

# 'Together we can'

## Community resilience and self-reliance

Report of the Auditor General for Wales

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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# Context

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- 1 This study is the final report of three under our themed programme of work looking at how local government is alleviating and tackling poverty. Through our work we have sought to:
  - **Assure** people on how public money is being spent on tackling and alleviating poverty and provide evidence on where change is needed.
  - **Explain** the scale of the poverty challenge facing people in Wales and set out how all tiers of government are working to address this. We highlight good practice but also identify areas where improvement is needed.
  - **Inspire** a change in how money and services can be delivered in the future identifying new ways of doing things to help address poverty.
- 2 Our first report provided a baseline showing that poverty is the major challenge facing all tiers of government, and Wales has the greatest and deepest levels of poverty in Great Britain. With this context in mind, our second report looked at how local authorities are working to grow and expand social enterprises to help local government deliver more services and reduce demand.
- 3 This final review focuses on understanding how local authorities are creating the conditions needed to transform ways of working and empower communities to thrive as independently as possible. We specifically look at the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in local authority plans, and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on often over stretched local authority services.

## Local authorities face a daunting challenge

- 4 In the last 15 years, local government in Wales has faced significant pressures, dealing with crisis after crisis, which has changed the way services are provided. Austerity tested local government's ability to change and react. Local authorities adapted well in responding to this challenge, devising and implementing a range of efficiency measures that reduced the cost of services, but also finding innovative ways of working. Similarly, local authorities were flexible when responding to COVID-19, finding new ways of delivering services that protected people while overcoming the many challenges the pandemic presented.

- 5 Local authorities are now facing more significant challenges as a result of the current cost-of-living crisis, and it is clear that they are again being challenged to support people where demand for services is likely to increase. But, because capacity within local authorities has been eroded and opportunities to deliver further efficiency savings are exhausted, local authorities will have to find other ways of maintaining services and continuing to support the wider community and in particular those most in need. This is also set against the current situation of public spending not keeping pace with inflation. While the Welsh Government revenue settlement for local authorities in 2023-24 will increase by 7.9% on a like-for-like basis compared to the current year<sup>1</sup>, this is below the rate of inflation which was estimated to be 9.3% at the end of November<sup>2</sup>.
- 6 Against this challenging situation, local authorities are showing an increasing interest in encouraging and growing community resilience; equipping people to do more for themselves and be less reliant on the state. Resilience is not a new concept and has been central to how local authorities have traditionally responded to local emergencies such as flooding, natural disasters and, indeed, the pandemic. In this context, resilient communities are defined by their ability to deal with a sudden calamity but are also able to quickly bounce back to their pre-crisis state.
- 7 But at a time of reductions in budgets and uncertainty in public finances, the idea of equipping people to do more for themselves on a more sustained basis, is increasingly appealing. It responds to the pressure of where to prioritise local authority activity and ensure there is an adequate safety net in place for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Consequently, community and self-resilience has begun to appear as a priority in more local authority corporate plans and strategy documents, not merely as a response to a natural disaster but as means of equipping people to be able to adapt and directly manage the problems they face.
- 8 The application of resilience thinking is not, however, without its risks and challenges. While promoting resilience can be seen as a pragmatic response by local authorities faced with difficult decisions about how to use their reducing resources, it is important to recognise the limits of what might be achieved; resilience might serve as a strategy for helping communities to cope with adversity, but it cannot overturn structural inequalities and deliver solutions to generational issues like poverty alone.

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1 [Written Statement: Provisional Local Government Settlement 2023-24](#)

2 [www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/l55o/mm23](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/l55o/mm23)



## Key findings

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- 9 Overall, we conclude that local authorities face a challenging and uncertain financial future but find it difficult to empower people and communities to be more self-reliant and less dependent on services.
- 10 In **Part 1**, we consider why community resilience and self-reliance are important for local authorities. We found that much of the current narrative on community resilience is framed by the need to respond to emergencies and civil contingency requirements. This narrow focus can lead to local authorities missing opportunities to make a broader impact and, in some cases, even unintentionally encouraging dependency.
- 11 Importantly, recent Welsh Parliament legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is mapping a new direction for public service delivery. However, we found that this has not translated into the fundamental shift with people being encouraged to do more for themselves and being less reliant on local authority services. While 19 of the 22 local authorities are prioritising community resilience, too often the work is poorly defined and the actions that underpin plans are narrowly focussed.
- 12 In **Part 2**, we outline how local authorities are currently working to engender more self-reliance and greater resilience in communities. We summarise current activity highlighting how local authorities are framing their changing relationship with communities. In this section, we also consider the effectiveness of approaches, noting areas of strength and good practice but also the barriers to making positive change.
- 13 The growth in volunteering, community asset transfers, community hubs, emerging work on community empowerment and the work of community navigators shows the commitment of local authorities to transform how they operate. However, given the societal, financial and demographic challenges facing Wales, there is a need to scale and speed up activity. We acknowledge that the shift in emphasis from local authorities doing less and requiring others to do more is not easy to achieve.
- 14 There are also significant barriers to overcome, both within local authorities but also communities. Capacity, resources and skills are scarce, people are facing tougher choices and struggling to cope with the cost-of-living crisis. Communities and local authorities themselves also have different abilities and are starting from different places with their own unique challenges to overcome.

- 15 Positively, as a result of COVID-19, there is a huge amount of goodwill and commitment within communities that local authorities can build on and use. However, the view of partners and stakeholders we spoke to suggests that some local authority services are returning to their pre-pandemic ways of working and the opportunity to shift to being an 'influencer' and 'enabler' rather than 'direct provider' is potentially being wasted.
- 16 In **Part 3**, we look to the future, setting out approaches and learning from elsewhere. We highlight positive practice and examples of how others are seeking to address the challenge of enabling people to be less reliant on local authority services and how they are supporting and enabling this transition. We frame this around the following:
- creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future;
  - holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like;
  - revitalising the role of local authority members as community champions;
  - refocussing the work of local authority staff;
  - recognising that recasting community relationships will require different solutions in different places; and
  - ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community.



The pandemic showed communities can play a more active role and become less dependent on public services but sustaining this requires local authorities to change how they work. I recognise how difficult this is in the current climate but also believe that change is necessary. Our report makes the case for change and provides helpful recommendations to help authorities make the transition.

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**Adrian Crompton**  
Auditor General for Wales



# Recommendations

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- 17 Our recommendations are set out below. We expect each local authority to consider the findings of this review and our recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to our recommendations in a timely way.

## Recommendations

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- R1 To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool in **Appendix 2** to:
- self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice;
  - identify where improvement is needed; and
  - draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.
- R2 To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:
- formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise;
  - regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
  - revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.





