



Make a bigger difference together

PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL, MARCH 2020

INTRODUCTION

1. WCVA's purpose is to enable voluntary organisations in Wales to make a bigger difference together. We know we can make an even bigger difference on the issues that drive voluntary organisations – from community sports to tackling climate change – if we also work together with public bodies and business.
2. Public bodies have also set out why working with the voluntary sector is so important to achieving their ambitions. That includes in *Prosperity for All* and it is reflected in key legislation in Wales.
3. Despite the policy, legislation and shared ambitions, we are still struggling to make this a reality in practice.
4. This paper recommends a joint task and finish group to report back on next steps to the Partnership Council and Third Sector Partnership Council in the autumn. It has drawn on contributions from voluntary organisations looking at relationships with local government.

OPPORTUNITIES

5. Voluntary organisations and public bodies make different and distinct contributions to our society. The overall outcomes that they are trying to achieve are often shared. These cover an extremely broad spectrum

of issues, from tackling the biodiversity crisis to strengthening positive relationships within and across communities.

6. A thriving voluntary sector in Wales is vital for achieving government's ambitions. Voluntary organisations are independent of government, but they are a social foundation on which our public services build and are vital to addressing complex issues requiring more flexible, people-centred responses.
7. Whilst relatively few voluntary organisations have a direct relationship with government; government policy, funding and legislation impact on their ability to fulfil their missions.
8. By understanding our distinct roles and how we can work better together, we can all tap into a much bigger collective resource.
9. This is not a new idea. It is already reflected in key legislation, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.
10. There are structures and mechanisms to support joint work, including local compacts, a Welsh Government Code of Practice for Funding that other public bodies should also follow, Public Service Boards and Regional Partnership Boards.
11. There are plenty of examples that demonstrate how people's lives can be improved when we get it right (see case studies in annex A).
12. There are many projects and programmes where public bodies and voluntary sector organisations are working together. This includes on diversity, human rights, Brexit, volunteering, community assets, climate change and community-led planning. The recent floods demonstrated the vital role that volunteers, community groups and big voluntary organisations play in emergency responses, working with public bodies.
13. Voluntary organisations are working with government and the Senedd to shape legislation, including the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. They are also a big part of our local democracy.

CHALLENGES

14. Despite all of this, examples where we work together well are still patchy. All too often, the reality in our communities is very different.
15. Numerous papers and reports have set out the impact on people and communities when we fail to work well together. The points at which this happens and some of the reasons why have also been set out. Many of these issues have been raised and discussed previously at the [Partnership Council](#) and Third Sector Partnership Council.
16. To play its full part, the voluntary sector needs to grow stronger and more resilient, and to be fit for the future. This will enable it to lead more innovation, act as critical friends to influence public bodies – and businesses – and empower communities through voluntary action.
17. Key areas that need addressing on how local government works well with voluntary organisations include:
 - a. Strategic direction on the role and relationship with voluntary organisations, and what that means in practice
 - b. Co-designing and producing services
 - c. Funding relationships
 - d. Engagement
18. Some of the structures outlined above are working, but several are not. We need to look collectively at how we can make them work better – or change them.

RECOMMENDATION

19. WCVA, WLGA and Welsh Government lead a small task-and-finish group to report back to the Partnership Council and Third Sector Partnership Council in autumn 2020. It should consider practical steps over the short, medium and long term that would enable us to make a bigger difference together.

Annex a: case studies

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. OTHERS

Other examples of areas where voluntary organisations and local government can and often are working together including:

- 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