracy is a way of effecting change, and therefore want to put themselves forward for election. The updated election results confirmed that these issues require urgent attention. I want to update members of progress.

My officials have been working with One Voice Wales to put in place a Democratic Health Task and Finish group to explore the causes of lower engagement and participation with some community and town councils, learn from the success in others, and suggest options for action to consistently improve engagement and participation.

I am pleased to announce that we have agreed the terms of reference and membership of the group. Their core aims will be to identify options for actions for community and town councils, sector representative bodies and government to:

* Improve awareness and engagement between communities and their community councils, and
* Increase the number, and diversity, of candidates standing for election to community and town councils.

This group will join up with related ongoing work on electoral reform and improving diversity in democracy. I would like them to work at pace and report within nine months of commencement.

I am pleased that Shereen Williams, Chief Executive of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales has agreed to chair this important work. The other members will be:

* + *Cllr Mike Theodoulou* – Chair of One Voice Wales
  + *Dr Leah Hibbs –* Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University
  + *Sue Leonard* - Chief Officer at the Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services, the county voluntary council for Pembrokeshire.
  + *Sue Husband* – Director, Business in the Community Cymru
  + *Tilley Rees* – Student, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

They will bring a broad range of experience and expertise, and introduce new thinking, to the challenge of improving the democratic health of community councils

Finally, I have asked One Voice Wales to support the community council sector to consider how they can help their communities during the ongoing cost of living crisis. Community councils can operate at street level, knowing the most vulnerable people in their area, and are well placed to support them. This support would complement existing national and local authority support. I have made up to £150,000 per year available, for the next three years, to One Voice Wales to support councils in this work.

I am delighted to be working closely with One Voice Wales and other sector partners in taking forward these strands of work.