



# Developing a new digital strategy for Wales

## ABOUT WCVA

1. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive across Wales, improving wellbeing for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by connecting, enabling and influencing.
2. We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to Welsh Government's engagement on its new digital strategy for Wales.

## GENERAL POINTS

3. We welcome the principles in the strategy and the ambition to harness digital to support wellbeing in Wales. In particular, we welcome the statement that 'digital is not just about computers – it's about people'. We whole-heartedly agree.
4. That is why government needs to involve the voluntary sector. The sector is all about people, social justice and improving all aspects of wellbeing. The lack of almost any reference (although there is one towards the end of the final blog) of the voluntary sector among the digital strategy information is a gap in thinking that should concern

us all. Yet elsewhere, Welsh Government is a strong champion of the value of the voluntary sector in all its diversity. Government needs to join up the dots internally for the final strategy. WCVA would welcome a blog from the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip's perspective.

5. All this matters because the voluntary sector is a fundamental part of our society. Our [Data Hub](#) on the voluntary sector starts to paint a picture of this. Voluntary organisations employ some 100,000 people in Wales, with 28% of people volunteering each year. Charitable income in Wales is over £1.2bn, which excludes big chunks of the voluntary sector such as Housing Associations. The equivalent value of volunteer time is higher again, estimated at over 3% of Wales' GDP.
6. The sector's value, of course, cannot simply be defined in monetary terms. It touches the lives of all of us - from nurseries to hospices, arts groups and sports clubs and social movements that have shaped our rights, our cultures and our environment. Much of our sector is characterized by agility and innovation. It is a space where people come together voluntarily to make a difference on the issues they care about. Those people are often driven by finding solutions to pressing issues, creating forerunners for what later become core public services. This is part of the NHS's story in Wales.
7. The principles around the value that digital innovation can bring are the same for voluntary organisations. If government works with them to tap into the benefits of digital approaches – well-designed, secure and based on user needs – it has huge potential to create and enhance wellbeing. If the strategy doesn't connect to the voluntary sector, however, it will miss key parts of our economy and services, hampering its ambitions from the start.
8. Just as with other sectors, to do this, there needs to be some investment to provide leadership, engage and support practical solutions. There are plenty of voluntary organisations who are eager to work with government and each other to achieve this. That

includes infrastructure bodies like WCVA and Wales Co-operative Centre, specialist organisations like Promo Cymru and also the thousands of voluntary organisations grappling with digital in their day-to-day work in communities across Wales.

9. There are plenty of examples of how to do this well from within Wales, plus across the UK and internationally. Tech for good and social tech movements are already there. But the sector needs support to tap into them. The draft strategy is silent about how to do this.
10. We welcome the inclusive and open approach in the blogs. However, the time scale offered for engagement is impossibly short. Inclusion is a welcome principle in the strategy, but different approaches are needed to deliver this in practice. We appreciate this is a journey and we hope that we can now work with Welsh Government to build deeper involvement of the voluntary sector.

## **MISSION 1 – DIGITAL SERVICES**

11. The strategy will be stronger if it recognises the value of services provided by voluntary organisations. There are also important relationships between the contribution voluntary organisations make and the delivery of public services - including shaping policy and holding public bodies to account. Digital can support both. For example, voluntary organisations hold relevant evidence/data to inform services. Importantly, they also work with people who can provide qualitative feedback based on lived experience.
12. Public bodies providing open and accessible data is important for democratic accountability and participation. The proposed Digital Special Health Authority for Wales in particular will rely on this.
13. It is essential that services are designed, commissioned, planned and delivered co-productively so that all stakeholders feel a true sense of ownership.

14. We welcome common digital standards. Voluntary organisations also deliver services funded by public bodies in Wales. Government also needs to ensure that this part of the voluntary sector is fully involved and able to meet these.
15. Those with sensory issues who wish to access services digitally must be able to do so. Support may need to be given to service providers to ensure this happens.
16. In embarking on this course of action, Welsh Government must endeavour to ensure no individual is left behind. Some people, such as older people or those who don't speak English or Welsh, may be unwilling or unable to access services digitally, so their needs must be met in other ways.

## **MISSION 2 – DIGITAL ECONOMY**

17. Voluntary organisations are an important part of our economy (see 5 above). They too will need to adapt to changes in the world of work.
18. The transformations in our workplaces could have detrimental consequences for levels of employment and underemployment, particularly affecting some groups of people and places. Andy Haldane and [Pro bono Economics](#) have highlighted the potential for voluntary and social action to play an important role in giving alternative sources of purpose and fulfilment.
19. Sector organisations also have a key role to play in shaping what sort of digital economy we want to see in the future and the values that underpin it. They must not be excluded from the digital innovation clusters highlighted by the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport. There is much experience, knowledge and skill within the sector that can help drive transformation.
20. Voluntary organisations are incredibly diverse. One of the characteristics that unites them is that they are 'value-driven and motivated by social, cultural or environmental objectives'. (Welsh Government's Third Sector Scheme) We need these organisations to

proactively shape the values that underpin this new digital economy. Government should invest in engaging with voluntary organisations better to enable this.

21. By signing up to be a Wellbeing Economy Government, Welsh Government has set out its ambitions for an inclusive economy that supports a vibrant natural environment. This is supported by the growing Wellbeing Economy Alliance in Wales. Digital is also forms part of government's plans for green and just recovery. Yet this ambition isn't currently clearly reflected in this section of the strategy. Currently, the mission is about economic growth with no mention of economic wellbeing. If delivery is to reflect the values Welsh Government has set for itself, this needs to be addressed in the final strategy.
22. Again, the benefits that are currently set out for business are equally applicable to voluntary organisations. It is not just traditional businesses who will be working flexibly and remotely in communities – providing services, jobs and community hubs. Social businesses and other voluntary sector organisations are all part of this tapestry. The current outcomes are weaker for not recognizing the voluntary sector and its role in that ecosystem of talent and innovation.
23. These outcomes could be strengthened with a clearer reflection of the principles of the wellbeing economy, for example an economy that tackles socio-economic inequalities across society. The ambition for a digital economy that reduces carbon emissions is welcome. However, the simple and single link to transport is not. The carbon and environmental impacts of digital need to be considered and addressed in the round.

