



Local government engagement with the voluntary sector

INTRODUCTION

For the four key themes that Welsh Government set out in *Prosperity for All – A Wales that is prosperous and secure; healthy and active; ambitious and learning, and united and connected* – to be achieved, it's vital that local government engages efficiently and effectively with the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector are key service providers at grassroots level, therefore are often more able to access and connect with communities than local government, and better placed to perform meaningful engagement.

To provide these services to communities, strong collaborative relationships between the voluntary sector and local government are essential. However, for this to happen, genuine co-productive working between all parties, including service users, is required, along with sufficient resource for the sector to provide these services effectively.

This paper presents case studies showcasing areas in which the sector and local government have worked well together, and sets out some asks of Welsh Government and local government to help improve collaborative cross-sector working across Wales.

CASE STUDIES

Supporting volunteers and improving wellbeing

Volunteers have been involved through the [Community Connections](#) programme of Bridges Community Centre in Monmouth since 2011. Building on this work, the [Volunteering for Wellbeing](#) programme began in 2019, a partnership between Bridges and Monmouthshire County Council. It has a much larger vision and works with statutory and third sector partners across the county to build community wellbeing by recruiting, training and supporting people of all ages to offer their services to a wide range of social and local community initiatives.

'Since 2016 we have worked to bring social value organisations together, including public services, charities, community organisations and Gwent Association of Voluntary

Organisations to talk about how we can best support individuals to stay well and how we collaborate to enable this,' said Nicki Needle, Changing Practice Changing Lives Lead, Monmouthshire Social Care and Health.

A key realisation was that people often need a purpose they can contribute to, rather than a referral to a service that can 'help them'. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act confirmed the direction of travel, towards more community involvement and greater focus on what matters to individuals, was the right one.

Upskilling young people and enhancing economic activity

Working in partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council and local schools, The Alternative Learning Company is an educational establishment which gives a second chance to hard to reach and disengaged young people, children who aren't meeting their potential in school and whose needs aren't met by mainstream education.

2018 was the first year of operation for this project, taking in pupils from year 10 and 11 whose needs were not being met by mainstream education. Several of these young people were in danger of becoming victims of sexual exploitation and many had substance abuse issues. Quite a few weren't living with parents (who may themselves have health related challenges to contend with), and a lot of young people had a wide range of social/emotional difficulties whilst others have ADHD or autism.

Of the 15 year-11s they took on in their first year of operations, all predicted to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), every single one has gone on to further education, employment or training. 50% of them finished with attendance of 70% or above and completed 191 units from Agored Cymru, leading to 36 qualifications. They also engaged with community work such as walking up Pen y Fan to raise money for charity.

Reducing the impacts of poverty

The School Uniform Recycle Scheme is a project in which Denbighshire County Council partnered with Citizens Advice Denbighshire after a single mother approached CAD in debt, with three children, no income and no school uniform.

A pop-up shop was opened in which families brought clean unwanted uniforms to recycle, while a £1 donation allowed other families to take as much as they needed.

The project did so well it was able to expand. The County Council helped with promotion, with Denbigh and Rhyl Town Councils provided grants for new uniforms and shoes, while local businesses hosted other pop-up shops and churches, with volunteers, washed and pressed uniform.

The project now covers the whole county and brings the community together.

Social Care/Prevention agenda

The Ffrind I Mi (Friend of Mine) initiative in Gwent involves a range of statutory and third sector partners, including Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, Newport City Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Age Cymru and the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. It works to ensure that anyone feeling lonely or isolated is supported to reconnect with their communities. Working with Community Connectors and existing volunteer befriending services, the project aims to recruit as many volunteers as possible to support those affected, seeking to match the interests of people to volunteers with the same interests e.g. gardening, watching sport, dog walking etc.

Community Asset Transfer

Community Asset Transfers was a focus of this year's Fire Starter Festival, which aims to create a movement around showcasing and encouraging creativity and innovation for social change and transformation. An event was organised by Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC) and its umbrella body Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW), to explain the process, positives and potential pitfalls of acquiring an asset from the County Council. Community Interest Company, Café Isa, provided the perfect location for the event, having formed specifically for the purpose of taking on the former library and community centre building that was at risk of closure but is now still thriving five years on.

At the outset of the community asset programme in Flintshire, FLVC worked closely with Flintshire County Council in devising and implementing a supportive process to be followed by community groups wishing to take on responsibility for a space or building. Throughout the process, FLVC provides advice and guidance to groups, and acts as a critical friend to discuss the potential pitfalls and what can be done to overcome them. The County Council provide transparent data such as the current expenditure, usage/occupancy rates, schematics and an up-to-date condition survey.

There are now up to 30 assets either transferred or in due legal process. Transferred assets range from Leisure Centres adopted by newly formed Charitable Incorporated Organisations to Community Allotments run by constituted groups formed by existing tenants.

The event itself included presentations and questions to a panel made up of representatives from FLVC, TSSW, Flintshire County Council, and funders Community Facilities Programme, the National Lottery Fund, and Social Investment Cymru.

Other areas the voluntary sector and local government should be working together on include:

- Emergency planning and resilience (County Voluntary Councils are usually represented on each region's Emergency Planning Forum)
- Brexit, particularly on upholding rights and preventing hate crime
- Tackling the Climate Emergency
- Mitigating impacts of welfare reform
- Co-productive commissioning of services (which is often inhibited by tight timescales)
- Scrutiny of services

- Greater participative democracy

Recommendation

For more collaborative, co-productive working to take place successfully between the voluntary sector and local authorities, we ask that a joint task and finish group is formed between WLGA, WCVA, CVCs and Welsh Government. This should consider a number of issues, including:

- Community-led planning - to help increase participation in local democracy, build community resilience, promote the prevention agenda, impact positively on decarbonisation and maximise the links between local businesses, local government, the voluntary sector and communities.
- Ensuring that Local Authorities work collaboratively with voluntary sector service providers should any local authority mergers happen, as per the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, thereby impacting on service providers.
- Ensuring that Local Authorities work collaboratively with the sector and communities in developing the Public Participation Strategies set out by the above Act.
- To look at issues around how local authorities commission services in partnership with the voluntary sector.
- How the issues raised in the Auditor General's report on [local authority funding of the third sector](#) will be addressed.

We recommend this group consults with the Third Sector Partnership Council and reports back to the next Partnership Council meeting.

*The Housing and Local Government voluntary sector network
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