



# Preparing for different futures: the wellbeing economy session report

## CONTEXT

Throughout May and June 2020 WCVA facilitated a programme of on-line discussion forums to gain an understanding of the issues facing the voluntary sector in Wales as a result of COVID-19, the different future possibilities that are emerging and how we can best prepare by steering towards the future outcomes that the sector wants. This builds on the [initial learning](#) that WCVA published in May 2020.

A series of six sessions each focused on a different topic; ran alongside a wider questionnaire. These were promoted across WCVA's membership and were free to access.

This work focusses on four key questions:

- What has been the impact of COVID-19?
- Where could this lead to long term change - both positive and negative?
- What are the implications for the voluntary sector in Wales?
- What could voluntary organisations, WCVA, government, or other decision-makers do that can help steer us towards a better future?

A summary report was prepared for each session, by [Richard Newton Consulting](#); along with a final report which sought to pull together key themes

and actions. These will be shared widely with the sector and others, such as funders and policymakers.

These reports seek to establish themes and actions rather than create a summary of what was said. They reflect the survey responses and contributions during the events, rather than WCVA or Richard Newton Consulting's positions. We cannot verify if they are wholly accurate or rather people's perceptions.

On 18 June 2020 the sixth discussion forum was held exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the Wellbeing Economy.

Over 80 organisations registered to attend representing a breadth of organisations from the not-for-profit sector. This included registered charities and community interest companies, along with support organisations including WCVA, CVCs and local authorities. The session was run in conjunction with Business in the Community.

## **WELLBEING ECONOMY - WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF COVID-19?**

The move to lockdown was immediate and mandated. It was necessitated by immediate public health concerns. As lockdown extended, and now starts to lift to some level, there is evidence that there have been areas of concern in relation to how our economy supports wider wellbeing, and what needs to happen to create an economy focussed on wellbeing in the future.

Participants reported:

- People have been unable to access wider services as some have stopped, and others have moved to a digital style of delivery which excludes a number of individuals. There is genuine concern about the number of service users who are not digitally connected and who have disappeared. In defining services, we refer not only to community services, but to wider public services linked to health and wellbeing.
- Many community venues which are central to the delivery of community services have temporarily shut. The longer they remain shut the more complex and costlier their re-opening becomes. This is further challenged by the fact that many of these facilities operate on very low

financial margins (ie difficult to bear the costs of additional cleaning / inspections etc.) and the fact that many are run by older volunteers who find themselves in the shielding group.

- Advice services were also highlighted as an area of concern. These have not only been affected by changes to the format of delivery but have also seen a surge in demand due to the financial pressures faced by the wider economy and by many claiming benefits for the first time.
- Some services have reported broadening their provision; community transport for instance has developed to deliver shopping and prescriptions as well as transporting residents.
- Isolation has affected many - not just the traditionally isolated but also those who have been affected by homeworking and shielding. This reaches beyond the older community who are often associated with isolation.
- Those shielding and caring for young children are felt to be a forgotten group – often engaging in significant care responsibilities with very little support.

## **WELLBEING ECONOMY - WHERE COULD THIS LEAD TO LONG TERM CHANGE - BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE?**

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic stretches beyond the initial public health emergency with economic and social consequences. Welsh Government has talked about a 'just and green' recovery, and the voluntary sector potentially has a key role to play in this. Some countries are moving beyond an economy measured by GDP to a wellbeing economy. It was thought that many community and voluntary groups understand wellbeing economics and social value better than statutory economic development bodies.

Of note:

- Now was the time to create a prosperous Wales as defined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act - creating a low carbon, innovative, productive, circular, wellbeing economy that creates social value, fair work, local procurement, involving young people etc.

- The present sense of community is really strong. This needs investing in so as to retain the energy and volunteers seen as part of the community response.
- The move to digital / remote delivery has value but cannot be at the expense of face to face to delivery. It excludes some users, and the remote environment makes it harder to pick up on safeguarding issues etc. linked to vulnerability.
- Public Service Boards need to change their approach in order to improve effectiveness and recognising the breadth of community stakeholders.

## **WELLBEING ECONOMY - WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN WALES?**

Wales is particularly fragile in relation to economic recovery. Wales has been over-represented in various studies in terms of communities shown to be fragile / disadvantaged in respect of their recovery needed as a result of the impact of the COVID pandemic.

There is a feeling that it is a period where change is possible, and the sector could position itself for the different future that it wants. That said, there are many challenges that remain linked to scaling up, availability of funding, measuring impact and value for money. It has been refreshing to deliver services on the basis of trust and need rather than risk assessment; reductions in the level of red tape have really helped this. The voluntary sector has often led the way in terms of service delivery – able to operate in an agile and time efficient nature when compared to statutory partners.

For there to be change, moving from economic to social / wellbeing indicators of prosperity, we need to change the basis of decision making. It was felt that decision making about communities were often made in Board Rooms well away from the communities affected by the decision making. There is the potential for Citizens Assemblies and participatory budgeting.

Funders also need to consider changing their thinking - there is often a focus on narrow outputs rather than broader progress against wellbeing objectives.

As explored in previous sessions, with the threats and challenges facing many organisations, it was felt that structural changes to the sector were inevitable.

## **WELLBEING ECONOMY - WHAT COULD VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS, WCVA, GOVERNMENT, OR OTHER DECISION-MAKERS DO THAT CAN HELP STEER US TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE?**

There are a number of actions emerging from the session for WCVA and members to consider and take forward with other stakeholders in order ensure that the sector is best placed to respond to the challenges of creating a wellbeing economy.

- ▶ WCVA and its members, through its positioning on various task forces and strategic partnerships, need to push for a green and just recovery that is measured against broader measures of wellbeing, not just economic ones.
- ▶ Achievement of a wellbeing economy requires the joint vision of many within the sector - from small community groups through to larger charities, and other types of organisations e.g. housing associations. Work needs to be undertaken to link these groups to a common vision.
- ▶ In addition to collective working within the sector, the sector needs to work with colleagues in the private and public sectors to determine indicators that could be used in addition to economic measures to determine a wellbeing economy.
- ▶ There is a significant challenge in terms of significantly increasing small community focused activity and the sector needs to explore how this can happen in order to inform recovery modelling.
- ▶ Work needs to be undertaken with funders and commissioners to recognise the need to fund community activity and support wider wellbeing objectives.
- ▶ As in prior sessions, the sector needs support with any restructuring challenges which may arise.

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