

# **Voluntary sector meeting with the Minister for Finance and Local Government, 24 June 2021**

## **Strengthening voluntary sector relationships with local government**

1. The Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) Recovery Sub-Group was set up to support strategic engagement on recovery planning. Its final report was agreed in March 2021 by the TSPC, including Jane Hutt as Chair. The full report is attached as an annex.
2. The report is structured under three themes which cut across government – volunteering, support and relationships. This paper focusses specifically on the implications for the Minister’s portfolio under ‘relationships’. It does not address relevant recommendations under the other themes.
3. We would welcome a response from the Minister and look forward to working with her and her officials on delivery.

## **Context**

4. Society is facing many big and complex challenges such as climate change, digital and inequality. The pandemic has created new challenges and exacerbated some existing ones.
5. Finding solutions that support individual and community wellbeing demands contributions from across sectors and organisations. The pandemic has shown we can achieve much more working together.
6. To do this, we need to embed structures that support good, productive relationships. This includes open, participative and inclusive democratic processes. There is a unique opportunity now to reshape relationships and structures.
7. The voluntary sector itself faces big change and many challenges. These are not all financial and not all negative, but the funding relationship between government, public bodies and voluntary organisations can make a big difference to a more resilient sector.

## **Relationships**

8. To achieve shared ambitions across government and the sector, the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector needs to evolve and we need to build trust. There are principles and models to draw on – an enabling state, the involvement principle in the Future Generations Act and the idea of ‘hardwiring’ voluntary and community-led activity and voices into local government thinking. There are many positive examples of practice.
9. The report recommends a specific cross-sectoral piece of work to further define what this means and support change in practice.
10. To support this, Welsh Government is funding an innovation programme with cross-sector input. It will look at what these relationships can look like in practice, the barriers and enablers, and how we spread learning. The programme will run to December 2021 and we will share findings with the Minister and her officials.
11. Other programmes are also providing a richer understanding of how we can embed these relationships as part of the recovery. For example, Co-Production Network Wales’ work with PSBs and a Resourceful Community Forum supported by Social Care Wales.
12. The report also underlined the importance of influencing emerging policy, legislation and guidance. Implementing the Local Government and Elections Act is a key opportunity. There is an opportunity to address possible tensions and ensure voluntary sector involvement is supported in democratic processes as well as delivery. There will be challenges and implications to address for our sector as services move to a regional or sub-unitary authority footprint.
13. The report recommends the government sets out a Community Policy which articulates relationships across national, local and community activity.

### **Discussion and next steps**

14. We hope the Minister will support this work and encourage her officials to actively engage in delivery across her portfolio.
15. We look forward to the Minister’s response at the meeting.

*The Voluntary Sector Finance and Local Government planning group*

June 2021

## **ANNEX**

### **TSPC Recovery Sub-Group Report**

#### **1. Background:**

In August 2020 the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, in her role as chair of the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC), established the TSPC Recovery Sub-Group in order to provide a formal structure for engagement between Welsh Government and the voluntary sector in Wales in relation to recovery from COVID-19. Essentially the sub-group was established to provide a mechanism for strategic engagement on recovery planning.

The sub-group aims to ensure voluntary sector voices are heard and contribute across the recovery work streams supported by Welsh Government. As the lockdown is eased and we focus more on recovery, we need to build on and strengthen the relationships that have been created and ensure we are not moving back to the pre-COVID world. In building that new future, we all want a strong and sustained emphasis on the contribution of voluntary and community action. Advising on this is was the clear focus of the sub-group's work.

The subgroup was asked to:

- set out shared ambitions for recovery and advise on how these can be measured
- identify learning that can enable better outcomes now and for the longer term
- advise on who needs to do what to achieve our shared ambitions and enable voluntary organisations to play their full role in recovery

The sub-group's full Terms of Reference are available here ([link](#))

At its initial meeting in August the sub group decided to focus on three key work streams (Volunteering, Relationships and Support), all of which would be examined in relation to a set of cross-cutting themes relating to the type of recovery we want to see in Wales.