# Defining community resilience and self-reliance

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01

## The policy shift from 'doing' to 'enabling' and 'influencing'

- 1.1 Nurturing resilience is not an exact science. Neither is it a traditional service or a neatly defined activity in its own right. An understanding of the evolving role of government and the changing relationship between citizen and state provides the foundations; from this evolving position, local authorities can develop their approach to community resilience, embedding consistent and sustained ways of working that ultimately empower people and communities.
- 1.2 This fundamental shift – from 'providers' to 'enablers' – is not insignificant or easy to achieve. Austerity drove local authorities to reflect on their role and in many ways necessitated a shift towards adopting a more enabling approach. At the same time, however, the budgetary constraints that demanded this shift in the first place, also significantly reduced the capacity and expertise needed to navigate this tricky transformation. However, with a challenging and uncertain future for public finances<sup>3</sup>, increasing demand for statutory services through an aging population<sup>4</sup>, and Wales already facing some of the worst poverty levels in the UK<sup>5</sup>, local authorities have little option but to focus their efforts on equipping communities to become more resilient and self-reliant.
- 1.3 Broadly, the terms resilience and self-reliance should encapsulate both community preparedness for adverse situations; the support to promote individuals' independence, and everything else in between. From those we reviewed, we found Public Health Wales's<sup>6</sup> definition of resilience to be the most rounded; 'an ability to draw on strengths and assets to cope or thrive in adversity – be that a severe or acute life event or the chronic stresses of everyday life'. The 2019 Public Health Wales report on community resilience sets out a number of key contributors to community resilience, highlighting its importance as a means of tackling complex societal issues such as poverty. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**.

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3 Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ['Autumn Statement is a missed opportunity to help our communities'](#), November 2022

4 Welsh Government, [Population and household estimates for Wales \(Census 2021\)](#), June 2022

5 Auditor General for Wales, [Time for change – Poverty in Wales](#), November 2022

6 Public Health Wales, [Resilience: Understanding the interdependence between individuals and communities](#), 2019

## Exhibit 1: Public Health Wales' 'Building blocks of resilience'



### Human capital

the innate and acquired personal attributes including skills and education, capacity and local knowledge



### Social capital (community level)

the extent of social networks and connections within a community, effectiveness of local community and voluntary organisations (support, participation), and resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support a community



### Physical/built capital

the physical infrastructure including homes and roads, access to amenities



### Natural/environmental capital

access to green and blue space, availability and use of natural resources



### Financial or economic

capital: income, wealth, access to resources, civic and social enterprises

Source: Public Health Wales, [Resilience: Understanding the interdependence between individuals and communities](#), Public Health Wales, 2019

- 1.4 Defining social resilience and community self-reliance is not helped by different interpretations and meanings in the contexts of key legislation and various functions of local authorities. For example, as a core principle of the [Social Services and Well-being Act \(Wales\) 2014](#), local authorities have long focused on supporting people to live independently by providing information, advice and assistance to prevent the escalation of their needs. This shifts the emphasis for local authorities to playing a more 'enabling' role, albeit in the context of supporting those needing care and support. This has not been without its challenges and there is still more to do to fully embed the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and to ensure organisational cultures support its implementation<sup>7</sup>.

7 Audit Wales, [The 'front door' to adult social care](#), Audit Wales, 2019

- 1.5 At the other end of the spectrum, under the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), Local Resilience Forums are responsible for co-ordinating local responses to threats and emergencies. Community resilience is a well-known term in this context but relates specifically to ensuring community preparedness for and adequate response to events such as pandemics, flooding, or terrorist incidents. The inherent focus and emphasis on emergency planning clearly relates to events or situations which threaten serious damage to human welfare, the environment or to the security of the UK<sup>8</sup>. Beyond the scope of emergency planning, resilience in this sense has little to do with promoting self-reliance in daily life and equipping people to be less dependent on the state.
- 1.6 A further interpretation is set out in the context of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) – specifically, the focus on climate change and air quality in the national wellbeing goal of 'A resilient Wales'. Although clearly relevant in a broader sense, this has little to do with creating the social and human conditions that help communities thrive without calling on local authorities. Developing resilient communities and self-reliant citizens, therefore, requires local authorities to 'let go' of control and involve and empower people. Despite 'involvement' being one of the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, public bodies are often not creating opportunities for citizens to be involved from the early stages of design through to evaluation and must do more to include the full diversity of the population<sup>9</sup>.

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8 Cabinet Office, [The role of Local Resilience Forums](#), Cabinet Office, 2013

9 Auditor General for Wales, [So, what's different? Findings from the Auditor General's Sustainable Development Principle Examinations](#), May 2020

## Most local authorities recognise the need to create more resilient and self-reliant communities, but very few have clearly defined what this means or entails

- 1.7 Given the current policy and legislative drivers, it is not surprising to find that local authorities' interpretations of resilience and self-reliance are rooted in either emergency planning or social care, and/or linked to their corporate efforts to reduce carbon emissions and boost biodiversity. Whilst these approaches clearly make an invaluable contribution to people's well-being and safety, their narrower focus can mean local authorities risk missing opportunities to make a broader impact and, in some cases, even risk encouraging dependency.
- 1.8 At the time of our review, we found that most local authorities have no clear definition of resilience or self-reliant communities, despite 19 having well-being objectives specifically aimed at promoting community resilience. In a survey of local authority lead officers, fewer than half could define what is meant by a resilient community and only three could define characteristics of a self-reliant individual.
- 1.9 All local authorities reference the national well-being goals, including a more resilient Wales, in their plans, but there is little development from these into local objectives or actions. The lack of definition for the terms 'community resilience' and 'self-reliance' means they are nebulous and often little more than catch-all statements. Between different local authorities, and between different services within local authorities, it can mean various things.
- 1.10 During interviews, we asked local authority officers to define community resilience and self-reliance (**Exhibit 2**). Some believed these are not possible to define, or that definitions are not a priority, or their meaning varies significantly between different services. While this recognises the holistic nature of resilience to the individual and the need to consider it in all service areas, it also illustrates the importance of a clear definition for different parts of the local authority to work towards.

## Exhibit 2: example of local authority officers' definitions of community resilience and self-reliance



'A resilient community is one that reacts to a challenge.'



'Cannot be defined.'



'Looking at opportunities to make people in their communities feel more engaged.'



'The local authority working with communities and individuals to find the things that matter in life without the local authority being the first port of call.'



'Can be defined differently wherever you go. Different areas need different support.'



'Working with residents and the community to share responsibility, helping communities to do more for themselves and give them more control over what they can do to support local people in their communities.'



'The process and outcome of engaging with the third sector and investing in their knowledge of their communities.'

Source: Audit Wales interviews with local authority officers.

**“ A resilient  
community  
is one that  
reacts to a  
challenge ”**



- 1.11 Other officers placed more emphasis on the need to engage with communities and the third sector to develop resilience – both as an outcome and a process. The end outcome would be that citizens work as a community to address issues rather than going straight to the local authority. There was also recognition of the need for resilience to empower communities to cope both with crises, but also grasp opportunities. Having a clear definition, therefore, enables impactful actions to be devised that embody these key features. Many officers we interviewed also view their role as helping to network community groups and involve them in creating infrastructure and systems to support their development. Others see the role of the local authority as a co-producer alongside partners continuing to deliver services rather than the end goal of passing all delivery onto partners.
- 1.12 Despite this, we found some promising approaches. Bridgend's Corporate Plan<sup>10</sup> includes a well-being objective to help 'people and communities to be more healthy and resilient'. This is framed around reducing or preventing an escalation of need in response from the local authority and to enable community-based solutions. Newport's refreshed Corporate Plan for 2022-27 includes a well-being objective to make Newport 'a supportive city where communities and care are at the heart of what we do'<sup>11</sup>. The plan describes how the ambition is for communities to support each other in a more co-operative approach.
- 1.13 Successful transformation requires local authority leaders, both officers and elected members, to clearly articulate the benefits of the new ways of working and successful outcomes. This, in turn, allows officers in each service area to take actions to the greatest benefit locally, such as commissioning investment in social enterprises to keep funding within the local economy. Consequently, third sector and social business organisations that support groups that promote community resilience felt that local authority leadership was paramount both externally in creating the needed dialogue within communities but also within local authorities to stimulate culture change.
- 1.14 In addition, many local authorities continue to frame their activities around continuing to be a service delivery body and have further work to do to help create a change in mindset and culture. Self-reliance is clearly influenced by the things that local authorities do. But it is also shaped by the things they do not do – it follows that, by supporting communities to do more for themselves, local authorities will ultimately change or limit what they do.

