

CWMDU AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/4

Introduction

Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, a community council must prepare and publish an annual report about the council's priorities, activities and achievements during that year. This is our report for the year 2023 to 2024. We hope it will be interesting and informative.

What are Community Councils?

Community councils have a number of basic responsibilities for improving the lives of local communities. Essentially these powers fall within three main categories: representing the whole electorate within the community; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve quality of life in the community.

Individual powers that are relevant in our villages include the provision and maintenance of community transport schemes, traffic calming measures, tourism activities, leisure facilities, car parks, litter bins, street lighting, street cleaning, burial grounds, allotments, bus shelters, commons, open spaces, footpaths, bridleways, and crime reduction measures.

We can also comment on planning applications where we are statutory consultees (which means we have to be consulted).

Council membership and staffing

There are 10 members of Cwmdu and District Community Council, who represent the villages of Bwlch, Cwmdu and Tretower. There are five councillors from the Bwlch ward, three from the Cwmdu ward and two from the Tretower ward. Currently all councillors are independents.

Councillors during the year ended 31 March 2024 were:

Bwlch: Les Doggett; Hank Jackson; John Jones; Kate Logan [resigned XX] and John Williams. There is currently one vacancy.

Cwmdu: Will Forster; Martin Pearse and Paul Silk

Tretower: Selena Clay and David Meyer

The Chair of the Council is elected annually. In 2023/24, the Chair was John Williams and the Vice-Chair was Les Doggett.

The Council has a single part-time staff member. For 2023/24, this was Sue Dale. She was succeeded by Kay Bailey in Dec 2023. The Council is very grateful to Ms Dale and Ms Bailey for having rectified systems problems that existed before their tenure of office.

Contact details for councillors and for the Clerk are available on the Council website <https://cwmducouncil.org>

Council meetings

The Council meets formally on the first Thursday evening of the month at 7pm, alternating between the village halls in the three villages. Occasionally, extra meetings are held, but there is usually no meeting in August.

Meetings have very full agendas. Anyone is welcome to observe and there are opportunities for public participation. As the law requires, there is hybrid provision so that councillors and the public may join remotely. The Council's website <https://cwmducouncil.org> contains the Agenda for meetings, together with details of location and instructions on how to join remotely.

Since 2022, the area of the Community Council is split between two wards of Powys County Council – the single-member Llangors with Bwlch ward and the two-member Crickhowell with Cwmdu and Tretower ward. One or more of the three County Councillors regularly attend the Community Council's meetings and we are grateful to them for reporting on County Council activities and on taking up issues raised by Community Councillors.

Budget and precept

The Council spent £14,867.37 in 2023/4 and raised £17,260.00 by precept on properties in the Council's area. The cost per Band D property was £30.01 annually.

For 2024/5, the budget is for expenditure of £18,548.00

Audits

Each year Internal and External Audits must be undertaken.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit was completed for the year ending 31 March 2024 was completed on XX and the following recommendations were made:

The Council has made good progress on meeting all the audit recommendations made in 2022-2023, petty cash has now been banked, signatories are being updated and the Council have nominated a Councillor to undertake quarterly reconciliations checks. They have subscribed to a dedicated Council accounting system with Scribe, that allows for the production of the AGAR from the information input throughout the year, it also produces the relevant reports easily for reconciliations, monthly reporting and end of year accounts.

External Audit

The Council received an unqualified audit in 2022-2023, this means that there were no recommendations for this period.

Once every three years Audit Wales will undertake a 'full' (in-depth) audit on all councils. Cwmdu and District Community Council will be receiving a 'Full Audit' for the year 2024-2025.

The Council has made good progress on meeting all the audit recommendations made in 2021-2022, in which they received a qualified audit. The Council is using HMRC PAYE Basic Tools to operate their payroll system, they have also set up a dedicated HR/Staffing Committee at the Annual Meeting in May 2024 who will focus further on this area.

Activities and priorities

Planning matters

Councillors give careful attention to all planning applications received from the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (BBNP). Where they believe that there are issues that need to be drawn to the attention of the planning authority, they seek to do so. Councillors have been increasingly concerned about several instances where BBNP appears either not to have followed its own policy or to

have failed to take appropriate enforcement action. Robust representations have been made to BBNP on these matters. The Council will continue vigorously to undertake its role as a statutory consultee.

Traffic issues

The A40 and the A479 are busy through routes that go through the middle of our villages. Many drivers pay scant attention to speed limits. We continue to press for better enforcement of speed limits and for the reduction of the speed limit through Cwmdru (currently 40mph), and we have supported speedwatch schemes, as well as engaging with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed Powys and with representatives of the Welsh Government.

Crime prevention

Where there have been instances of criminal behaviour, we have sought to take these up with the Dyfed Powys Police and the local PCSO has attended some of our meetings. We would, however, like to see better feed-back from the police when issues are raised with them.

Playgrounds and playing field

The Council is responsible for maintaining the small playgrounds in Bwlch and Cwmdru, and for the playing field at the former school in Cwmdru where there is a considerable amount of woodland that needs to be monitored. It is considering how the playing field might be better used in future.

Allotments

There are allotments in Cwmdru on land owned by the County Council and leased by the Community Council. These are managed by the Cwmdru Allotment Society. There is scope for greater use of the allotments.

Village Halls

The Council gives modest financial support to the three Village Halls to encourage community events. It has also assisted Cwmdru Village Hall to acquire wi-fi – something that was necessary so that Council meetings could be held there. The Council is Custodian Trustee of the Cwmdru Village Hall.

Bwlch War Memorial

The Council regards the maintenance of the War Memorial in Bwlch as one of its most important responsibilities.

Fedw Wood

This area of woodland in Cwmdu was willed to the community in the nineteenth century and is managed by trustees of a registered charity (No. 251927). It had been considered that Community Councillors were automatically trustees, but this is not the case. The future governance of the charity, and its relationship with the Community Council, remain matters for further work. Meanwhile, the Council has some concerns about the safety of the woodland, through which there is a public footpath.

Environmental duties

The Council is conscious of its environmental obligations and has actively considered how it might undertake an environmental project of benefit to its residents. It is committed to a 40% reduction in the use of paper.

Website and accessibility

Work is in hand to improve the Council's website and to develop an electronic community noticeboard. We are also considering how to improve remote access to Council meetings – a challenge when meetings are peripatetic.

Involvement and future activity

The Council would welcome greater involvement by residents, and more feedback from them about what they would want the Council to do. It is conscious that it has many powers that it does not at present use, but that doing anything of substance would involve raising the precept. It is also conscious that activities in any one village may not be of benefit to residents in the two other villages. Some ideas that have been canvassed include the re-use of the redundant church in Bwlch for community use, better car-parking in Bwlch and improved play provision in Cwmdu and Tretower.

Contacts - For more information about the Council, Council business and to see regular updates please view our website: <https://cwmducouncil.org>

You can also contact Ms Kay Bailey, Clerk & RFO, 16 Kennelwood, Gilwern NP7 0BD Email: cwmducouncil@hotmail.com