During October, November and December the sub-group held a detailed and focused meeting for each of the three work streams. For each work stream, this work has resulted in a set of key issues/comment along with a set of high-level proposals to improve things into the future.

This final report builds on an interim report that was circulated to enable a broader group of stakeholders to comment on the sub-group's discussions and proposals ahead of a final report being presented to TSPC.

## 2. Our shared ambitions

The voluntary sector has never been more needed. The pandemic has highlighted the enormous value the voluntary sector and volunteering bring to our society in Wales. The sector has a particularly vital role to play in helping to address and mitigate the levels of inequality that the unequal impact of the pandemic and the COVID-19 crisis more generally has created.

Together our aim is to build on improving relationships and support (both financial and non-financial) to help realise the potential of Active Citizenship, which is a crucial ingredient for more empowered and inclusive communities.

The pandemic is having a huge and often devastating impact on our society. We have seen this foremost in the impact on people's health and the loss of life. It is also leaving a deep economic impact. Different groups of people and different places are being affected in different ways. Young people's employment opportunities are expected to be particularly negatively affected, with the adverse effects anticipated to be felt by those who are already facing marginalisation and disadvantage. The pandemic has highlighted entrenched inequality and is creating new inequalities.

These are complex problems and finding solutions that support people's wellbeing will demand contributions across different sectors and organisations. We will need to embed structures that support good, productive relationships. Open, participative and inclusive democratic structures are central to this.

Whilst the immediate focus is supporting people and communities through the pandemic, we recognise that the way we approach recovery needs to put us on a strong footing to thrive in the context of other big changes ahead. That includes the digital revolution and responding to the climate and nature crises.

At the same time, the voluntary sector itself faces huge challenges. Parts of the sector have had their income streams hit hard. Different types of organisations are affected differently, and we are likely to see lasting changes to the shape and size of the sector in Wales.

The impacts on the sector are not just financial, nor are they always necessarily negative. Voluntary organisations, from the big charities to the informal community groups, have had to change overnight the way they run. Many have adapted at speed to continue to provide vital services in very different circumstances. Others have had to close activities. Whilst the pandemic is driving some change that is new and temporary, it is also accelerating ongoing change. Organisations need capacity to adapt to the immediate situation, and to build resilience for the longer term. That includes adapting to digital, new approaches to governance and leadership and reviewing business models and service delivery whilst striving not to compound digital and other forms of exclusion.

In response to this the sub-group agreed five cross cutting themes for its work that reflect our shared ambitions for recovery:

- Equality and justice for all

- A green and just recovery
- A more resilient voluntary sector
- Inclusive collaboration and citizen involvement
- Community-led action

These are big topics in themselves. Some are the focus of other cross-sector working groups, such as the Natural Resources Wales' Green and Just Recovery group, the Wales Race Forum and Disability Equality Forum. Individual TSPC networks are leading work on specific issues, for example, Building Communities Trust (BCT) has published a number of reports around community-led action. Think tanks and academics are also leading thinking on related work. This group has therefore focussed on three work streams that each of the five themes cut across - Volunteering, Relationships and Support. This is where the group felt it could add most value.

Relationships between government and voluntary organisations need to reflect the size, breadth and diversity of the sector. The voluntary sector in Wales is made up of over 30,000 organisations. It includes informal mutual aid groups through to large charities that are household names. It includes faith-based organisations, social enterprises, housing associations and development trusts. Sections of the report will be relevant to particular parts of the sector. The Recovery sub-group recognises the complexity of these relationships and the diversity in the sector. Its focus has been on what actions are needed in order to create an environment that enables the wider sector's contribution, including its vital role in inclusion and prevention.

The report does not specifically address how to measure success. We anticipate that this will be part of the next phase of work in planning delivery. The group did agree that the overall outcome should be for volunteering and the voluntary sector to make a bigger contribution to a recovery that supports the Wellbeing Goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. All activities should also be undertaken using the 5 Ways of Working (including the prevention agenda). This should provide a basis for measuring success.

