

A citizen-led recovery: working better together 2

SEMINAR REPORT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for us all, but what has been clear is that by working together we achieve so much more and identify opportunity.

This second virtual seminar follows the first on 20th January 2021, which explored what has worked, and how we can maintain momentum and work better together in the future to ensure that Pembrokeshire citizens are at the heart of the post-COVID recovery.

A number of areas for working better together were identified, which fell into four key areas. This seminar will explore two of these in more

depth, with a further session in March exploring the other two.

The seminar is for City, Town & Community Councils, facilitated by Pembrokeshire County Council, working with Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services and PLANED.

Date:
Thursday 25th February 2021

Time:
6.30-8pm

Is there a cost?
No

Who is it for?

Any member of a Pembrokeshire City, Town or Community Council who would like to see how we can empower citizens across Pembrokeshire.

How do I register?

Please click on [this link](#) to register for the seminar. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing instructions for joining the meeting.

The seminar was attended by 38 people:

- 25 representatives from City, Town and Community Councils (T&CCs) (3 of whom are also Pembrokeshire County Councillors)
 - There were 5 City and Town Councils represented (Fishguard & Goodwick, Haverfordwest, Narberth, Newport, and St David's)
 - There were 15 Community Councils represented (Crymych, Freystrop, Jeffreyton, Kilgetty / Begelly, Lamphey, Llanddewi Velfrey, Llanrhian, Maenclochog, Manorboer, Marloes & St Bride's, Martletwy, Saundersfoot, Solva, Templeton, and Tiers Cross)
- 5 officers from Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC)
- 4 officers from Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS)
- 3 officers from PLANED
- 1 officer from Together for Change

The presentations

County Councillor Phil Baker opened and chaired the meeting. Cllr Baker is Cabinet member for Infrastructure, Licensing and Major Events, and also has the lead for Town and Community Council Liaison. Cllr Baker referred to the previous seminar held in January. The feedback from that seminar fell into four broad categories: two

of those would be looked at in more detail at this seminar, and the other two in March.

Antony Topazio, Communications Officer at PCC, reflected on the issues raised at the January seminar relating to **communication and sharing information** and offered some thoughts on these topics moving forward.

Iwan Thomas, Chief Executive at PLANED, then reviewed the views expressed around **collaboration and sharing resources** at the January seminar, also referring to the recent interactive map launched by PLANED of City, Town and Community Councils across Pembrokeshire.

Lee Hind (Regional Lead for Digital Timebanking, PAVS) provided a demonstration of the Connect Pembrokeshire platform (www.connectpembrokeshire.org.uk) and the potential it has for helping to improve both communication and collaboration between and across organisations.

Break out session

Due to the number of people on the seminar, the group split into five smaller groups to address the two themes introduced by Antony and Iwan:

- Communication and sharing information
- Collaboration and sharing resources

The feedback notes from each group follow.

Group 1

- Discussed the issue of targeted versus non-targeted communication, from all-household leaflet drops to digital. On balance felt there was a role for both, but none were perfect – they all have limitations. Reality is a range of communication methods are needed.
- A lot of people are not digitally connected, and some never will be. Need to support people wherever possible.
- Surveys can be a useful communication tool, and can help you target communications to those who are particularly interested in something.
- Have to be cautious of only engaging with the ‘grumpy minority’.
- Town & Community Councils have limited time / capacity (apart from the Clerk they are all volunteers), and this will impact on their ability to communicate well with their communities. Most are not communications professionals. Can support be provided?
- A lack of connection between communities is a barrier, often feel like they are working on their own. There is a lack of cohesiveness.
- Previously a lack of communication between T&CCs and PCC/others.
- COVID has helped develop relationships, especially informal ones e.g. through the Community Halls Network with PAVS & PLANED.
- There are perhaps 3 key strands to better communication:
 - Informal
 - Link Officers (felt this was very helpful in the past)

- One Voice Wales (very useful, especially for advice & support)
- Some help with sharing ideas through facilitation would be helpful.

Group 2

- Clarifying terms – clear on what we are seeking to achieve
 - How we communicate, discuss, link with each other
- We all need to be using the same platform
 - Public Service Board (PSB), citizens, community groups etc.
- Introduction neglected to talk about One Voice Wales' (OVW) participation in development of T&CC Charter with PCC – has never really been properly implemented – wonder how relevant the document is as a result of the pandemic
 - Is it far too bureaucratic?
 - How relevant do PCC feel it could be?
- Connect Pembrokeshire
 - Lockdown – people are more sophisticated and confident online
 - How do we cut through all the other channels that people use
 - Prospect of another channel can be overwhelming
 - No good for people with no internet and no intention to use internet
 - Very young platform
 - Can be good for T&CCs to communicate on projects
 - There is some value in variety – connect platform is a tool in a number of others
 - Looks very good – lots won't use it but worth persevering
 - Allows many different working groups and sub committees
- Lots of different things being suggested
 - Already have OVW
 - OVW doesn't cover all of Pembrokeshire – a number of T&CCs are not members
- Conversations/meetings etc. are all tools for communication also – these can be face to face in addition to online platforms
- Buy into a common framework – Communication and Participation Framework
 - Sank without trace
 - Could it be revisited?
 - Don't need to reinvent the wheel
 - Frustration with communications in some areas of PCC
 - Commissioned an external review – developing an action plan
 - Broadcast/communicated at rather than communicated with
- Are other PSB organisations involved in this conversation?
 - Need to look at improving relationships
 - We aren't working well together
- We need to work together – not for PCC to lead on this
 - Joint endeavour
 - Regular newsletter that council is putting together – some are very active, others are not interested in what comes out of PCC
 - Could be an opportunity for PCC to put together a headline newsletter – what has happened and what is coming up
 - There isn't a functional forum/network in Haverfordwest
 - Could we have a network of forums linked in with Town Teams under a PCC umbrella

- Engagement HQ – What is this?

