



**Un Llais Cymru
One Voice Wales**

**Community & Town Councils
Digital Guidance
Good Practice for Community and Town
Council Websites in Wales**

October 2024

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Introduction

Community and Town Council websites play a crucial role in engaging with residents, disseminating information, and fostering transparency. They can also be a platform to promote the community locally and on a wider basis. A website is a vital tool for modern governance, enhancing communication, transparency, and community involvement.

This document provides an overview of the statutory context for Community and Town Council websites. It also considers wider benefits from use of the technology by Community and Town Councils

Section 55 of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 requires Community and Town Councils to have websites on which they can publish notices and papers electronically. However, as some time has elapsed since this requirement was established, many councils are looking at renewing or replacing their websites. This document provides guidance on key considerations for deployment of a new or replacement website.

Regulatory and Legislative Environment

Community and town councils in Wales must adhere to several key bills and regulations which direct the use of websites.

These include:

[Freedom of Information Act 2000](#): which sets requirements for providing public access to information held by public authorities.

[Local Government \(Democracy\) \(Wales\) Act 2013](#): which provides details on online publication and websites as outlined below

[Data Protection Act 2018](#): which sets requirements for protecting personal data.

[The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#) and [The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) Accessibility \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2022](#): which set requirements for accessibility. Councils must publish an accessibility statement on their website and periodically review it to ensure compliance.

[Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#) : which sets requirements for promoting transparency and public engagement through digital means.

Councils should also consider the [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#).

Currently the Welsh language standards are not applied to Community and Town councils but councils should consider how they are supporting the official status of the Welsh language as defined in the measure. Specifically if a council has a Welsh Language Scheme, it should apply to electronic materials, such as websites, as well.

There is [additional guidance](#) from the Welsh Government for the requirements of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013, specifically on Section 55 of the act, which places duties on local authorities to make certain information available electronically.

The requirements outlined in the guidance can be summarised as follows

Contact Information:

Councils must publish their contact details electronically, including a telephone number, postal address, and email address.

If the council does not have an office, the clerk's contact information must be provided.

Member Information:

Councils must publish information about each elected member, including their name, contact details, party affiliation (if any), and any office or committee membership.

If the council is divided into wards, the ward each member represents must be indicated. Co-opted members should be clearly distinguished from elected members.

Meeting Minutes and Documents:

Councils must publish the minutes of their meetings and, where practicable, documents referred to in those meetings.

Annual audited accounts must also be published electronically.

Public Notices:

Councils must publish public notices electronically in addition to traditional methods. Notices of forthcoming meetings must be published electronically at least three clear days before the meeting.

Register of Members' Interests:

Councils must publish their register of members' financial and other interests electronically.

Benefits

The regulations around Community and Town council websites aim to ensure councils are following good practice in serving and representing their communities.

Well designed and accessible websites will provide numerous benefits to councils for relatively small investment:

Efficiency: Community and Town council services, such as community buildings, allotments or cemeteries can have streamlined online processes via the council website. This should reduce the administrative burden on council clerks and staff.

Transparency: A website provides an open platform for sharing information about decisions, policies, and activities. It can easily share meeting minutes, contact details and public notices, helping to build the trust of residents.

Accessibility: Residents and other parties can easily access important information at any time. This is a common feature of modern life allowing public services to match varied lifestyles and working patterns.

Participation: A well-maintained website provides information to residents on council activities and can encourage participation by raising awareness of council meetings, access to accounts and other situations where members of the community can engage directly with the council.

Engagement: Regular updates and announcements can keep the public informed about upcoming events, changes in services, and other important news. This straightforward access to council information allows residents to be more engaged with the council. Websites can also be used facilitate public participation through methods such as surveys and feedback forms. This can allow residents to voice their opinions and concerns.

In addition to direct benefits to the operation of a council, many councils use their websites to promote their local area. This can include elements such as

History and cultural aspects

Tourism and the Visitor economy

Local businesses and services

Community groups

Business Case Considerations

In addition to supporting compliance with legislation as noted above, investing in a functional and intuitive website will bring benefits to council operations. Large and small organisations across the private, public and third sectors use their websites for these purposes

Outgoings

Typical costs associated with a website include

- Design and implementation fees
- Hosting fees
- Domain name fees
- SSL certificate
- Plugins and extensions
- Technical Support
- Security or accessibility review
- Marketing and SEO
- Effort to update and maintain – direct or outsourced

