



Being a Councillor with Clydach Community Council

What is a Community Council?

Community and town councils are an elected tier of local government. The other tier in Wales consists of Unitary Authorities and in the case of Clydach, this is the City and County of Swansea (Swansea Council). Unitary Authorities have a legal duty to deliver services such as education, town and country planning, environmental health and social services. Community and town councils have the legal power to take action, but they have fewer duties and freedom to choose what action to take. They can play a vital part in representing the interests of their communities and influencing other decision makers. Furthermore they can take action to improve the quality of life for local people and their local environment and, in some cases, they can deliver services to meet local needs.

Each council is made up of elected members, or in some cases co-opted members. A typical community council represents around 1,500 people but the largest population served by a town council is Barry with over 50,000. Clydach Community Council currently represents around 7,500 people. The diversity of community and town councils is a strength. Each can provide a unique response to the needs of their community with a sensitivity that is more difficult for county and county borough councils to achieve. In Wales there are approximately 8,000 community and town councillors who represent the interests of the communities they serve as a whole. They are recognised as having a role in providing the voice of the citizen in the development and delivery of public services in Wales.

In Wales they are known as community councils or town councils - in England they are called parish or town councils. In both England and Wales they are elected units of local government whose activities are controlled by Acts of UK Parliament or legislation introduced by the National Assembly for Wales.

What do these councils do?

Community and town councils are the part of local government closest to the people. They serve the smallest area and are responsible for the most local of matters. Very importantly, these councils can "precept" - raising a sum collected with the council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

Community and town councils have a number of basic responsibilities in our communities, making them better place to live, grow, work and learn. 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.

Community or town councils have a range of individual powers include the provision and maintenance of community transport schemes, traffic calming measures, local youth projects, tourism activities, leisure facilities, car parks, village greens, public conveniences, litter bins, street lighting, street cleaning, burial grounds, allotments, bus shelters, commons, opens spaces, footpaths, bridleways, and crime reduction measures. The Welsh Government encourages community and town councils to deliver more services and play a greater part in their communities.

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced the new power of 'well being' reflecting the Welsh government's initiative to revitalise local democracy enabling the sector to do more to improve the local social, economic and environmental situation of an area.

Additionally, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 introduced new legislation allowing the appointment of up to two individuals to act at any one time as community youth representatives. Several community and town council have established youth councils and youth representatives in their areas.

Councillors are elected to represent an individual geographical unit on the council, known as a ward or – mainly in smaller communities – the entire community or town council area. They are generally elected by the public every five years.

Where a vacancy arises within the a community or town council during this term, a notice is advertised locally. If no more than one person declares an interest in the vacancy, council would be instructed to Co-opt a member.

A councillor has a duty to act properly and a responsibility, in particular, to:

- attend community or town council meetings when summoned to do so; the notice to attend a council meeting is, in law, a summons, because you have a duty to attend;
- prepare for meetings by studying the agenda and making sure you are properly informed about issues to be discussed, taking advice where appropriate;
- take part in meetings and form objective judgements based on what is best for the community - and then to abide by majority decisions;
- ensure, with other councillors, that the council is properly managed;
- act on behalf of the whole electorate equally, and not just those who supported your election campaign;
- similarly take an interest in all issues equally and not just those local issues for which you campaigned;
- listen, and then represent the views of the community when discussing council business and working with outside bodies;
- maintain proper standards of behaviour as an elected representative of the people.

Responsibility Summary

1. Decision making - Through meetings and attending committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented. In undertaking their role they are bound to observe the provisions of the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

2. Monitoring - Councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.

3. Getting involved locally - As local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. These responsibilities and duties often depend on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available, and may include:

- Going to meetings of local organisations such as tenants' associations.
- Going to meetings of bodies affecting the wider community.
- Taking up issues on behalf of members of the public.
- Running a surgery for residents to raise issues.
- Meeting with individual residents in their own homes.

Rules and regulations for councillors

All councillors are expected to uphold the highest standards of behaviour. The public needs to feel confident that you are living up to the high standards that they have a right to expect from you.

Councillors are bound by a statutory Code of Conduct which outlines what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and conduct; this code applies to councillors whenever they are acting or appear to be acting as a councillor – in short pretty much all of the time. According to the Code, councillors need to act very clearly in the ways outlined below:

- Act only in the public interest - not in favour of yourself or anyone else
- Be honest and declare any interests you have
- Act with integrity - not be influenced by any people or organisations for their benefit
- Act within the law
- Use the council's resources lawfully and prudently
- Always take decisions on merit, using all the information and evidence available
- Always show respect to other people no matter who they are and what they believe
- Be as open as possible about your actions and the actions of the council
- Be prepared to be open to the scrutiny of the public for what you do
- Lead others by example and be a positive role model for the council to the public and officers

Breaches of the Code can be referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and sanctions can include formal apologies, training or even suspension or disqualification from office. Councillors are expected to formally agree to the Code when signing their acceptance of office following election. (Source: Code of Conduct, NAFW, 2001)

Are You Eligible To Be A Councillor?

Yes - most people are. However there are a few rules.

You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union; and
- on the “relevant date” (i.e. the day on which you are nominated or if there is a poll the day of the election) 18 years of age or over;

And additionally:

- on the “relevant day” a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand; or
- have during the whole of the 12 months preceding that day occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area; or
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area; or
- during that 12 month period resided in the council area (or within three miles of it)

You cannot stand for election if you:

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine.
- you work for the council you want to become a councillor for (but you can work for other local authorities, including the principal authorities that represent the same area).

Political Affiliation

You are welcome to be, or to become a member of any recognised political party. Likewise, you may be an independent councillor and not affiliated to any party. As a Community Councillor, your political affiliation will be made public.

Specific Duties of Clydach Community Council

- Attend at least 1 Full council meeting within every 4 month period. Failure to do this will disqualify councillors from office.
- Attend separate council committee meetings as required, dependent upon your membership of committees.
- Attend training sessions as required by the council’s standing orders, unless superseded by any national requirements.
- Support with the council’s public events. This work may include marshalling, erecting marquees, litter picking, liaising with pitch holders.
- Supporting with community activities which may include placing flags throughout the village each year, weeding planters, litter picking areas, helping with local groups etc.
- Ensure that items listed as action for you from meetings are completed within the required timeframes.
- Take part in surgeries arranged by the council.

This list is non-exhaustive and the role may contain other responsibilities to be carried out in the spirit of the post of councillor.

If you are interested in becoming a councillor, it would be advisable for you to sit as a member of the public in any of the council's public meetings which are held on the second Tuesday of each month (excluding August).