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10 Bridgend County Borough Council, [Corporate Plan 2018-23](#)

11 Newport City Council, [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)

1.15 Through our interviews, we found that local authorities are comfortable in discussing direct provision of activities – for example, activities to support vulnerable people – but are less clear on their role in moving towards supporting communities to do more for themselves. Getting the balance between helping those who need support and enabling others to do more is a key challenge facing local authorities in creating greater levels of self-reliance.



**The current approach  
of local authorities to  
creating more resilient  
communities and  
self-reliant people**

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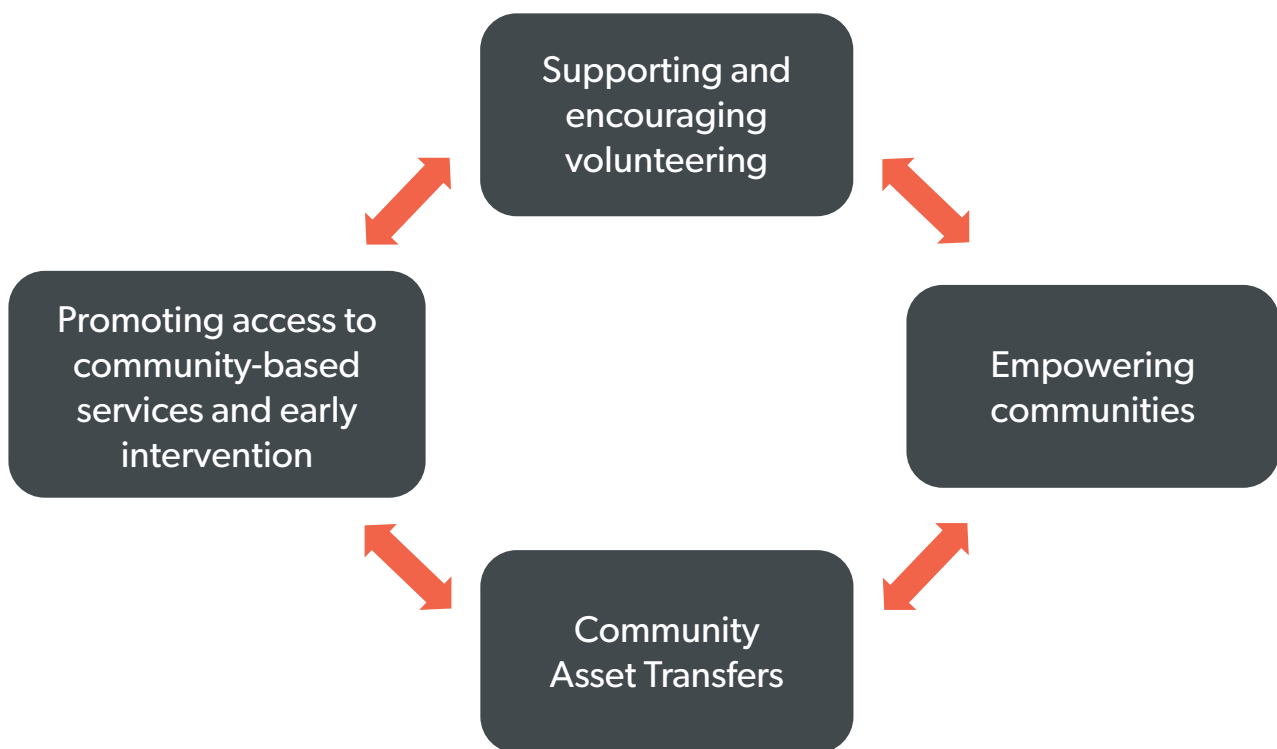
**02**

2.1 In **Part 2** of the report, we outline how local authorities are currently working to engender more self-reliance and greater resilience in communities. We summarise current activity highlighting how local authorities are framing their changing relationship with communities. We consider the effectiveness of approaches, noting areas of strength and good practice but also the barriers to making positive change.

### Local authorities have a mixed track record in helping to build community resilience and strengthen self-reliance

2.2 In terms of where local authorities have traditionally pitched their efforts in helping to build stronger and more self-reliant individuals and communities, their work in recent years has broadly fallen into one or more of the following areas – **Exhibit 3**.

**Exhibit 3: how local authorities are helping to create resilient and self-reliant communities**



Source: Audit Wales

## Supporting and encouraging volunteering

- 2.3 Local authorities value the additional support provided by volunteers to a range of services, and volunteers bring new skills, new ideas and a fresh perspective. There are many examples of volunteer programmes within local government, and volunteering has evolved in line with the changing policy and operational context of local authority services. As local authorities increasingly focus on community engagement and participation, they have also begun to take a more strategic approach to volunteer involvement in service delivery.
- 2.4 Through our interviews with local authorities, we found that volunteering initiatives often work best when the local authority has a close working relationship with their local County Voluntary Council (CVC)<sup>12</sup>. We also found some positive examples of how local authorities are building upon these local relationships to boost volunteering. For example, [Caerphilly's Employee Volunteering Scheme](#), and the Isle of Anglesey 'good turn schemes' in defined communities on the island.
- 2.5 There are nonetheless some challenges around volunteering. Not all communities have a strong volunteering demographic and communities themselves have different capabilities and capacity. For instance, we found good work taking place within Pembrokeshire, with the creation of an effective volunteer network undertaking a range of activities including good neighbour schemes, a 50+ network and a pharmacy delivery service. However, it is clear that Pembrokeshire has a strong local community with a good range of volunteers with the skills and abilities to thrive independently that the local authority and its partners can draw on. This is not the same everywhere in Wales, and it is clearly more challenging to encourage volunteers in the more deprived areas.
- 2.6 There is also a growing worry of burnout in the volunteering sector and a danger that while volunteers can play an important role, they are often 'papering over the cracks' of a system under stress. Volunteering has its place, but it needs to be managed and nurtured carefully and requires a shift in culture and policy within local authorities to be successful<sup>13</sup>.

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12 Every county in Wales has a voluntary sector infrastructure body, generically called a County Voluntary Council or CVC. The key role of a CVC is to provide advice and information to local voluntary and community groups on volunteering, funding sources and a wide range of other issues.

13 Nesta, [Making the shift to people powered services: a cross-Government agenda](#), gov.uk

## Empowering communities

- 2.7 A number of local authorities are similarly focusing their efforts on mobilising community capacity and empowering communities to identify their own needs and priorities and produce workable solutions. A good example of this is the work of Isle of Anglesey Council with Medrwn Môn, an independent agency providing support and advice to voluntary organisations and community groups. Under the 'network of alliances' initiative, Medrwn Môn is helping to create a system of local coalitions across the island which are empowered to identify the problems in their area, the assets that are available to help tackle these problems and the solutions needed to address them<sup>14</sup>. An evaluation of the success of this initiative was not available at the time of our audit.
- 2.8 Caerphilly has established a Community Empowerment Fund to support its Transformation Strategy. The first round of funding was shared between 18 community projects totalling over £40,000. The local authority has established criteria for applications to help focus efforts on improving resilience across the County Borough. While the criteria prioritise initiatives to support the establishment of new community groups, projects to support greater community cohesion, and projects aimed at tackling isolation and loneliness, although no update on the success of this work was provided at the time of our audit.
- 2.9 Despite the above, there is more that local authorities can do. Our analysis of responses to our survey of officers highlights that local authorities are not shifting efforts to empower communities to do more for themselves. From our survey of local authority officers, the activities where communities are more directly involved in delivery without local authority involvement are things like community litter picks, food banks and recycling and repurposing furniture, goods and clothing. While clearly important, these fall short of activities that help to encourage people to be more self-reliant and less dependent. In addition, procurement and grants processes are often not streamlined or agile enough to either encourage local groups to apply for funding or to get money to community organisations in a timely manner<sup>15</sup>.