### **MISSION 3 – DATA AND COLLABORATION**

24. We welcome the focus on data and collaboration. The pandemic provided examples of people working quickly to share data across organisations, resulting in people being able to access services that simply would not have been possible otherwise. Open, accessible data is important for accountable and participative government.

Protecting individuals' data is something many voluntary organisations are concerned about.

25. We would welcome opportunities to build capacity in our sector around initiatives such as WISERD's Administrative Data Research, an initiative to maximise the potential of administrative data as a resource for research. How can we connect voluntary organisations to the insights that are being generated and help them make use of them? Again, this is where some capacity in the voluntary sector could help connect into a world of potential opportunity and innovation that is already there.

26. There is also potential for voluntary organisations to contribute valuable data to a shared resource. For example, Citizen Advice Cymru has a rich source of data based that can provide insight into social issues in Wales. The Third Sector Statistical User Group has well established links with Welsh Government officials that would be useful in data sharing.

#### **MISSION 4 – DIGITAL INCLUSION**

27. Inclusion and social justice is a core issue for much of the voluntary sector in Wales. As the pandemic has forced services online, digital exclusion and the inequality and hardships this causes have become clear. Age, poverty and race are key factors in being digitally excluded.

28. The emphasis in the strategy on user needs and on digital being about not just computers, but people, is fundamental and welcome. Involving voluntary organisations, listening to their experiences and collaborating on solutions would undoubtedly strengthen delivery and improve outcomes. Voluntary organisations should be a strong campaigning voice for social justice within the digital world. We want to work with others to enable that stronger voice. Wales Co-operative Centre has been central to improving digital inclusion in Wales, with strong knowledge and expertise that will be essential in achieving outcomes in this mission.

29. This is such a critical section, with links across the strategy - it would be strengthened by the addition of clear outcomes like the other areas. We would welcome further engagement with Welsh Government and the sector on this and would be happy to offer our support. We have joined the Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales, led by Wales Co-operative Centre, and this would be a good forum in which to explore this subject together.

## **MISSION 5 – DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY**

30. Our membership and wider engagement with the voluntary sector has highlighted this as a major issue. The pandemic has highlighted already-existing inequalities and is widening their impact.

31. Voluntary organisations – including social enterprises – have been active in providing solutions for community and campaigning for change.

32. The Socio-Economic Duty may help decision-makers consider the impact on inequality and be held to account.

## **MISSION 6 – DIGITAL SKILLS**

33. We welcome the mission on digital skills and on building capability and confidence. This is crucial and is a message we have had from our members. The general silence about the voluntary sector across the rest of the strategy is almost amplified by the single mention here.

34. The needs of voluntary organisations around digital skills, confidence and capability are similar to businesses and we hope this will be reflected in the final version. We need confidence in planning and developing digital models to maximise opportunities to use digital technology for good – and in engaging a highly-skilled talent pool developed in Wales. Equally, voluntary organisations should be encouraged to invest in their workforce.

35. Young people are increasingly motivated by making a difference and having purpose. Being a leader in digital innovation for good would attract highly skilled people to jobs in Wales and opportunities to contribute their skills through voluntary action.

## **OTHER POINTS**

36. There are plentiful examples that we can learn from in Wales, the UK and internationally around digital innovation in the voluntary sector. Our colleagues in SCVO and NICVA have programmes around digital, while SCVO has developed a highly valued programme on digital leadership which might well be a model for Wales. A number of trusts and foundations have developed funding streams around digital which will provide examples and learning (see Comic Relief, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and National Lottery Community Fund).

37. We can draw on the social tech and tech for good movements, and link with networks like Catalyst, alliance of civil society organisations, funders and digital agencies. CAST, the Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology, has huge expertise and experience in Wales. And of course, the Wales Co-operative Centre and its work on digital over a number of years has provided many useful lessons for the sector.

38. The difficulties caused by digital exclusion has been raised by our members time and time through the pandemic and we would welcome the opportunity to connect them into conversations with government.

39. A quick win could be to connect the voluntary sector with ongoing initiatives. There is so much already happening and so much to be gained by involving the voluntary sector. A lot of progress could potentially be made quickly. However, this links back to the need for some investment in leadership and programmes that can reach out, engage and enable voluntary organisations.

40. WCVA supports the Charity Digital Code, which offers charities a framework and benchmarks to work towards regarding digital, along



with resources to define their next steps and guidance on sharing best practice. We would like Welsh Government to consider how the Code can help support voluntary sector involvement with the new digital strategy.

41. The final strategy should spell out how it will contribute to the building of the Foundational Economy.

## **IMAGINING A BETTER FUTURE**

42. WCVA is part of a group of people in and beyond the voluntary sector in Wales to think about how our sector can be involved in shaping a better future. As part of this, we are working in partnership to develop and pilot a community foresight tool. It is early days, but one of the benefits of using futures tools can help us to better imagine the future and to set out how we can shape that. In a world of such huge uncertainty and change, where many are coping day to day, these sorts of tools could be useful in helping engage organisations in the bigger issues around shaping digital in Wales.

## **DISCUSSION**

43. WCVA will be pleased to discuss these or any other related points with Ministers, committees or officials if requested.

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