### **3. High-level proposals for the three work streams.**

Through the autumn, the group considered what high-level actions could be taken that would make the greatest difference against the overall outcome of volunteering and the voluntary sector making a bigger contribution to a recovery that supports inclusion and the Wellbeing Goals.

This section sets out its recommendations under each work stream (volunteering, relationships and support). *Detailed notes of the sub-group's discussions that have led to these proposals are captured in **Annex 1**.*

## **Volunteering**

1. Volunteering in Wales is changing (the pandemic has for example brought to the fore the importance of informal groups and younger volunteers) and the levers we all have will need to evolve in order to support it. Including how we ensure equality of access by removing barriers to opportunities, and creating diversity conscious systems that are welcoming, will be key. Ahead of the next financial year, Welsh Government should work with volunteer bodies to establish a broad-based Volunteering Partnership. This will be a cross-sectoral (with diverse representation from the voluntary, public and private sectors) leadership group to support and champion volunteering across all the principal sectors and provide strategic leadership. Members will work collaboratively to identify and set priorities, to lever investment, to inform policy development and delivery, and to foster learning, sharing and innovation.

The Volunteering Partnership will promote a set of key enablers at a local and national level to create sustainable volunteering in Wales:

- Accountability and Leadership
- Strategy, Processes and Products
- Resources and partnerships
- Effective volunteers and organisers

In the short term, the Volunteering Partnership should be tasked with overseeing a substantive review of volunteering in Wales. This should draw on what we have learnt through the response to COVID, recent evaluations of volunteer programmes in Wales, available research evidence and an open engagement process. This will inform how Welsh Government and others, in partnership, can make substantive improvements to **maximise the contribution of volunteering in Wales to an inclusive, green and just recovery**. This work should also link into national and regional workforce planning processes.

Ensuring that volunteering is accessible to people from all backgrounds. We are particularly keen to ensure that opportunities are available for groups who are traditionally less likely to be involved for a range of reasons – such as younger people, and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. This review may also consider the role that volunteering can play in supportively bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, as well as how to increase Welsh language opportunities.

Emerging thoughts on this work are available in **Annex 2**

2. In parallel with the cross sector leadership group, Welsh Government should establish an internal, diverse cross-government volunteering group to ensure key departments are helping to realise the potential of volunteering within their sphere of influence. Key areas of focus should mirror and compliment those of the external leadership group and/or areas currently in policy development stages where there are opportunities to build in consideration of volunteering from the beginning.

3. We must recognise that most volunteering which contributes to policy goals and wider wellbeing takes place at community level and often has limited direct connection with public services. However, many of the issues discussed in the Recovery Group apply to these groups. They will benefit from support to participate and work as effectively as possible. Third Sector Support Wales (WCVA and CVCs) provide volunteering development and support services, including via a digital platform. These should be reviewed and adapted where appropriate to ensure they are up to date and responsive to the diversity of needs and the changing context now and over the longer term.
4. In the short term, whilst the infrastructure mentioned in points 1-3 is established, Welsh Government and partners should seek to maintain the momentum around volunteering by making improvements to its existing Volunteering Wales Grant programme, based on recent evaluations. That includes an element of funding for strategic projects.
5. During the work of the Recovery Group, Welsh Government established a Volunteering Recovery grant programme to enable cross-sector partnerships to begin the work of local coordination and transitioning out of the pandemic – building on the opportunities created by COVID. Grants will enable connections, understanding and integration between key local and regional infrastructure to enable stronger future decision making and delivery around volunteering, putting this local work on a more sustainable footing.

## **Relationships**

1. If we are to achieve the shared ambitions identified above, the relationship between state and the voluntary sector needs to evolve and trust to be built. The sector is made up of diverse national, regional and local members, and positive work is happening at all levels (including Public Service Boards) that needs to be built upon. The group discussed the principle of an ‘enabling government’, the principle of inclusive participation and involvement under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Local Government Minister’s ambition to see voluntary and community-led activity and voices ‘hardwired’ into local government thinking, involving and working with communities in the design and delivery of the services provided to them.