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14 Medrwn Môn, 'What is an Alliance?' Event, July 2022

15 South Wales Argus, 'Caerphilly Council still has budget for grants to charities', November 2022



## Community Asset Transfers

- 2.10 A Community Asset Transfer (CAT) happens when a local authority transfers the management and/or ownership of a property asset to a town and community council, third-sector body or community group. This will sometimes include the delivery of any associated services. Transferring assets enables the retention of key local facilities and services that might otherwise be closed. Overall, we found that local authorities are not using CATs to help stimulate and build community resilience, and are mostly focussing on opportunities to reduce expenditure and divest themselves of assets that can no longer be subsidised.
- 2.11 Our survey of town and community local authorities highlights mixed performance in their experience of local authorities transferring assets. A common complaint from town and community councils is that transfers of community assets are unequitable and unfair. They often take far too long, with some reporting that the process took multiple years, resulting in the loss of potential funding opportunities, spiralling costs, and sudden changes in contract agreements. Local authorities were categorised as being excessively risk averse and poor at communicating.
- 2.12 Some respondents to our survey also flagged that they had no option but to take on the asset because of the threat that the service would otherwise be stopped. Several we interviewed reflected that local authorities were not transferring assets but liability with conditions placed on transfers that made success unachievable. Suggestions for improvement included providing an easily-accessible register of available transfers, more flexibility in transfer agreements, recognising the importance of cross-subsidisation and guaranteed ongoing support from local authorities.

## Promoting access to community-based services and early intervention

2.13 Local authorities are recognising the need to reset their presence in communities and have focussed primarily on two approaches:

- **Community Hubs** – Several local authorities including Cardiff Council have developed 'community hubs,' providing a space for people to access key services. The Hubs also function as a place for people to meet and interact and are helping to reduce isolation and loneliness. In Gwynedd, the community hub in Maesgeirchen, Bangor has been instrumental in strengthening the local authority's presence on the estate, creating a more easily accessible and suitable space where services and the community can come together to work in partnership.

Likewise, the positive work of the Pembrokeshire Community Hub. This started life as a COVID-19 response for the county and was based in county hall in Haverfordwest. During the pandemic, the Hub took over 10,000 calls providing help and assistance so that citizens could access the food, prescriptions and the community services they needed. Following its success and in-depth engagement with communities and partners at a Community Activity and Wellbeing Day in June 2022, the Hub has recently been re-launched with a broader role<sup>16</sup>.

- **Community Navigators or Connectors** – Most local authorities are recognising the importance of the community navigator role to co-ordinate access to community-based services and to support the development of alternative non-local-authority provision. The job titles vary across Wales. Some are referred to as local area co-ordinators, others community navigators. Irrespective, local authorities recognise the value of these roles in helping to support resilience in communities. They often draw their roots from work in social care, and are focused on developing the provision of community-based services and activities, identifying potentially vulnerable people before their needs escalate and promoting access to alternative services<sup>17</sup>.

For example, Bridgend County Borough Council through its 'Local Community Coordination and Connecting Communities' programme which supports people whose needs would not usually meet the eligibility criteria for care and support. The local authority, working with Swansea University, has quantified and evaluated the impact of this programme, highlighting that every £1 spent delivers a return of £4. In addition, and more importantly, only 4% of people referred by the Local Co-ordinators to third-sector services subsequently needed to access statutory help from the local authority.

16 The Hub partnership includes Pembrokeshire Alliance of Voluntary Services (PAVS), Hywel Dda Health Board, Pembrokeshire County Council, Public Health Wales, PLANED, Volunteering Matters and West Wales Action for Mental Health.

17 The roles are rooted in the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and are focused on prevention, helping to ensure people's well-being is maintained to avoid them requiring statutory care and support.

## There are significant cultural, resource and capacity barriers to overcome in helping to create more resilient and self-reliant communities

2.14 While it is clear local authorities have a strong track record in some key areas that can help create more self-reliant individuals and resilient communities, our survey of senior local authority officers highlights that significant challenges remain – **Exhibit 4**.

### Exhibit 4: barriers to creating more self-reliant and resilient individuals and communities identified by local authority officers



Lack of resources, limited skills and weak capacity to be able to drive this agenda.



Inability to redirect resources from service delivery to supporting communities to be more self-reliant.



A lack of trust between the council and residents and a perceived inability and appetite within communities to be more self-reliant.



The prevailing service delivery culture within the council of needing to be 'direct providers' rather than 'influencers' and 'enablers'



Limitations in joined up working with partners on the ground to foster stronger community involvement and influence.



Lack of a strategic vision and limited understanding of community needs and abilities

