

Voluntary sector meeting with Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

28 January 2021

Minutes

Attendees

Voluntary sector

- Matt Williams, Welsh Sports Association
- Simon Jones, Mind Cymru
- Chris Williams, Age Alliance Cymru
- Judith Stone, Kidney Wales
- Gethin Rhys, Cytun
- Owen Evans, Children in Wales
- Kate Young, All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers
- Simon James, Interlink RCT
- Clair Swales, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations
- Rachel Burr, Community Transport Association
- Debbie Shaffer, Fair Treatment for Women in Wales
- Ruth Marks, WCVA
- Sally Rees, WCVA
- David Cook, WCVA

Welsh Government officials

- Matt Jenkins
- Gez Martin
- Andrew Pithouse
- Ian Turner

Ministers

- Minister for Health and Social Services
- Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Introduction

The Minister thanked the sector reps for attending the meeting and noted that the Deputy Minister would lead the meeting for the Government.

The Deputy Minister thanked the sector for its incredible work during the pandemic. She noted she would like to discuss the Social Care Futures White Paper at the end of the meeting.

The difference the sector made and continues to make during the pandemic

Ruth acknowledged the positive relationship between the sector and Welsh Government and in particular over the last year. All parts of the sector have found chances to engage with the statutory sector very helpful.

Judith spoke about Kidney Wales' experiences of kidney patient support, including working with partners to produce a hard copy newsletter, cohosting three virtual conferences and working with the Head of Renal Policy at Welsh Government.

Clair said the sector had played a vital part in supporting people, meeting needs such as prescription collection and food deliveries. It supported popup community activity. Powys saw 112 Covid action groups start up, and the sector helped ensure they have been up to date on information on topics such as safeguarding. The sector has helped people access digital support and befriending groups moved online. CVCs have been able to support community groups with additional funding. It is important to harness the goodwill of volunteers moving forward. 175 volunteers in Powys are helping with the vaccination programme.

Ruth thanked Welsh Government for emergency and resilience funding support that had been made available to the sector and had been extended.

The Deputy Minister said that many volunteers are older people, and many have had to shield. How has that impacted the voluntary sector?

Chris said that there were concerns about the ability of volunteers to continue their roles. The RVS has not been able to provide all its previous services due to the nature of its volunteers. Many older volunteers are concerned about when and how they will receive their

vaccines. More clarity is needed. He noted that some people have wanted to volunteer, but there has been no safe opportunity to do so and people are having to wait.

Ruth added that the sector has benefited from volunteers who have been furloughed from work and young people who support social action.

Gethin praised compassionate leadership, noting that arrangements have been made for families to visit hospitals during end of life care, with arrangements made to avoid people coming and going and risking further infection.

On the vaccine programme, Sally said that there is variability as to when and how volunteers are recruited and used across health boards, especially in North Wales. Some volunteers are ready to get involved, but need the go-ahead from the health board. She has received enquiries about when voluntary sector frontline workers are likely to get vaccination appointments. There is variability on this across Local Authorities and Health Boards. There needs to be a definition of a health and social care worker – does this include third sector workers. Transport is also proving to be an issue – clarity needs to be given on what a volunteer driver scheme actually is. People shouldn't be asking neighbours to drive them to appointments, they should be using community transport.

Rachel said community transport is well placed to provide support, but some organisations have not been contacted about this and don't know who to contact themselves. Some have made informal arrangements with GP centres. This should be consistent and part of the strategy. Financial support is variable – some organisations have been expected to deliver for free, which is not viable.

Long-term planning and the importance of early engagement with the sector

Simon James said there was a chance to build on community research happening throughout Wales. At the start of the pandemic, there was no top-down way to organize things, so communities organized themselves before public services could respond. Things got done fast and well, then public services built on this response. Small organisations have provided a foundation of support despite not being part of any system. He said "the system" currently leaves people without a safety net and

compassion and relationships are lost due to short-term grants and bureaucracy. The learning from Covid-19 can change this. We need a system to support kind and caring ordinary people. The Community Facilities Programme can help. We need a workstream to develop programmes and proposals that get small organisations into the system and give them support. He would like to work with sector partners on a replacement for the Transformation Fund and ICF to allow small services to be supported through mainstream budgets.

Owen noted the work the Children and Young People Safeguarding group. The sector has added benefit to the trauma-informed approach to delivery. He noted the impact of the pandemic on very young children – what impact on development and socialization? He is working to convene an early years action group.

Simon Jones said issues around mental health will probably be revealed in coming months as lockdown eases. We need to think long-term and ensure people can self-refer to support services rather than go through GPs.

Ruth noted the wider health inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic across all protected characteristics. It might be useful to speak with Welsh Government colleagues from strategic budgeting to ensure that the best value is made from the funds available to the sector, especially when dealing with short term funding opportunities.

Kate noted that there will be an upsurge in demand for community services post-pandemic and it would be good to start exploring in detail what life will be like post-Covid. There is an opportunity to look at what's working well with RPBs, and to feed organisations' Covid impact reports into recovery plans being designed at regional and Health Board level.

The Deputy Minister said that Covid has highlighted the fragility of the social care system and the difficulty of planning. Welsh Government have been looking at the low pay and status of workers in this sector. The White Paper proposes a national framework for social care and a unit that will consider workforce conditions, pay, etc, in a strategic way. Welsh Government plans to strengthen RPBs and a strong third sector voice will be part of legislation. A consultation on the White Paper is happening currently, and public events arranged. She asked if it would be appropriate to have a specific event for the sector to talk about its experiences. Sally said this would be welcome. It was agreed that Matt Jenkins of Welsh Government will work with WCVA on this. Kate

suggested it would be useful to do something similar to help enhance the citizen and carer voices on RPBs.

The Minister said she was struck by comments on long-term planning, and how activity in communities during the pandemic grew in ways that were not “over managed”. This is what we should build on in work for the future – the sector is crucial in this. She also said much work is being done on transport – an important area, and is aware of the issues around very young children during the pandemic. Welsh Government is putting in what it can to help with this in the work towards the recovery.

Ruth closed by acknowledging Welsh Government’s commitment and support for the voluntary sector.

Actions:

- Sally Rees and Matt Jenkins to have discussions around voluntary sector event relating to its voice on RPBs.
- WCVA will circulate the video it has made to Welsh Government officials.
- Simon James to discuss with Sally Rees and Kate Young, the best way to approach the community involvement and longer term planning points.
- Sally Rees to discuss with WCVA colleagues and the H & SC Planning Group the approach to strategic budgeting.