



**Voluntary sector manifesto**  
**Senedd Cymru elections 2021**

## INTRODUCTION - NEVER MORE NEEDED

Volunteers, community groups and the wider voluntary sector have been integral to supporting people and communities across Wales through the COVID-19 crisis. Collaboration, and our collective ability to make a much bigger difference to people's wellbeing together, has led to effective action for the people of Wales.

In the midst of the tragedy and hardships of recent months, these groups have had to work very differently. This has created opportunities to learn about what does and doesn't work and what could lead to longer term change. The recovery presents a once in a generation opportunity to address the long-term challenges that face our society, as well as the immediate challenges ahead. Voluntary organisations are ambitious to play their full part in creating a better future.

The crisis has led to huge upheaval across the voluntary sector. Some has been positive – rapid innovation, new

relationships and shifts in behaviours and opinions that many have been campaigning on for years. But some has been negative – significant loss of income at a time of rising demand, services reduced or closed and worsening outcomes for the most vulnerable people and communities. The crisis will lead to deep and permanent change. We believe the voluntary sector can apply the same community spirit to the challenges Wales will face in the future.

The manifesto outlines some of the ways that the public and voluntary sector can work in partnership to ensure the best outcomes for Wales. In developing this manifesto, we have listened to our members, to the voluntary sector and stakeholders more widely and drawn on a wide range of reports on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the voluntary sector and the people who it serves. More detail on many of these proposals can be found in our response to the [Our Future Wales consultation](#).

## VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers are at the heart of Wales' communities and have been at the heart of our national response to coronavirus. They have delivered medicines and food, provided support and friendship, and helped those in dire financial need as a result of the pandemic.

The history of volunteering in Wales is longstanding, and the contribution volunteers have made to our communities over the years is significant. Today, our volunteering networks – local, regional, and national – are strong.

Since the coronavirus outbreak, there has been a renewed interest in volunteering, whether formally or as part of spontaneous community action. Over 18,000 people signed up to Volunteering Wales, many more have volunteered for national voluntary organisations and community groups, and informal community groups (often called mutual aid groups) have flourished across Wales.

We also know that volunteering provides benefits, not just for voluntary organisations and people who receive services, but also for volunteers.



Wales has a golden opportunity to sustain this surge in volunteering thanks to a pre-existing, Wales-wide volunteering infrastructure, as well as closely-knit communities with a history of helping each other in difficult times.

With the right support, this spirit of volunteering can contribute to the recovery, and to overcoming the challenges Wales will face in the longer-term.

Our evidence shows that:

- ▶ Volunteering benefits the volunteer as well as those who receive support from volunteers. It provides purpose, social interaction and can improve career prospects and individual wellbeing. Other benefits include improved mental health for both the volunteer and those supported.
- ▶ Volunteers provide essential benefits to their community, as well as supporting the well-being of people living there.
- ▶ In Wales, volunteering has been more successful as a result of consistent investment in volunteering infrastructure.
- ▶ Providing Welsh language volunteering opportunities increased the value of a service to people who receive it, and help contribute to plans to increase the percentage of the population that speak Welsh daily.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen by:

- ▶ Investing in youth volunteering, supporting the expansion of opportunities available within existing and emerging organisations. This should focus on

tackling big issues such as climate change and the nature crisis, mental health, community cohesion and intergenerational links. This would build on and support opportunities that already exist in these areas, and include Welsh language provision. Young people should be in the lead to contribute their own solutions to these big issues.

- ▶ Investing in the volunteering infrastructure so that it is accessible to a wider range of cohorts of people and communities, can support different approaches to volunteering, modelling the responses seen to COVID-19, and ensure volunteering can be well-managed, agile, and safe. Enabling more people to volunteer in Welsh should be a part of this.
- ▶ Supporting the role of volunteers in the NHS, beginning by implementing Action 32 of the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care, which commits the Welsh Government to commission a programme of work to understand the contribution of volunteers and unpaid carers to the health and care system.
- ▶ Working with the voluntary sector (national, regional, and local) to ensure that Welsh Government's investment in volunteering matches the demands and trends of the future and enables the third sector to take a leadership role on this agenda.

## COMMUNITIES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, active communities have been a lifeline. Communities have provided a sense of belonging and a way of escaping the challenges of the lockdown, especially through local nature spots and community facilities. Community groups responded swiftly and effectively to COVID-19; providing support and services that neither government nor the private sector could do. With the right support, we can nurture this community spirit beyond just this crisis.