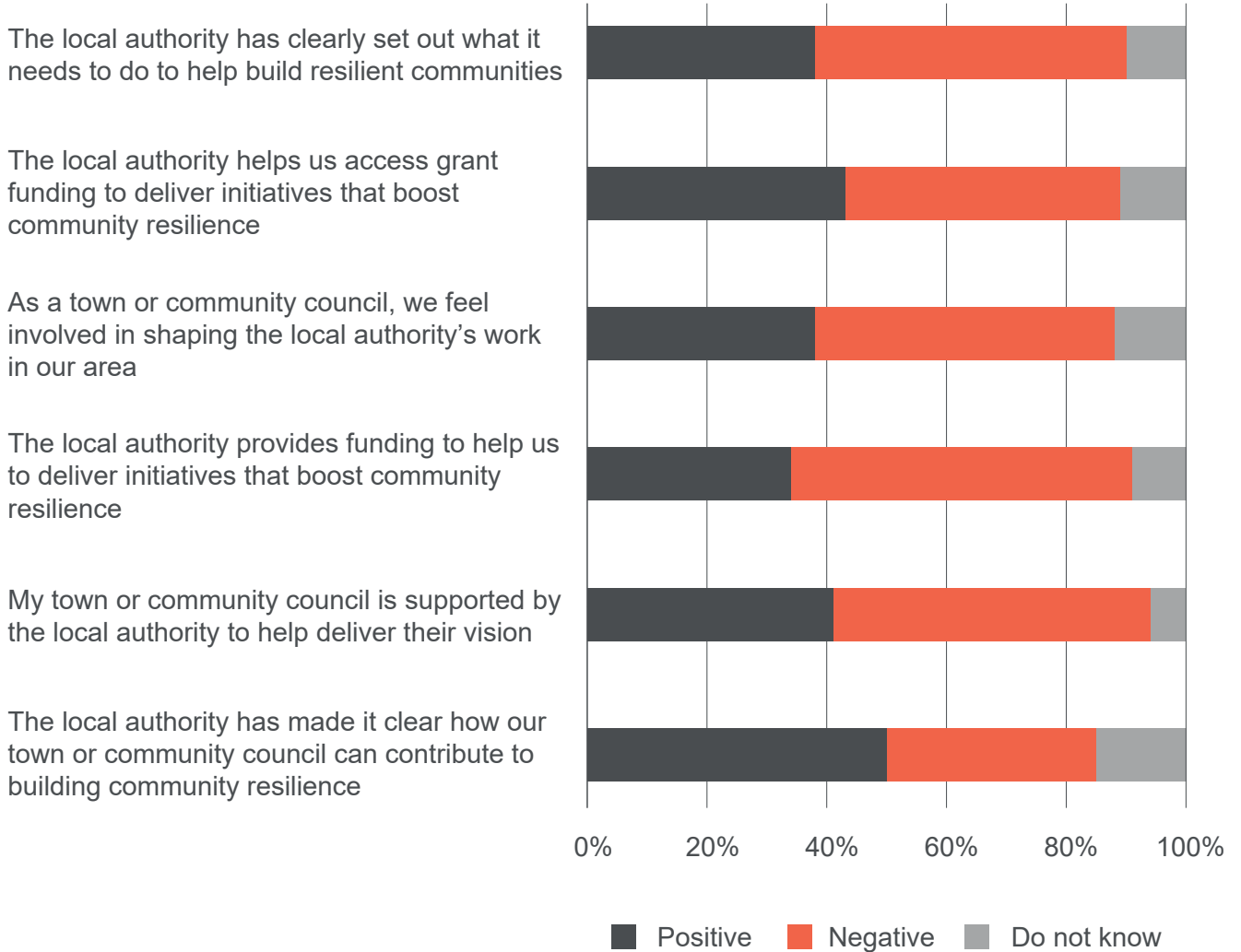


Ongoing challenges in helping connect and re-connect communities due to challenges of poverty, rurality, transportation and digital exclusion.

Source: Local Authority Officer Survey, Audit Wales analysis

- 2.15 A strong message from our interviews and survey work is that local authorities are not using resources to effectively stimulate community resilience. This is unsurprising. In the current fiscal climate, with an uncertain future, switching resources from often over stretched services is no easy thing. However, without some investment on the ground targeted at building capacity and encouraging resilience, it is clear some communities will not be able to respond, and responses where they happen, may not be sustainable.
- 2.16 Town and community councils are a key stakeholder in creating resilient and self-reliant communities. They are often well placed in local networks and hold significant community assets that can be used by groups. Collaborating with town and community councils opens the opportunity to involve communities more actively, which should increase public buy-in, and, in turn, help stimulate community resilience.
- 2.17 Town and community council survey comments had an overwhelmingly negative tone. While local authorities were felt to be effective at planning and creating a vision, they are overwhelmingly seen as ineffective at putting these into action. Poor communication, as well as delays caused by 'red tape,' were cited as the reasons initiatives failed. One respondent recorded that due to delays, 'the enthusiasm tends to tail off.' Survey responses on specific questions identify lots of opportunity for improvement. For example, while half of town and community council respondents felt that their local authority had set out what was needed to help build resilient communities, only 41% felt involved in shaping the approach and just over a third were clear on what they could and should be doing – **Exhibit 5**.

### Exhibit 5: town and community council views on how well they collaborate with their local authority



Source: Town and Community Council Survey, Audit Wales analysis

- 2.18 Another strong line of feedback from town and community councils is the lack of funding and resources. Respondents noted that local authority budgets have shrunk, resulting in the local authorities 'not having enough experienced staff to cover statutory functions' let alone engage in community development activity. In addition, services that could often be in the frontline in engendering community resilience, are often absent on the ground. For instance, the lack of focus on the role of economic development to keep funding within local communities and prevent wealth extraction is seen as a missed opportunity.
- 2.19 Others highlight an enduring 'command and control' culture in some local authorities, strengthening the power imbalance between the local authority and its communities, framing the relationship as 'them' and 'us.' This limits local authorities' ability to fully engage with, involve and understand the community, and in turn creates difficulties for a community to fully trust the local authority. One respondent noted that their local authority continues to identify its own priorities and only then goes to local communities for validation of their work.
- 2.20 This is not helped by local authorities' performance monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Most local authorities reflect on their previous performance towards all well-being objectives and against key performance indicators as part of regular performance monitoring arrangements. However, we found that, because of weaknesses in how local authorities have articulated their vision around community resilience, performance monitoring is often limited to focusing on specific projects or initiatives and does not consider what these mean collectively in terms of community resilience.
- 2.21 There are no national measures collected that formally determine how resilient people and communities are in Wales. However, a number of publicly available datasets can be used as proxy measures to identify the key challenges facing local government in nurturing more resilient and self-reliant communities:
- active citizenship, measured through people's participation in democratic processes and decision-making drawing on data by [The Electoral Commission](#) showing the proportion of eligible voters who participated in local authority elections. Ceredigion had the highest turnout of voters in the most recent election in 2022, with 48.6% of eligible voters voting. This compares with a turnout of 31.3% in Torfaen during the same election. And across Wales, turnout on average was almost 4% lower in 2022 compared with the 2017 election. The data shows that turnout in local authority areas across some of the South Wales Valleys is consistently lower<sup>18</sup>.



- the National Survey for Wales measures emotional and social loneliness over time, and these are key issues to address in promoting social capital. The data shows that almost a third of the Wales population reported feeling socially lonely in 2019-20. Data by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) breaks a similar measure down by local authority area. It shows that, by 2020-21, almost 40% of the Welsh population reported feeling lonely. Local authority areas in the South Wales Valleys, including Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, are amongst those with the highest proportions of people having reported feeling lonely<sup>19</sup>.
- Data Cymru publishes data showing people's sense of belonging to an area and levels of community cohesion. It measures the number of people agreeing that they belong to the area; that people from different backgrounds get on well together; and that people treat each other with respect. It shows an increase in recent years – from an average of 51% agreement across Wales in 2016-17 to 70% agreement in 2020-21<sup>20</sup>.

2.22 Through our review we found no local authority in Wales using these proxy measures to help evaluate or monitor resilience.

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19 [National Survey for Wales](#)

20 [Well-being of Wales, Data Cymru](#)

## The pandemic showed communities can play a more active role and become less dependent, but sustaining this requires local authorities to change how they work

- 2.23 Local authorities in Wales responded to COVID-19 with effective leadership and extraordinary sacrifices from frontline workers, elected members and senior leaders. The pandemic made people more aware of the role of local authorities in their lives. As such there is a window of opportunity to reset the relationship between local authorities and their citizens and to use the experience of collaborating with communities as genuine partners to reset relationships and expectations.
- 2.24 People we interviewed in particular noted that the pandemic had sparked a resurgence in 'community activism' with individuals, groups, and organisations working together to bring about change. Several people we spoke to also highlighted that the crisis encouraged local authorities to be more open, with officers and elected members showing a new willingness to involve and collaborate with people to find solutions to problems, often on a daily basis.
- 2.25 Our town and community council survey asked recipients how the pandemic had impacted on resilience and self-reliance in their local areas. Positively, a number of respondents stated that COVID-19 had supported communities to 'pull together' and support vulnerable people in the community by providing meals and medication to vulnerable people shielding, undertaking home deliveries and community activities like litter picking. Some also noted that having to operate with less support from their local authority also helped increase resilience, demonstrating that individuals and communities could do more for themselves.