We recommend a specific, appropriately representative cross-sectoral piece of work (including national and local government, the voluntary sector, Town and Community Councils, and the private sector) to further define what this means, particularly at a sub-unitary authority level, and support the change in practice. This work should also look at how we can address the possible tensions and implications for the sector’s ability to engage and be involved from moving some public service delivery to regional or sub-unitary authority footprints.

We recommend creating a practical innovation programme which can build an evidence base around what this can look like in practice, what the key principles, barriers and enablers are and what the benefits are for inclusion and wellbeing

outcomes. Exploring the importance of “Place based” models (and the collection of local, strength-based, place-based data) as well as the “facilitator” role between the system and non-system (e.g. community connectors) in unlocking the unique strengths/assets across our diverse communities.

2. Effective relationships between government and the voluntary sector are a core aspiration under the Third Sector Scheme. Improving how we embed the Scheme and ensuring the involvement of national third sector delivery partners at the very beginning of policy/strategy shaping will be critical in our efforts to drive change. Welsh Government should map opportunities to influence emerging policy, legislation, guidance and funding on good involvement. Examples are the Local Government Act (including new regional structures) and the Socio-economic Duty statutory guidance. There will also be new structures established in the wake of Brexit. These are key opportunities to set out strong expectations on the involvement of voluntary organisations, of principles of equality and fairness and tools to shift delivery.
3. The pandemic has highlighted how action at local and community levels play a key role in contributing to national ambitions. This spans the environment, the foundational economy to social care, tackling poverty, inequality and community cohesion. We recommend the government sets out a clear Community Policy, which clearly articulates the relationships at and between the national, local, and community activity. Government needs to work with the sector and communities to explore how this should be supported by (but not limited to) legislation and funding.

There are opportunities for Welsh Government to join up commitments across government, strengthen connections both in Welsh Government and amongst local bodies in the public sector. Putting support for volunteering, inclusion, community action and the wider voluntary sector onto firmer policy ground (building on, and drawing together the increasing amount of research undertaken and underway, by organisations like Social Care Wales, to look at “Community Resilience”).

4. Key pieces of Welsh legislation already set out requirements around relationships between public bodies, the voluntary sector and citizens. That includes the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the principles of inclusive Involvement and Collaboration. The Future Generations Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales have powers and responsibilities in relation to delivery against the legislation. We will begin discussions with these key bodies to discuss possible actions.

## Support

16. Programmes providing non-financial support to voluntary organisations will be essential to support organisations to adapt to the ongoing crisis and thrive in the future. Welsh government should continue to fund infrastructure organisations to provide support services across the whole of Wales, reaching out across the breadth and diversity of the voluntary sector. There will continue to be a need for targeted support tailored to particular parts of the sector, for example social enterprises and equality organisations.

What support is provided and how it is delivered will need to adapt to ensure it is supporting recovery and organisations' longer-term resilience. Infrastructure bodies have adapted quickly to changing needs, for example, providing information, advice and guidance quickly in response to the pandemic. Next year (2021/22), they should undertake a more substantive review of future support needs for the sector to thrive in Wales. This should draw on the learning from COVID-19, including reports on the experiences of inequality of different communities, existing evidence such as National Lottery Community Fund's (NLCF's) mapping of voluntary sector support services and insight from foresight work. It should draw on the shared ambitions highlighted in this report.

17. We recommend that Welsh Government's new Digital Strategy sets out clear ambitions to support the voluntary sector and works with the TSPC on delivery.

Digital has been a constant theme during the pandemic and will be key to our recovery. Voluntary organisations adapted at incredible speed to deliver digital services in response to the crisis. The pandemic has highlighted the enormous potential for voluntary organisations to use digital for good and to lead digital innovation for a green and just recovery. By moving services on line and strengthening them the sector was also able to free resource to help those who are digitally excluded or needed face to face support.