The relationship between the public sector and the



voluntary sector is often dominated by the public sector. COVID-19 has shown what can be achieved when they work together. It has shown what could be achieved longer term if we can reset these relationships so that public bodies empower and enable community leadership.

A sustained response will require a shift towards an enabling governance model. It is likely to need funding with a place-based focus. WCVA's Empowering Communities project identified a number of key issues which included: being clear about the role of place in development, focusing on asset-based development, and valuing social, natural and cultural capital and community anchor organisations.

Our evidence shows that:

- Communities working together can improve the lives of everyone who lives in them. Sometimes this can be spontaneous but sometimes it will be better delivered by more formal or long-standing organisations.
- Community facilities help sustain communities, including Welsh-language communities.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen by:

- Developing a community wealth programme to support voluntary groups in the communities which need it the most. This long-term programme would develop community capacity in a manner decided by these local organisations. This could be funded by UK Government's proposed dormant assets scheme.
- Supporting a Community Empowerment Act which would:
  - improve the rights available for community groups seeking community asset transfer and wider forms of community control.
  - Improve co-production and involvement between community groups, citizens, service users, and unpaid carers, and their local public sector bodies.
  - Ensure an asset-based approach to community development, which is flexible enough for all areas of Wales.
  - Strengthen community involvement in decision-making, and emphasize place-based development.

- Working with and enabling County Voluntary Councils and other bodies to ensure that the skills and staff are in place to support community organisations, including mutual aid groups.

## DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Wales' democracy should be open to everyone. The voluntary sector plays a key role in engaging citizens with their communities and supporting their involvement in our society.

COVID-19 has highlighted how some groups of citizens are not treated equally – especially those groups with protected characteristics.

The Black Lives Matter movement, for example, has exposed and highlighted the structural inequalities faced by people from BAME backgrounds. European migrants, asylum seekers and refugees also face increased uncertainty in the post-Brexit period. Many other groups also face similar inequalities.

This is especially true when involving citizens in the decisions which affect them. Many parts of the Welsh public sector can improve by involving voluntary organisations and citizens better in their work – but this is especially true of disadvantaged groups, whose voice is often the least heard.

Our evidence shows that:

- The state engages with some groups of citizens less effectively than others, and this impacts public policy outcomes.
- Volunteering and community engagement leads to a greater interest in politics.



The public sector and the voluntary sector can make this happen by:

- Putting citizen voice at the centre of service planning and policy development by embedding tried-and-tested participatory approaches to citizen engagement, such as citizens' assemblies and panels, co-production approaches and participatory budgeting. Specific attention should be paid to including marginalised groups within this, including young people and people from BAME backgrounds.
- Ensure the voice of the voluntary sector is heard in future discussions around social partnership including as part of any Social Partnership council.
- Developing policy alongside accountability to move the Welsh public sector towards being an enabling state for communities and publishing its outcomes.
- Support local engagement and participation through building empowered communities (see above).
- Continuing to support equality and human rights standards following withdrawal from EU regulations which have supported them.
- Continuing to enable the voluntary sector to ensure a healthy, representative, and active civil society which can hold public bodies and politicians to account.

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE RECOVERY



There will be a national effort in rebuilding our society and economy following the COVID-19 outbreak. We believe that this should be based around the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Supporting this recovery will be a big challenge for the voluntary sector as a whole, and each part of it will have contributions to make. Getting all parts of society involved, across all our communities, is critical.

The voluntary sector overwhelmingly believes that the recovery should not be an attempt to restore the system which existed before, but to use this generational opportunity to ensure that economic recovery is green and

just, that it includes everyone and keeps us within safe and sustainable environmental limits. For example, many voluntary organisations are working to provide solutions as part of the green recovery and to ensure that, despite the current pandemic, we don't take our eyes off this potentially far worse looming disaster

The pandemic has also highlighted the value of frontline workers, including those from the voluntary sector who have provided care and support services in the community. The sacrifices they have made has raised questions about how we value and compensate their contribution.