- 2.26 We also found some good examples of local authorities taking learning from the pandemic to help improve community resilience. For instance, Gwynedd County Council are learning from the shift to prevention required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to influence its work and approach elsewhere in the organisation. By rolling out training on the 'What Matters'<sup>21</sup> principles more widely to staff in other services, the local authority is seeking to redefine its work moving away from responding to need to identifying personal and local strengths and solutions as a way of supporting resilience. Similarly, Flintshire County Council is drawing on the positive response from communities during the pandemic to help address staff shortages in social care. Building on the success of people volunteering during COVID-19, the local authority is prioritising work to engage with its residents to encourage people to begin a career in care.
- 2.27 However, others we spoke to noted that much of the good work of reframing relationships and changing how people access and use services created by the pandemic have not been embedded and maintained. Despite local authorities having the experience of the pandemic to draw on how to do things differently, many are not grasping the opportunities to recast their relationship with people and communities. Through our interviews with officers, we found that a growing number acknowledge that a culture shift is required but are yet to articulate and set out what they will do differently to reduce dependency. As a result, there is a growing concern that local authorities are reverting to their traditional ways of working and not building on the enthusiasm and buy-in created by the pandemic.
- 2.28 This is echoed in the evidence of our local 'Springing Forward' review delivered in 2022. Our audit work focussed on how local authorities are taking learning from the pandemic to transform both their workforce and use of assets. We found that local authorities are increasingly seeing flexibility and agility in their human and physical assets as critical in the models of service delivery they will need to apply in the future. However, we found little focus on the need to create more resilient communities and self-reliant citizens, nor a prioritisation of the steps needed to reduce demand on services.

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21 A 'What Matters' assessment is an outcomes-focused, strengths-based conversation between a social care practitioner and an individual to determine whether they have eligible care and support needs.



**Looking to the  
future and learning  
from elsewhere**

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**03**

- 3.1 In this final part of the report we look to the future, setting out approaches and opportunities from other parts of Great Britain. We acknowledge that different parts of Wales will have different challenges to overcome, and no local authority is starting from exactly the same place. However, from our research there are opportunities to learn from elsewhere that can help local authorities make this transition.

## With an uncertain future and growing complexity in service delivery, local authorities must change how they work and use resources differently to empower communities and individuals to build resilience and become more self-reliant

- 3.2 The scale of the current challenges facing communities across Wales is threatening to overwhelm local authority services. Entrenched poverty, longstanding inequalities, uncertain public finances and growing demand from people with a range of complex problems are creating a tough operating environment<sup>22</sup>.
- 3.3 It is clear that local authorities are going to face significant problems in the next few years with capacity continuing to be stretched, services increasingly becoming more targeted and potentially oversubscribed. There are likely to be fewer services delivered directly by local authorities, to fewer people, and local authority services as we know them will look hugely different by the end of the next decade.
- 3.4 As a consequence, a key focus for local authorities will need to be on steering people away from their services and replacing this with a co-operative approach, collaborating with communities and doing things differently. To achieve this, local authorities need to think and act differently, building capacity and social capital and encouraging communities and citizens to do more for themselves.
- 3.5 Positively, we are not starting from zero. As noted in Part 2, local authorities are already doing much and during COVID-19, we witnessed a community response on a scale and diversity that were previously unthinkable highlighting that many communities have significant depths of resilience. There is also much work already happening across Wales and the other nations of the United Kingdom from which we can learn. **Exhibit 6** sets these out.

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, see the conclusions of the [Future Trends Report Wales 2021](#) produced by the Welsh Government, which brings together a range of information to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales' future. The most recent report of December 2021 set out a series of significant challenges facing local authorities in the next decade and beyond.

**Exhibit 6: key approaches in how local authorities are seeking to strengthen community resilience and self-reliance to reduce demand on services**



Creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future.



Holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like.



Revitalising the role of council members as community champions.



Refocussing the work of council staff.



Recognising that recasting community relationships will require different solutions in different places.



Ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community.

Source: Audit Wales

## Creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future

- 3.6 When embarking on a new direction, it is important for local authorities to articulate what their vision for the future is. Setting a vision helps to describe the local authority's purpose, what it is striving for, and what it wants to achieve. The vision should be derived from the local authority's core values and should function as a guiding principle to support long-term decision making.
- 3.7 Bristol City Council in its [Resilience Strategy 2016](#) set out a long-term direction of travel, reflecting the need for change at all levels: starting with individual citizens, through local communities and neighbourhoods, to the city as a whole and its place in the wider world. With the overall ambition of creating a flourishing resilient city the Council and its partners are focussing on:
- **Fair** – Every person living in Bristol has the assets and opportunities to enjoy a good quality of life.
  - **Liveable** – The city centre and neighbourhoods are great places for people of all ages to live, work, learn and play.
  - **Sustainable** – The city and region prosper within environmental limits through adopting new behaviours and technology.
  - **Agile** – Bristol citizens and leaders make effective decisions based on shared priorities and real-time information.
  - **Connected** – A strong network of local communities and organisations promotes trust, co-operation and shared action across the city.
- 3.8 Similarly, Oldham Council has embarked on a bold programme centred on becoming a co-operative borough with everybody doing their bit and everybody benefitting. The Council's [Corporate Plan](#) sets out an ambition of 'working with communities to reduce need by taking a community-centred, preventative approach to public services'. The starting point for the local authority was to recognise that everybody in Oldham has shared problems and ambitions and only by working together and looking at what the local authority, partners, community groups and individual citizens can do, are you be able to deliver change.

3.9 For Oldham, a whole system approach is required, engaging with communities to design and deliver things in partnership and emphasising self-help and responsibility by supporting communities to be more resilient. The driving ethos is to collaborate with communities to reduce need by focussing on four key areas of work:

- supporting local leaders and empowering people because the local authority is often not well placed to deal with issues at a community level;
- encouraging staff to constantly look for ways to improve services or solve problems, supporting them to take responsibility and act boldly;
- putting Oldham and its people first and doing what's best for communities; and
- creating a high-performance culture which focuses on knowledge and using data to maximise the impact of spending and service delivery choices.

### **Holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like**

3.10 Setting a vision is one thing. Making this a reality requires local authorities to enable a cultural shift within their communities, away from seeing them as the first point of contact when seeking help to a shared understanding of the future role of the local authority. This will require local authorities to clearly articulate a strong message on what they can and will do in the future but also how they will support and encourage communities to do more for themselves. In driving this shift, local authorities will need to ask some fundamental questions, for instance:

- What do we need to do differently to develop and improve the resilience in each of our communities?
- What support and assistance do we need to provide and maintain to ensure the resilience capability and capacity in each of our communities is retained?
- How can we maintain community resilience beyond the voluntary sector?
- What partnership approach and support are needed to truly enable community resilience?



- 3.11 As a starting point, local authorities will need to have an honest conversation with the public about the reality of future service provision and the potential role of the local community going forward. Within this conversation, local authorities will need to engage with communities to determine what they might be able to do without help, and how they can collaborate better with local people, local groups and local community assets.
- 3.12 Asset mapping is essential to highlight what already takes place and what others are doing, both for the local authority (elected members in their role as community champions and local authority staff) and local people. Likewise, local authorities will need to promote opportunities to apply for funding, directly to the local authority but also from other organisations, locally and nationally, and set out how they will support this activity.
- 3.13 An example highlighted in Scotland of intense involvement of communities in designing and planning new approaches is the use of Community 'Charrettes'. Supported with funding by the Scottish Government<sup>23</sup>, the Charette model brings together stakeholders and decision makers to collaborate with experts to co-develop solutions to address problem issues in the physical environment of an area. Examples of recent successful Charrettes include Crieff and Glenrothes West. As such, Charrettes have the power to provoke transformation; but without careful preparation they can backfire, creating distrust within communities. Although traditionally applied to regeneration and planning work, the Charette approach is also being used in policy and organisational planning and change efforts.

