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Ffôn: 01269 595400

Un Llais Cymru
One Voice Wales

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Phone: 01269 595400

Dear Clerk

Please bring this letter to the attention of your Chair and Councillors.

Membership of One Voice Wales 2024/25

I am writing to invite your council to renew its membership to join One Voice Wales from April 2024. Once again, the past year has seen many positive developments to our services and for the community and town council sector in general, many of which are outlined in this letter, which we believe add significantly to the value for money offered by One Voice Wales membership.

We continue to represent the sector in a wide variety of ways – we regularly meet with the Minister for Finance and Local Government Rebecca Evans MS and we continue to represent the sector on the ***Local Government Partnership Council***. During 2023-24 we have once again made strong representation on the role the sector can play in supporting sustainable local services and supporting the Local Government Reform agenda amongst others. We have maintained and further enhanced our working relationships with the Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the WCVA strengthening the voice of the sector within the public services family in Wales and improving working relations with the Third Sector.

One Voice Wales continues to make significant contributions to public policy developments through our representation on several Welsh Government advisory panels including the ***Climate Change Panel, Ystadau Cymru Working Group, Ministerial Towns Action Advisory Group***, ***Welsh Government Litter Advisory Panel, Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing***, ***Welsh Government Diversity in Democracy Working Group, Welsh Government Democratic Health Task and Finish Group, Older Persons Commissioner Age Friendly Steering Group, Welsh Government Advisory Board on Resourceful Communities as well as Understanding Welsh Places Advisory Board.*** One Voice Wales is playing an ever-increasing role in the development of resources for the sector, for example, through our **Local Places for Nature Officer** in our team who has helped hundreds of councils to date on environmental projects and issues; and following funding off Public Health Wales via Save a Life Cymru we were able to establish the post of **Community CPR and Defibrillator Manager** in the team who helped hundreds of community and town councils in 2023/24 in developing this critically important agenda. We also played a significant role working with the Welsh Government and SLCC colleagues in the development of a **Finance and Governance Toolkit** for the sector which will help to drive up standards of working practice. We continue to work collaboratively with a range of other bodies including the ***Local Government Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales, Independent Remuneration Panel, Public Services Ombudsman and Audit Wales***. So, our ability to influence key stakeholder organisations continues to grow year on year.

In 2023/24 we were successful in our funding bid to the Welsh Government to recruit a Digital Project Manager and a Cost-of-Living crisis support team. Justin Horrell is delivering on a project plan to support councils in relation to digital approaches and will be instrumental in helping us develop a new website that will provide member councils with a wealth of up-to-

date information include practice guidance in an easily accessible format. Our new Cost of Living crisis support team will be delivering on a project plan designed to support councils with a range of issues linked with the ongoing cost of living issues faced by communities in Wales. The funding will continue into the next two financial years.

Our representational role means that ***we have a direct interface not only with the Minister for Finance and Local Government but other Ministers*** where our sector's remit extends. During 2023-24 we made several representations to the ***Minister for Climate Change*** on a range of matters - on the need for greater resources for the sector, the need for digital skills and capabilities to be developed, the role community and town councils can play in town regeneration and community planning, how the sector can support the decarbonization agenda, devolution of services and asset transfer agenda and support for the sector to better engage on the green infrastructure agenda. During 2023-24 we have extended our ***representational role*** - One Voice Wales' many Councillors across Wales are increasingly able to provide their views on a wide range of policy areas to support our lobbying activities and ***influence government and stakeholder organisations*** in their decision-making. This includes representation on health trust stakeholder forums and several ***Public Services Boards***. These developments have improved and further developed our representational and lobbying roles and we will seek to further develop them in 2024-25.

Some of our other accomplishments over the past 12 months include:

- There has been a healthy increase in membership numbers during the year. Over 90% (89% previous year) of all councils in membership of One Voice Wales, or 670 (653 previous year) out of the 732 Councils in Wales and this is the highest level of membership since One Voice Wales was formed. Plans are already in place to drive increases in membership in 2024-25.
- Through our Local Places for Nature Officer post, we have enabled over £1m of funding to be accessed by Community and Town Councils across Wales with a further £500,000 of projects having been worked up for 2023/24.

As current members are aware, we provide the following services outlined below, and we are aware from feedback from our members that all aspects of the service are highly valued.

- **Provision of free legal advice** from a team of experienced Solicitors which can save members significant time and cost compared with using local solicitors for advice (These savings can in many cases exceed the membership that is payable)

- ***Quality and timely advice and support service*** on topics relevant to member councils.

- ***Training*** for members and staff, including policy seminars and new working opportunities.

- ***General information via our website including a members' area***.

- ***Monthly*** editions of our new ***'E- Newsletter'*** and wider forms of communication on social media by our new Communications Officer

- ***Representation*** of the sector on the Local Government Partnership Council.

- Creating ***new opportunities for collaboration*** with national organisations across Wales.

The training and development agenda is another area where much progress has been made during 2023-24 with the continued successful delivery of webinar-based training. Under the auspices of the ***National Training Advisory Group***, chaired by One Voice Wales, we have continued to refine and develop and extend our training provision to the community and town council sector. Once again, the breadth of our training programmes has been extended and will be available to members throughout the year. To date it is very pleasing to see councils actively engaging in developing their skills and abilities as the sector's role grows in importance.

Furthermore, our ***Consultancy Services*** have been growing at a pace with many councils taking advantage of this service. We are increasingly able to provide 'One Stop Shop' solutions for our members and have supported our councils on ***community planning exercises, HR*** and **personnel matters including representation at Industrial Tribunals**, assisted in ***policy development and health and safety*** – and at ***costs significantly below market rates***. Please contact the Ammanford Office if you would like further details on how we can support you through these services.

Importantly our role as a representative body has been significantly improved with a significant growth in our membership during 2023-24 – ***at year end we had 670 local councils in membership or 91.5% of all community and town councils***.

I hope that this summary of current and future developments has demonstrated that One Voice Wales continues to do all it can to represent the sector, provide high-class information, and support service for our members.

For your council to have a voice in the future of this vital sector of local government, and to benefit from the support provided by One Voice Wales, please return the attached Membership Form by email or to our office in Ammanford – the address is at the top of this letter.

If you have any further queries relating to membership, please contact the office on 01269 595400 / 07917 846510 or email: tgilmartin@onevoicewales.wales

I trust that your Council will give this invitation full consideration and I hope to be able to welcome you into membership shortly. I look forward to working with your council in 2024-25.

Yours sincerely,

Lyn Cadwallader
Chief Executive