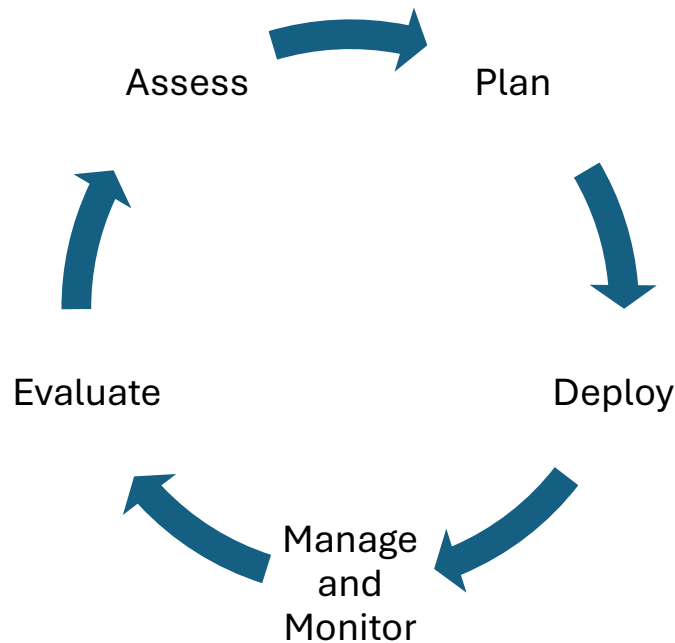
Most of these costs will be included in the service charge from a commercial website provider

Possible Financial Return

- Service efficiency and consequent savings in staff costs
- Reduced physical visits and telephone engagement from residents, press and other bodies
- Support for grant funding applications through transparent provision of information about the council

Implementation

As noted above Community and Town councils have been required to maintain a website since 2013. However, many councils will be looking to upgrade, replace or renew their website and the guidance below sets out some key considerations and steps. It follows a standardised approach to implementation of digital services as shown in the diagram below.



Assess

Councils should review their website for compliance with the regulatory environment and ability to serve the councils vision for their community. This could be done on an annual basis as part of the process of preparing for internal and external audit. Auditors will consider the state of council's website as part of their review.

If councils determine that their website doesn't match their requirements then a remediation plan should be developed.

Plan

There are three basic remediation approaches available if a council determines their website doesn't match their requirements - depending on the issues which need to be resolved

Option 1: Resolve specific issues

This will be best approach if the council assesses that their website is failing on specific, more technical, requirements such as accessibility or security. A determination will be needed as to what steps can resolve the issues. This may be available via previous assessments (e.g. if a review of accessibility has been done). An external consultation and contract may be needed to resolve the issues.

Option 2: Update website contents – and the process for maintaining content

If the council assesses that current content is inaccurate, incomplete or out of date then a plan with dates and clear responsibility should be put in place to update the content. A process for maintenance of the content on a regular basis should also be established.

Option 3: Full Website Redesign or replacement

This could be considered if the council assesses that their current website is not serving the council's vision.

As part of planning for the redesign or replacement councils need to consider the following items;

- Note the reasons for setting up a new or redesigned website now.
- Consider the budget available – website design can be done at very different scales for different costs.
- Decide on the approach to procuring and running the new website. Is the council is going to commission an external provider or try to design and run the website internally? There are several website providers who specialise in Community and Town councils (and parish councils in England). These providers will typically have a template design for a council website which will include all the required aspects. An external procurement will need to be done in line with the council's financial regulations and should include several tenders to ensure there is good value.
- Review the likely amount of staff time and elapsed time needed to undertake the project

Deploy

Councils who choose to work with an external provider should receive a project plan from their provider outlining the deployment steps which they will take. Councils who choose to develop the website themselves will need to manage these steps.

The exact plan steps will vary depending on the level of design and customisation which the council asks the provider to undertake but would typically include phases such as

Discovery – Understand the council's requirements from the website, understand the typical users of the website and what those users will be looking to achieve by visiting the website

Design and prototyping – Create “wireframes” or other visual representations of the proposed website. This step may not be needed where a provider is using a repeated design which they have deployed for other councils

Development, testing and staging – Write any code needed for the website and define any integrations with 3rd party products. Test the developed items and deploy them to a staging site (ie an area of the website which is not published online). Again, this step will be significantly accelerated where a repeated website design is being used.

Production – Deploy the staging site as the “live” production website.

Training – Staff who will be responsible for updating the website with council documents and materials will need to receive training and documentation

Manage and Monitor

Council websites must be regularly updated with the information about the council’s activities as noted above. Documented processes should be put in place to ensure updates are done in the required timeframes.

Councils should monitor the level of use of their website and look for any increase or decline, trying to understand why these changes are occurring.

Evaluate

The website provider should monitor the website for performance issues and security vulnerabilities as part of their ongoing support fee.

Changes in the use of the website will provide an indication of the value that website users are deriving from the contents.

Residents’ views on the website should be sought as part of any feedback or engagement exercises which are undertaken. The website provides a “shop window” to the activities of the council and should be a valuable resource for residents and others within the community

Version History

	Date	Issuer	Reason	Review Date
V1	12/11/2024	Justin Horrell	Initial Version	12/11/25



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