However, the sector needs support to equitably build skills, confidence and expertise. There are basic challenges around access to digital infrastructure and connectivity. Digital inclusion is a huge concern across our sector and continued support is needed for Wales Co-operative Centre activity to address this. The voluntary sector need to be involved alongside business and public services in delivering an inclusive digital strategy for Wales using the same evidence base.

18. Financial support is also essential to ensure voluntary organisations can contribute to the recovery.

- Government and the sector should work together to increase the amount of endowment and trust funding in Wales. From a voluntary

sector perspective, this should include the work to attract endowments and trusts by Community Foundation for Wales. The voluntary sector should lead activity and research into how to increase levels of endowment and trust funding in Wales, building on existing work. The Funders' Forum will be a key network to be involved in this work.

- Government and the voluntary sector should work together to design a new programme for spend on new dormant assets which will shortly be made available. This could be used to create a Community Wealth Fund to support our shared ambition on inclusive community-led action.
- The next financial year 2021-22 will be key for designing new funds to replace European Funding, including the Shared Prosperity Fund. The voluntary sector should be involved at all stages (particularly early/concept stages) of design for policy and implementation, including ensuring diverse representation and where organisations are not directly involved in delivery.
- Welsh Government funding has made a huge difference this year in enabling organisations to continue despite the devastating financial impact of COVID-19, to provide specific services in response to COVID-19 and now to build resilience for the longer term. That includes the Welsh Government Third Sector COVID-19 Resilience Fund. We do not know what is ahead in the immediate months, but direct support is likely to remain important for the sustainability of many organisations and for them to directly support our shared ambitions for an inclusive recovery.
- Currently, information about what funding is available and what funding is being distributed is difficult to access in one place. This has implications for equality, diversity and inclusion. It is more difficult for organisations with least resource to know about and scan various sources of information. Bringing information together in one place could also enable organisations to identify opportunities for collaboration and adding value to each other's work. Welsh Government and TSPC networks should explore potential for achieving this, linking to activity on digital (and data) below. The Funding Wales Portal provides an established basis from which we could achieve these ambitions, but we will need to improve its use by funding organisations, as well as raising awareness about its existence amongst those organisations seeking funding, and improving its functionality.

19. We welcome the commitment to refresh the TSPC funding and compliance committee and its focus on the principles and relationships that should underpin Welsh Government funding to the sector. We recommend it consider the following priorities for its new workplan:

- multi-annual funding (including the potential for more sustainable funding models – e.g. links to budgeting agreements with Westminster and to full term objectives and plans of Government),
- flexibility of funding between years (by e.g. linking funding to long-term strategy rather than year on year budgets)
- Creating clear/transparent/informed/inclusive pre-funding decision-making processes around how to fund (Core vs Project Grant / Grant vs Procurement) and procure in order to deliver the best outcomes for our diverse communities at a national, regional and local level.
- reforming procurement to enable the voluntary sector to bid in a way which matches their particular skill set and value. This includes emphasising social value (including using the Welsh TOMS) and developing more creative forms of procurement, focussing on what delivers the best inclusive service for the community, rather than a competitive process. We acknowledge procurement law could change shortly and the voluntary sector should be involved in any reforms.
- implementing best practice learned from funding during the COVID-19 pandemic, both within the public sector and with non-statutory funders.

We would recommend the above work plan includes the relationship between KPIs and government interventions; aiming to change thinking between the sectors on this.

## **Next steps**

- Produce a final report (including comment and steer from wider TSPC members and the DMCW) for presentation and sign off at the next full TSPC meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March. This will formally end the role of the COVID Recovery sub-group and provide a long-term direction of travel for partners.
- Following TSPC sign-off, some areas of work have existing mechanism to drive them forward (e.g. funding and compliance sub-group) whilst others (e.g. cross-sector volunteering leadership group) will need to be established.
- Develop a communications plan with TSPC members to raise awareness, involvement and engagement in the agreed work streams.
- WCVA and WG officials will have a responsibility for ensuring co-ordination and momentum is maintained under the individual work streams and for providing frequent formal updates on progress to TSPC – but delivery of these

proposals will be dependent on the support of all TSPC members and colleagues across government.

