

Meeting Between the Minister for Finance & Local Government and Representatives of the Third Sector - 24 June 2021

Attendees

Rebecca Evans MS - Minister for Finance & Local Government

WCVA:

Ruth Marks - Chief Executive
Anna Nicholl - Director of Strategy & Sector Development
David Cook - Policy Officer
Alison Pritchard - Sustainable Funding Manager
Janine Downing - 3-Set Manager

Third Sector Representatives:

Derek Walker - Wales Co-operative Centre
Chris Johnes - BCT Wales
Andrea Cleaver - WRC
Iwan Thomas - PLANED tbc
Sian Rees - Interfaith Council for Wales
Catrin James - CWVYS
John Gallanders - CVC Cymru
Clair Brick - SIAWNS TEG
Jackie Jones - Welsh Assembly for Women
Noreen Blanluet - Co-Production Network for Wales
Ruth Power - Shelter Cymru
Michelle Hunt - Wales Environment Link
Kate Young - All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers of People with Learning Disabilities (also Health & Social Care Planning Group rep on TSPC)

Phil Fiander - Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee

Welsh Government officials:

Chris Buchan - Community & Third Sector Policy
Matt Wellington - Budget & Government Business
Rhian Williams - Welsh Treasury
Paula James - Local Government Transformation & Partnerships
Paul McDonagh - Secretariat
Sandra Stephenson - Secretariat

1) Welcome

The Minister extended a warm welcome and acknowledged the huge debt of gratitude owed to the sector for their tireless work throughout the pandemic

2) Minister's Priorities for This Portfolio Over the Next Senedd Term

The Minister advised that budget preparations will be framed by the ambitious Programme for Government but faced significant uncertainty. The Minister stated that she continued to press the Treasury for early clarity but the UK Spending Review was unlikely until late autumn and it was unclear when the UK Government would consolidate public finances post pandemic. This, combined with the impact of leaving the EU and the need to address the gender budget and climate/nature emergency, made for extremely challenging fiscal circumstances. The Minister reported that she hoped to provide further details on budget preparations in July but it was unlikely that the 2022-23 Draft Budget would be published before December.

The Minister reported that the approach to engagement around the 2022-23 Budget preparations was still under consideration but welcomed the secondment opportunity within Welsh Treasury from the WCVA as an opportunity to ensure the sector is considered at the most central level of budget setting. The Minister thanked the WCVA in supporting this opportunity and was keen to meet the secondees once they are in post.

Ruth Marks congratulated the Minister on her re-election and expanded portfolio. Ruth highlighted the sector's work with the UK Government and relevant Welsh Government Ministers and officials, and confirmed that Janine Downing, 3-SET Manager at the WCVA would be taking up the secondment opportunity.

3) Funding and Compliance Sub Committee

Phil Fiander advised that the Sub Committee had recently been revived and, with the agreement of the TSPC, had put together a Work Plan which identified five key areas of work for the next Senedd term:

- Create greater awareness of the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector and the work of the Sub- Committee;
- Improve understanding of decision-making around funding and procurement processes;
- Encourage longer-term funding agreements;
- Learn the lessons from COVID-19; and
- Look at the availability of evidence and data to allow for more informed funding decisions.

Phil stressed that the overriding purpose of the Work Plan was to benefit communities.

Michelle Hunt stressed the need for stabilisation of the sector and offered to share a copy of a Green Recovery report prepared by the Funding Centre for Natural Resources Wales. The sector also agreed to share a copy of the Disability Equality Forum's report on their experience of Covid **[Action x 2]**.

The Minister was pleased that the sector was engaged with the Grant Centre of Excellence (represented on the Sub Committee) and third sector colleagues welcomed the Minister's suggestion that they also engage with procurement officials. Third sector colleagues highlighted their positive engagement with local authorities and Local Health Boards but warned of the risk of slipping back into old ways of working.

Matt Wellington advised that he would be happy to meet the sector in relation to the budget as his team was taking forward a range of innovative issues.

4) Strengthening Voluntary Sector Relationships with Local Government

The Minister invited thoughts and comments from third sector colleagues on this new part of her portfolio:-

- Communities Aspects - Noreen Blanluet & Chris Johnes

The critical role of communities in the emergency was recognised as was the many examples of good practice. However, in view of the culture and practice of local government, the need for strategic leadership from the Welsh Government was highlighted. Agreed to share information on the National Lottery Community Fund project to work with Public Services Boards to improve their practice of co-production and citizen involvement **[Action]**.

- Children & Young People – Owen Evans & Catrin James

Strong examples of collaboration and innovation were highlighted but outcomes for children was seen as key. Third sector and Local Government Interim Youth Work Boards were seen as a good example of collaboration but approach was inconsistent amongst local authorities.

The Minister highlighted some of the contacts she had had with children and young people about the budget and taxes and was keen to hear the recommendations of the Youth Board in due course **[Action]**.

- Housing – Ruth Power

The role of housing and the good relationship between Welsh Government/local government/Third Sector during the pandemic was highlighted. Agreed to share the report on the role of housing during the pandemic **[Action]**

- Environment & Equalities – Michelle Hunt

Whilst welcoming funding at local level, the need for joint budgets, across boundaries was highlighted as was the need for legislation to be joined up.

The Minister was pleased to see local authorities in Wales applying for Resilience and Levelling Up funds but recognised the challenge to ensure that they met the needs in Wales.

5. Any Other Business

Kate Young highlighted the problem of many local government services being paused during the pandemic, some of which remained paused, and the feeling of disengagement this has had on some communities and the catastrophic effect on unpaid carers.

Kate also highlighted the need for citizens' voices to be heard.

The Minister agreed to take this up with Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services and her officials **[Action]**.

In closing the meeting, the Minister stressed how uplifting she found these meetings due to the significant amount of good work being done by the voluntary sector.