## Revitalising the role of local authority members as community champions

- 3.14 Elected members, as community leaders, can play a critical role in recasting the future relationship between the local authority and local communities. They often lead local partnerships, sit on the boards and management committees of voluntary groups, represent their communities with other organisations, such as the Police or Local Health Board, and regularly promote local services within the community.
- 3.15 Going forward, elected members will now have to deliver a different community leadership role, one which focuses on encouraging people to take more responsibility for their neighbourhoods and inspiring people to do more to help out in their local community. The role of elected members in developing stronger and more resilient communities cannot be underestimated. They will have key roles to play in:
- managing the expectations of communities, by setting out why things are changing and explaining why things will be different going forward;
  - identifying and collaborating with local community activists and leaders to ensure they are encouraged, supported and assisted to play a more prominent role in the future;
  - enabling the flow of two-way information and intelligence between local communities and the local authority, to identify the issues on the ground and provide the information local communities need to ensure they can get involved; and
  - acting as the channel between local community groups and the local authority to help develop local community-led solutions that strengthen resilience and meet local need.
- 3.16 A number of Welsh local authorities we interviewed highlighted the important role of elected members in developing community resilience and a rejuvenated role is central to strengthening self-reliance and community resilience. For example, in Cardiff, officers emphasised that members often 'approach life from the bottom up' and bring a deep understanding of community issues and the role the Council can play in helping communities to thrive.

3.17 In Oldham, the local authority has taken this approach a step further introducing in 2011 a Local Leaders Programme. This has been vital in equipping elected members with the skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for engaging with and driving a new relationship with communities. The course included a mix of elected member-led discussions, seminars offering useful tools and models, expert facilitators and speakers, and a range of formats for discussions and activities. The six modules covered:

- the local leadership role in communities;
- personal leadership skills and understanding;
- working inside the organisation and the politics;
- a deeper look at community leadership in Oldham;
- issues and challenges; and
- neighbourhoods, partnerships and outward communication.



### **Refocussing the work of local authority staff**

3.18 As with the revitalised role for elected members, local authorities will also need to ensure their workforce has the skills to deliver a new way of working. Local authority staff are trained and experienced in delivering services to people, but the move towards community development and community resilience work will entail a quite different way of thinking and doing for some.

3.19 At present, the model for many local authority services is predicated on meeting need, with responses concentrating on delivering actions to address short-term acute issues. But with less emphasis on direct provision and more focus on influencing others to do more, the local authority worker of the future will need to be able to foster positive working relationships with networks and groups in communities.

3.20 To do this well will require staff to be good communicators who are able to encourage and motivate people, facilitating change and encouraging communities and individuals to step up and do more. Critically, staff will also need to be effective problem solvers and active agents for change, being less concerned with process and more driven by delivering solutions on the ground.

3.21 Local authorities will therefore need to develop their workforce to be able to respond to this new set of challenges. This will mean redefining roles and responsibilities for those both on the frontline, but also managers. Support and training will be required to help engender a new culture and ethos for service delivery, focussing on prevention rather than intervention.

### **Recognising that recasting community relationship will require different solutions in different places**

3.22 Communities themselves are not uniform. They will have different capacities, skills and assets and each will come from a different starting point. It is clear that there are communities in Wales which are still coming to terms with their post-industrial past, where levels of poverty remain stubbornly high, and the socio-economic challenges are vast. The response to engendering community resilience in these areas will therefore be quite different to areas with high levels of affluence and an active history of doing many things for themselves with little intervention or support from local authorities.

3.23 Irrespective, it is important that local authorities recalibrate their relationship with their communities and find solutions that are specific to the differing needs of Wales. To be successful in achieving this shift of emphasis – from concentrating on need and service provision to focusing on mobilising the energies and strengths within communities – requires local authorities to create a new relationship with citizens, helping to build capacity and improve a community's potential to do more. For instance, by working with:

- **individuals**, including volunteers, to build capacity to do things that local authorities traditionally have done;
- **groups**, including faith and community groups, who offer a wealth of experience in helping support people and have established and successful links on the ground;
- **organisations**, including town and community councils, local businesses and anchor institutions, which are active in supporting local interests but now need to be encouraged to do more; and
- **networks**, including associations such as county voluntary councils and local partnerships which are better placed to influence others to do what is needed.

- 3.24 Research highlights that for communities to have the capacity to act, three things are generally required: the motivation and commitment to act; the resources required to support action; and the skills, confidence and understanding to act<sup>24</sup>. Often the starting point for local authorities is to understand current capacity within a community, focussing on things such as local needs and issues and the relative strengths and weaknesses of a community. Key to this is to identify the community players and leaders and to establish forums, systems, and structures that encourage participation, engagement and involvement.
- 3.25 Scotland's Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) has a track record in highlighting positive examples of community-led regeneration work and awarded Campbeltown in Argyll and Bute the most improved place award in 2020. In response to socio-economic challenge, the local authority initiated a wide-ranging programme of activities in Campbeltown that secured the participation of public, private, community and third-sector organisations<sup>25</sup>.
- 3.26 A shared vision based on trust and perseverance helped to transfer ownership from the local authority into the community which is now empowered to shape and deliver projects that respond to local circumstances to the extent that Campbeltown is once again a thriving town centre, and an increasingly attractive place to live, work and invest in. Importantly, less reliance is placed on the local authority with the community doing far more for itself.
- 3.27 The work in Argyll and Bute has also been helped greatly by the policy framework adopted by the Scottish Government under the umbrella of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – **Exhibit 7**.

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24 Building Community Capacity – Resources for Community Learning and Development Practice: A Guide, Scottish Government, 2007.

25 Argyll and Bute Council, Campbeltown Regeneration.

## Exhibit 7: Community Empowerment in Scotland

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was introduced to help empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services. To support implementation of the Act, the Scottish Government has sought to empower communities to do more for themselves through the provision of, for example:

- funding for community-led regeneration through the Empowering Communities Fund;
- funding participatory budgeting through the £1.5 million Community Choices Fund, giving people more power to make decisions on spending in their local areas; and
- making it easier for communities to take over land and buildings in public ownership through asset transfer and extending the community right to buy to all of Scotland;
- supporting community local authorities to represent communities' opinions and needs to public bodies; and
- giving communities the ability to request to participate in decisions and processes which are aimed at improving outcomes through participation requests.

Taken together, it is clear that national policy in Scotland has developed to encourage and support the ownership of assets by communities and for communities themselves to have more say in how services should both be provided to them and how public services should collaborate with them. Scottish communities now have legal rights to participate in policy development and buy assets from public bodies. They can shape services on the ground and play a greater role in deciding where resources are committed.

## Ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community

- 3.28 Community wealth building is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. It is an especially helpful model for delivering services in a time of restrictions on public funding, austerity and growing economic uncertainty because it seeks to stop, or at least limit, the flow of money out of those communities that most need investment and financial stimulation, by reshaping the local economy and using an organisation's assets in vastly different ways.
- 3.29 To do this, community wealth building uses the economic power of large, locally-rooted organisations, commonly referred to as 'Anchor Institutions' – **Exhibit 8**. The way in which these institutions spend their money, employ people and use their land, property and financial assets can make a huge difference to a local area. The role of 'Anchor Institutions' cannot be underestimated, and they can play a defining role in creating and reinforcing local economic ties.