- This work (and report) will feed into a clear work plan, principles and direction of travel to put forward following the formation of the next Welsh Government and the upcoming TSPC elections.

**END**

## **Annex 1: summary of discussion at TSPC Recovery Sub-Group meetings**

### **Summary of key discussion points arising from the three Work Streams.**

#### **Volunteering:**

On October 12<sup>th</sup> a detailed discussion was then held around the “volunteering” work stream with respect to the main issues, asks and opportunities. All comments were captured - the following is a summary of the main points raised:

- During the pandemic CVCs and other third sector infrastructure bodies have been bridging the gap between the “system” and “non-system” – how do we make sure that this support of the formal/statutory services is happening in as frictionless a way as possible between the CVCs, LAs and Health Boards at a local level? COVID has seen some of these practical systems being developed but they are not yet well enough enshrined.
- We need to establish good local coordination/partnership working (between 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, LAs, and LHBs) based around key enablers of sustainable volunteering such as accountability and leadership; strategy, processes and products; resources and partnerships; and effective volunteers and organisers. These should have been in place before the pandemic – we need to make sure they are there for ongoing and future needs.
- We are going to have to differentiate between formal and informal volunteering in terms of new and existing activity and the ways in which we support them – particularly how we support the informal activity without stifling it. Work is already ongoing in this area that we can build on.
- The idea that there is a spectrum of volunteering with informal at one end and formal at the other, rather than either or, statutory / non-statutory distinction (unless referring to statutory services).  
This idea can help contextualise the sharing of a variety of good practice around how to meaningfully and effectively use necessary tools such as risk assessments and data protection, safeguarding etc. without being unnecessarily bureaucratic or imposing limitations which are counter-productive to the end goal (ensuring the tools add strength to the service, rather than deplete it.) It is worth noting that informal volunteering can in many cases contribute to public policy aims; initiatives tackling loneliness and mental health come to mind especially strongly

- Risk appetite amongst funding organisations and statutory bodies around volunteering (in particular informal) is an issue that needs to be addressed properly.
- For any improvements to be made around volunteering a robust and resilient infrastructure to support it will be necessary.
- The quality of digital support is becoming increasingly important – there are resource and skills issues within the third sector at the moment that need to be addressed if support is to be delivered effectively.
- Some public bodies still don't trust volunteering as a way to help deliver. We need to better understand what the challenges are, so this can be unpicked and addressed, and examples of good practice can be used to best effect.
- There are parts of government that have started to see the potential importance of volunteering during the pandemic – this momentum needs to be continued. Some key areas for initial focus Youth volunteering (including but not exclusively pathways to employment), volunteering and the environment, equality and justice.

### **Relationships:**

On 5<sup>th</sup> November a detailed discussion was then held around the “Relationships” work stream with respect to the main issues, asks and opportunities. All comments were captured - the following is a summary of the main points raised:

What are the issues/asks/opportunities?

- The third sector is the mediator between the state and the citizen/community voice – we need to review and reflect on whether we really are creating the opportunity for this “voice” to be heard in the planning and delivery of services and interventions.
- But there are communication and cultural working barriers stopping/hampering community action/activism. Public Service Boards (PSBs) are not typically good at engaging with communities or community organisations. There are examples of good individual relationships but they are fragile and vulnerable to changes in policy and personnel.
- Some relationships have improved due to COVID but there are concerns about how we sustain these improved relationships – and continue to breakdown institutional barriers.
- The sector is crucial to tackling all of the major issues we face in Wales – but they need an enabling environment in which to operate. But what does an “enabling” relationship with Government and public bodies look like? We have

good rhetoric around ways of working in legislation, policy and guidance, but it isn't translating into action at a local level.