Our evidence shows that:

- ▶ Pre-existing trends around inequality, the climate crisis, health challenges and social cohesion have been exacerbated by this crisis.
- ▶ The crisis has disproportionately impacted specific groups, such as BAME communities, older people, people with disabilities and unpaid carers, and those on low incomes.
- ▶ Partnership between the voluntary, public and private sectors will be crucial to creating a green and just recovery.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen for **public services** by:

- ▶ Investing in preventative services that reduce harm (and cost) in the long-run, ensuring all services take an active part in the prevention agenda.
- ▶ Ensuring the diversity of unpaid carer's voices are heard in discussions around the future of health and social care.
- ▶ Increasing the role that the voluntary sector can play in delivering wellbeing and support the NHS by mainstreaming social prescribing and loneliness prevention into the work of public bodies.
- ▶ Using social value principles in a wider area of public services and reviewing the effectiveness of the implementation of rules supporting social value in commissioning and procurement processes.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen for **tackling poverty** by:

- ▶ Engaging people living in poverty, and organisations which work with people who live in poverty, in policy-making.
- ▶ Specifically addressing the different experiences of poverty that affect specific groups to ensure that anti-poverty measures are inclusive.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen for **the economy** by:

- ▶ Supporting a Shared Prosperity Fund which provides an opportunity for communities and their support agencies to help drive change in job creation and community development, as well as supporting education, volunteering, and equality. In order to best work with the devolved range of services, the Fund should be devolved.
- ▶ Supporting the development of community and voluntary sector-led employability programmes, building on current provision that already exists. This would also include removing the barriers which prevent some groups from volunteering.

- ▶ Committing that a proportion of the overall skills and employability budget should be ringfenced for disadvantaged groups, taking an approach that acknowledges that voluntary sector agencies are a key part of achieving this.
- ▶ Ensuring that apprenticeships and similar programmes of work recruit from the full diversity of Wales' communities and are accessible to voluntary sector employers.
- ▶ Implementing an inclusive Social Enterprise Action Plan, based on the recent vision for Social Enterprise.
- ▶ Developing a wider range of alternative finances, such as social investment and endowment funding or support organisations to move to a more varied funding model.
- ▶ Strengthening the space for the voluntary sector within the policy development process. The Third Sector Support Wales and Third Sector Partnership Council networks can and should be enabled to play an essential role in linking the grassroots, community-based response to national policy and enabling knowledge transfer and accountability.
- ▶ Expanding support for the climate and conservation activity that takes place at a local level in recognition that this is a crucial part of the response to the climate and nature emergencies.
- ▶ Developing milestones for Wellbeing of Future Generations Act so we can see where and how much Wales is progressing towards the Goals. The TOMS framework needs to more fully reflect the Welsh context and diversity if adopted.

Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen for the **climate and nature** by:

- ▶ Ensuring funding for environmental and nature projects in the recovery programmes, as well as ensuring that green recovery spending does not go to environmentally-damaging projects. This includes Welsh Government's external advisory group in recovery led by the Counsel General through to sector focused recovery groups.

## RESILIENCE

The coronavirus pandemic has changed the voluntary sector in a way that no-one would have expected earlier this year. The sector has faced a sea-change in the way it operates and a monumental drop in its income – all while demand has continued to rise. Over the next few years, there is an expectation that the voluntary sector will change enormously – and not necessarily in a positive way.

Many of these trends existed before the pandemic but have been exacerbated by it. However, the voluntary sector needs to prepare for the future it will face in the longer term – both for its own independent work and to support Welsh Government's priorities. The more resilient the voluntary sector, the more it can support societal and in turn public sector resilience.

Our evidence shows that:

- ▶ The voluntary sector faces a significant financial loss this year – estimated to be 24% of income, or £1.2 billion for charities based in Wales.
- ▶ Resilience is about more than just financial security, it is also about how the public sector partners with the voluntary sector, and how adaptable our services are.



Partnership between the voluntary sector and the public sector can make this happen by:

- ▶ Expanding its programmes for digital inclusion, including for both greater high-speed coverage and improving access to technology and digital skills amongst marginalised sections of the population.
- ▶ Co-producing measures to re-set relationships across the public and voluntary sector to enable better collaboration, and share best practice to ensure greater consistency and accountability.

- ▶ Ensure its programmes enable the voluntary sector to speak out on policy matters which are important to us and our service users.
- ▶ Supporting the proposed dormant assets scheme in order to release more funding to Wales, and that this funding be used to increase the levels of endowed funding and social investment.
- ▶ Continuing to provide support to voluntary sector organisations assisting with the recovery, or faced with significant financial challenges.
- ▶ Addressing the particularly fragile situation of groups representing, and led by, Wales' BME communities.
- ▶ Consider the way in which its financial powers can provide more sustainable funding for the voluntary sector including three-year budgeting and ensuring the principle of full-cost recovery is included in project funding.
- ▶ Support infrastructure services to build resilience, including governance, digital services, Welsh language skills, diversified income and alternative finance across the sector as a whole.

## SIGNATORIES



Cefnogi Trydydd  
Sector **Cymru**  
Third Sector  
Support **Wales**



Children in Wales  
Plant yng Nghymru



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