Group 3

Paid ideas. Funded support roles/systems.

The relationship between PCC and T&CCs was a strong theme in this group. Points about how things used to be were paramount but I got the feeling that this is not a problem, as perhaps the previous methods were more collaborative, are missed and could be explored again. Members raised how useful previous Link Officers were to their council.

Some told us that County Councillors do not attend their meetings despite invitations but others said their County Councillor always came and helped. The question around their duties and requirements was highlighted. The concern of County Councillors sometimes being party political was highlighted and perhaps this tier of government is not the place for this.

We heard about one community that has recently needed and was given a Link Officer type role and found this extremely useful. The group seemed to agree that a role such as this is about being connected and information being fed up and down in a timely manner.

It was discussed how hard it is to hear back from PCC and there is no way to directly contact the person/specialist you need. The idea of a shared directory was suggested - this could also include other partners such as PSB members. We also discussed knowing who to engage with e.g. who is the best person or place to contact about particular issues?

Communication (in order to collaborate and share)

Again, lack of responses from PCC was brought up. However, it was also recognised that PCC team members were stretched and those that do and can help are valued.

The group discussed a way to know what skills and strengths other T&CCs can offer and share. The directory idea was mentioned again as a way of empowering each other and turning to each other first. The clerk in our group clerks for various communities and explained that clustering and working across borders is possible if you are organised.

Partnerships

OVW was brought into the discussion, not all present are members. One said they'd found it useful for legal matters in the past but no longer require membership, whereas the clerk member told us they are very useful (our time was running out at this point). I also asked about the Clerk Association to draw back on a comment and our clerk told us that this network is useful.

Throughout discussions, it was mentioned that T&CCs would like recognition and respect for their roles. And in turn clerks would like more respect when coming to PCC

for support. Skills sharing was again raised and PAVS highlighted as a partner to link with.

Group 4

Communication

- Noted that slow broadband speeds hinder digital communication – some councillors, especially in rural areas, have unstable broadband connections and therefore miss parts of meetings. Speed of broadband connection was felt to be more of an issue than digital skills of councillors.
- Ensuring that councillors have access to correspondence / information is the first priority.

Focus of T&CC agenda with PCC (collaboration as well as communication)

- Idea of a Designated Cabinet member floated to champion local democracy. For instance Solva and St Davids already liaise closely along with Brawdy CC so there is an existing grouping that a Cabinet member could approach to get a view from a local area. This would also demonstrate that Cabinet values the T&CC voice.
- Potential for T&CCs to have a structure that mirrors some of the Cabinet portfolio – housing, economy, education champion.
- PCC could be more active in reminding T&CCs to communicate with each other.

Creating a resource to promote collaboration

- Need a dedicated Pembrokeshire wide resource to support T&CCs, to promote best practice, be independent and work on thematic or geographic issues.
- Worth exploring the Family of Councils idea – councils linking with neighbouring councils to share resources and expertise (but also noted that this is in the context of having relatively small groupings)
- Noted that some Clerks work for a number of councils and this may help create hubs

Group 5

- Every T&CC is different.
- It would be great to have a register of assets that community Councils have. Some can generate incomes from allotments, land etc.
- T&CCs could share assets e.g. ride on mowers
- Buy resources in collaboration e.g. laptops, projectors, in the hope of having a reduced price
- Insurance – as all T&CCs must have insurance a joint application to cover all could result in a reduced price
- Connect Pembrokeshire could be beneficial as a way of sharing information, good practice comparing and resolving similar issues.
- A questionnaire via Connect to see how the various T&CCs have used grant funding from Enhancing Pembrokeshire. Sharing resource e.g. policies etc.

- Cluster working to support each other as clerks. Full time clerks offering support and guidance to part-time clerks where needed and working with community halls and community officers.

Notes from the Zoom chat

During the presentations from each group (above) some additional topics and comments were captured in the Zoom chat function as follows:

- T&CCs on Facebook: have a look at Llanrhian Community Council on Facebook. It doesn't need to be a huge time commitment at all and we get good engagement with our community by signposting and sharing
- For any further information regarding the Community Buildings Forum please contact liz.cook@pavs.org.uk
- Mapping of community assets across the county - as well as finding ways to use assets more effectively this could be a good exercise for T&CCs to work together to create to build links... (see Asset Based Community Development)
- The Welsh Government have made £10 million available to support social enterprises and local authorities to deliver broadband projects locally. Funding is available for projects that deliver innovative broadband solutions to communities and parts of Wales which do not currently have access to 30Mbps broadband speeds (<https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/broadband>)

Next steps

Cllr Phil Baker wrapped up the evening, thanking all for their contributions on what had been an extremely positive seminar. It was agreed that the next seminar will be on Thursday 25th March at 630pm.