- The third Sector are “writ large” in Government’s policy/strategy documents but this isn’t translating into involvement in planning and delivery (and the associated resource) on the ground – and the third sector doesn’t have enough direct contact with Government to influence this.
- There are expectations associated with some government funding around relationships – but reporting back and tracking/checking seems to be light touch – there isn’t enough holding to account in the system, or the creation of shared outcomes and how we measure them.
- There is a power imbalance between the third sector and public bodies, created by the fact that WG fund them directly and the third sector are secondary recipients of funding via the public sector “gatekeeper”. The relationship is not just about the funding, it also includes things like releasing assets. We have to find ways of redressing this imbalance – some funders give money directly to the third sector, which immediately strengthens their negotiating position within potential delivery partnership.
- We also need to consider how we use our inspectorates/auditing regimes more - if bodies aren’t inspected or audited against particular expectations & requirements in relation to voluntary and third sector matters, there’s always a risk they won’t act. Is there a role of the Auditor general in this space – especially around Social value? And equalities, inclusion?
- We know the importance and value of the sector and their relationships, but do others? Are we using the right language (e.g. social value) and do we have enough good examples to win hearts and minds?

#### Suggested Areas of Action:

- We need to find ways of ensuring that good relationships are systematised/in-built (even if that sometimes involves WG dictates about joint working e.g. SSF)
- There are good examples of where relationships are working (e.g. Pembs – Umbrella for Change) – we need to find ways to embed this good practice more widely – helping CVCs and LAs to be more proactive through e.g. better leadership, better use of funding levers (to improve the local capacity of the sector).
- We need to describe what an “enabling” relationship looks like i.e. what would we like to see more of. We need to find ways of illustrating good practice and ensure it is the public sector that are the advocates delivering the messages instead of them always coming from the third sector (this will give them real power).
- The Social Services and Wellbeing framework is better than the Wellbeing Act at promoting ways of working and investment in social value (and social value organisations) – we need to understand why that is and work out how we encourage more of it. Is it based on the act both specifying resources and having quite directive elements in law?

- We need to see Welsh Government using its levers to ensure the involvement of the sector in service design and delivery is a “must do” not a “nice to do” – setting expectations through e.g. funding and procurement processes and regulatory frameworks/processes, statutory guidance – and ensure this is audited against. Ensure that fine words in high level strategy documents are backed up with specific actions in action plans and measures in performance reports e.g. Health Board INTPs mention the role of the voluntary sector but does not mention it in the associated delivery plans or performance mechanisms / KPIs
- We need to look at how the role of Auditor General can be linked to aspects around Social Value.
- We need to explore more equitable ways of funding (e.g. “requirements based”) that remove the power imbalance between sectors and the marketization of service delivery (allowing all the sectors to play the role they should to create the best services for communities).
- COVID has brought to the fore that the right balance is needed between the government’s corporate parent role and the role of society to take responsibility for itself. We need to have a real conversation about what kind of model we want to embrace in Wales – do we for example want a “participatory democracy model” and all that entails in terms of e.g. open budgets etc.
- We need to shift from pilot programmes (of which we have plenty of examples) to making things happen.
- We need to ensure more transparency around how the existing influencing structures around how e.g. portfolio meetings work.
- We need to look at increasing the diversity of Regionalised working groups (where key decisions are being made).
- WLGA are a key force for engagement – they have to be closely involved (and embracing of) this work.

### **Support:**

On 1<sup>st</sup> December a detailed discussion was then held around the “Support” work stream with respect to the main issues, asks and opportunities. All comments were captured - the following is a summary of the main points raised:

What are the issues/asks/opportunities?

Governance:

- Often when organisations are in need of support, the ‘presenting’ issue is not the underlying problem. In many cases this problem is about governance. Holistic support often works best for longer term organisational resilience.

- Safeguarding is a core part of governance and often some smaller organisations struggle in this area. This can also be true for orgs working outside of areas where safeguarding is traditionally considered to apply and may not be aware they need to engage in safeguarding.
- An organisation may need different skills in its trustees at different times, for example different skills are needed during a period of organisation growth, or change, or recovery.
- Small spontaneous voluntary groups which have grown out of COVID-19 potentially change the make-up of the sector and these groups may need bespoke support.