### Exhibit 8: the role and value of Anchor Institutions

The term '**Anchor institutions**' is used to refer to organisations which:



Have an important presence in a place, usually through a combination of being largescale employers, the largest purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and/or having relatively fixed assets.

Are tied to a particular place by their mission, histories, physical assets and local relationships. Examples include local authorities, NHS services, universities, trade unions, large local businesses, the combined activities of the community and voluntary sector and housing associations.



Source: [Community business and anchor institutions](#), CLES, February 2019

3.30 The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has been at the forefront of developing approaches to community wealth building. Through their work with public sector bodies, CLES have identified five key principles that are critical to delivering successful community wealth building. These are:

- plural ownership of the economy;
- making financial power work for local places;
- fair employment and just labour markets;
- progressive procurement of goods and services; and
- socially productive use of land and property.

3.31 Preston City Council have been long-term exponents of Community Wealth Building and are a positive example of an organisation that are using the CLES method, focussing on providing value for communities within the city directly and indirectly through their policy choices and spending power. The City Council's approach, often referred to as the 'Preston Model', is centred around tackling inequality by collaborating and building locally controlled economies, which put communities first<sup>26</sup>. Practical examples of how the local authority has sought to deliver this vision on the ground include:

- using local authority procurement of services as a means of investing in the local economy and urging other local public sector partners to do the same. New procurement practices are providing opportunities for local SMEs, worker co-operatives, social enterprises and businesses to bid for contracts.
- encouraging suppliers to enhance the social value aspects of their contracts through the inclusion of training and employment opportunities in agreements.
- being an early adopter of the 'real living wage' locally and using the local authorities' profile and soft power to influence other employers to do the same.
- supporting and encouraging greater diversity of ownership in the local economy by investing directly in key assets in the centre of the city, bringing services back in-house and promoting worker cooperatives and community businesses;



- enabling more financial wealth to be retained locally by contributing to the establishment of a regional development bank – the North West Mutual – with Liverpool City Council and the Wirral. The new bank is tasked with improving access to financial services for local people and businesses, and has a specific aim to retain banking profits in the North West and recycle regional savings into business loans and mortgages.
- encouraging the Lancashire County Pension Fund to invest in Preston.



# Appendices

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- 1 **Audit approach and methods**
- 2 **Community resilience and self-reliance evaluation tool**

# 1 Audit approach and methods

## Approach

Our approach was to understand local authorities' definitions and approaches to building social resilience and community self-reliance and how town and community local authorities are supported to promote resilience.

This report sits alongside other reviews examining how local authorities are addressing poverty, and another review considering the role of social enterprises in delivering public services. Combined, they serve to examine how local authorities empower citizens to tackle and prevent issues developing into a crisis that requires statutory intervention.

We examined all 22 principal local authorities in Wales at a high level, managing delivery to be mindful of the pressures local authority officers are under during both the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We ensured coverage was sufficient to draw a view on the whole sector but not to significantly detract from officers' delivery. Our approach was flexible to fit around officers when agreeing and delivering our fieldwork.

## Methods

We completed our review between September 2021 and August 2022 and used a range of methods in delivering our review:

- **document review** – we reviewed published research and documentation from the Welsh Government, local authorities and other relevant public bodies. We also reviewed a range of publications from representative groups, research organisations and public bodies in other UK countries.
- **interviews and focus groups** – we undertook a range of different interviews and focus groups:
  - officer interviews – we interviewed officers nominated by all Welsh principal local authorities, generally those with responsibility for leading on social resilience and community self-reliance. These took place between January and May 2022.

- officer focus groups – in line with our flexible approach, some local authorities felt it was more appropriate for us to speak to a range of officers in focus groups to provide more rounded information and reduce our impact on service delivery.
- national interviews – we interviewed representatives from national bodies, UK-wide think tanks, research organisations and representative bodies. These took place between March and July 2022.
- **surveys** – we undertook two surveys to inform our work:
  - a national survey of town and community councils – we invited all 732 town or community councils in Wales to share their views on social resilience and community self-reliance through an online survey. We received a total of 336 responses, including 195 fully completed submissions and a further 141 partially completed responses. The completed responses represent roughly one in every four town or community council in Wales, and we received responses from all 22 local authority areas.
  - survey of senior local authority officers. We invited all 22 local authorities to participate and received 21 responses. Despite being invited to take part, Pembrokeshire County Council elected not to respond.
- **data analysis** – we collected and analysed a range of publicly available datasets from the Welsh Government, the UK Government, the Office for National Statistics, and third-sector organisations.

## 2 Community resilience and self-reliance evaluation tool

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
<b>Understanding the challenge and articulating your role</b>			
We have clearly defined and agreed what community resilience and self-reliance means to us.			
Our vision makes clear what we need to do and what others are best placed to do.			
We have identified by service the activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that the authority must continue to provide;</li> <li>• those that can be delivered in partnership with others; and</li> <li>• those that the community can lead on.</li> </ul>			
We have communicated our definitions widely to ensure all key stakeholders understand what we want to achieve through our work on community resilience and self-reliance.			
Our key partners have identified how they will collaborate with us to strengthen community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have completed a place-based asset mapping exercise to assess community resilience and capacity for increased self-reliance.			
We know the number and types of organisations working locally that can help us improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We know where there are gaps that we need to address.			

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
We have agreed the actions required to help improve community resilience and self-reliance in our area.			
We have set SMART objectives and actions on how we will improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We are clear on the benefits and risks of our work on community resilience and self-reliance for citizens, local communities and the local authority.			

**Knowing your communities**

We know who our key community activists and leaders are.			
We have good working relationships and work effectively with our key community activists and leaders.			
We provide help, support and training to ensure our key community activists and leaders are as effective as they can be.			
We effectively encourage local community activists and leaders to improve community resilience and self-reliance.			

**Skills and knowledge to build community resilience**

We are good at encouraging people to help out and do more in their community.			
We have the right staff in the right place to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have revised job descriptions and person specifications to strengthen their focus on involvement, to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			

<b>Action</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Do not know</b>
We give staff the opportunity to take well-managed risks and explore innovative practices with communities.			
Our staff are good at influencing people to do more for themselves where they can.			
Elected members support the authority's work on strengthening community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have put in place the right support to help Elected Members strengthen community resilience and self-reliance in their wards.			
We have a can-do culture and mindset within the local authority to improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We are good at encouraging communities to find their own solutions to problems and not rely on us.			

**Making a difference**

We have reviewed ways of working across the Council and are changing services to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have identified how these changes will impact on people.			
We are communicating to citizens how our services are changing.			
We have specified the information required to evaluate how our work is improving community resilience and self-reliance.			
We use our resources, money and assets to build and retain wealth in our local communities.			

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
We use our procurement of services as a means of investing in the local economy.			
We work with our local anchor institutions to ensure they support community wealth building through their provision of services, use of resources, procurement and assets.			
We encourage suppliers to enhance the social value aspects of their contracts through the inclusion of training and employment opportunities in agreements.			
<p>We regularly report on our community resilience and self-reliance work to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced set of performance information that covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demand for local authority services;</li> <li>• alternative provision within communities and by partners; and</li> <li>• impact of our work on people's wellbeing.</li> </ul>			
Our scrutiny and evaluation processes provide us with assurance that our work is delivering anticipated outcomes.			







Audit Wales

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