#### Programme delivery:

- There is concern that some local community groups, that are small and often lack formal governance structure who will not be able to partake in social prescribing/isolation programmes, for example, as they aren't able to 'play the game.' Smaller groups do not have the capacity to manage referrals or the monitoring arrangements which would go with this. There should be a discussion about how to minimise this administration, with the voluntary sector involved at BOTH the policy design and the programme delivery planning phases.

#### Funding:

- It will be useful to feed into discussions within Welsh Government about the longer-term grant funding of the voluntary sector, including reducing need for competition. This would lead to stability and longer-term relationships.
- Related to this, multi-year funding agreements would be helpful, as well as an ability to carry funds over between years.
- Funding is important but sometimes discussions between the statutory sector and voluntary sector focus on this to the exclusion of other forms of support.
- Most voluntary sector organisations do not have any money from the public purse. Most voluntary sector income is not from public funding.
- The emergency funds from WG were welcome.
- There has been a recent focus on procurement, and this could continue after withdrawal from the EU is complete.
- Some organisations will be struggling to survive, including those that have not had problems before, as a result of lost income and the diminution of reserves. Guidance, governance, and funding will be part of how to build resilience.
- We need to build alternative income streams, like the proposed Community Wealth Fund. Where are the different pots of funding coming from?

- The funding situation in Wales is fragile and there are limited numbers of funding opportunities (and even fewer Wales-specific ones). In the short-term we should consider opportunities to improve this.
- The Welsh Funder's Forum has worked well during this period.
- Funders have been flexible during this period and it would be useful to continue – for example, not to go back unless there is justification.
- There are concerns around the uncertainty of the wider funding environment for example, around the future of the SPF, and what the dormant assets funding may be allocated towards.

Other issues:

- Improved data and information on voluntary sector support in Wales could lead to better partnerships as voluntary sector organisations will be aware of others' work.
- Other key issues which are needed to sustain the voluntary sector include IT skills and digital support, as well as legal support. The first underpins everything and the second can be unplanned and complex. Financial planning is also a concern and linked to longer-term planning.
- Look at the community connectors and support services which have helped bridge gaps during the crisis. They have provided essential support for those who need it in some areas, depending on the approach being used, their role and often employer.

## Annex 2: Volunteering Partnership Review

We recommend that the Volunteering Partnership lead a substantive review of volunteering in Wales in order to inform how Welsh Government and others can make substantive improvements to maximise the contribution of volunteering towards a green and just recovery.

The review should consider:

- Local coordination and recovery from the pandemic, building on the opportunities created by COVID. It should consider enabling connections, understanding and integration between key local infrastructure (eg LAs, CVCs, LHB) to enable stronger future decision making and delivery around volunteering.
- The potential for volunteers in each sector and how volunteering can become more embedded in working practices.
- Ways of sustaining volunteers
- How informal volunteering and the various mutual aid groups which have emerged through the crisis, can be best supported in the future.
- Ensuring that volunteering is accessible to people from all backgrounds. We are particularly keen to ensure that opportunities are available for younger people, and people from BAME backgrounds. This review may also consider the role that volunteering can play in bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, as well as how to increase Welsh language opportunities.
- How volunteering can contribute to specific aspects of a green and just recovery, building on the opportunities and challenges created by COVID-19
  - Increasing citizen wellbeing, particularly for young people
  - Health and social care improvements
  - Pathways to employment, particularly for young people.
  - A healthy natural environment and tackling climate change
  - Equality and justice, including diversity of volunteers.
  - Digital skills and capacity.
  - Community cohesion and tackling division.
- In the longer-term, this group should support work to build on the Future Trends report in relation to volunteering; including both what will enable people to volunteer more easily (e.g. the future of work, an ageing population) and issues that volunteering can address (e.g. climate change, divisions in society).