



# Further milestones to measure our nation's progress

## A RESPONSE FROM WCVA

1. [Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#) (WCVA) is the national membership body for voluntary organisations in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.

## DO YOU AGREE WITH THE PROPOSED NATIONAL MILESTONE FOR INDICATOR 2: HEALTH LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH, INCLUDING THE GAP BETWEEN THE LEAST AND MOST DEPLETED

2. We would like to start by noting that we are not 100% happy with any of the milestones we discuss in this response – they all have room for improvement. There is no nuance in the 'do you agree – yes/no' format of these questions. While we appreciate there are opportunities to expand in the 'if yes' and 'if no' follow-up questions, the fact is that if Welsh Government publish figures saying something akin to 'X% of people said they were happy with this indicator', these bald statistics are unlikely to be a true reflection of the reality. Being able to answer something using a rating scale would likely have offered a fuller picture.
3. So with regard to this question: we would broadly agree with this as a milestone. However, one respondent highlighted the difference between male and female life expectancies and requested a deeper dive behind these figures. She observed that 'longer life expectancy' in women often doesn't consider ONS data showing that women also live fewer years 'disability-free' than men. She also noted that older women are also more likely to be in poverty. We agree that an intersectional understanding of what can constitute barriers to 'healthy life expectancy' is vital if they are to be addressed.
4. This indicator should address the links between quality of housing and life expectancy. Those in poor quality housing can fall victim to illnesses that are then exacerbated by their housing. Those in higher quality housing can remain independent for longer, less likely to need hospital care, and more likely to live longer. The [Strategy for An Aging Society](#) looks at some of these issues in more detail and can be an invaluable lever in helping Welsh Government achieve its target on Healthy Life Expectancy. There is also a cost element in maintaining poor quality housing, which has a direct impact on Indicator 18.

5. A number of people suggested to us that a more ambitious target would be to seek to eliminate the gap in life expectancy between most and least deprived people. The current target is, after all, only to narrow the gap by just 15% over 38 years. We would agree that Welsh Government should seek to narrow the gap by more than this over such a length of time, with a longer-term target of eliminating it entirely.

## **HOW CAN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HELP ACHIEVE THIS MILESTONE?**

6. This is not a question Welsh Government asked. However, we believe it useful for Welsh Government to hear what the voluntary sector can do to help it achieve the aims set out in this programme, and so we have asked this question of the sector regarding each section we are responding to.
  - Social prescribing can play a key role in helping people live longer and improve their health and wellbeing. The sector's role in hospital discharge services is also vital in this area.
  - Grassroots organisations led by and for people with protected characteristics play a crucial role in amplifying the needs of communities, including those that are deprived. These organisations can play a key role in policy-making, but must be empowered and supported to do so.
  - The sector can provide more accessible services, more decarbonised transport and more walking and cycling routes, but must be funded sustainably to do so.
  - In terms of raising expectations in the most deprived areas, working with middle-aged people, as well as youth and older people, on their living conditions may well be particularly important.

## **DO YOU AGREE WITH THE PROPOSED NATIONAL MILESTONE FOR INDICATOR 18: INCOME POVERTY RELATIVE TO THE UK MEDIAN**

7. Again, we broadly agree with this as a milestone. However, there are beneficial changes that could be made. Firstly, a clearer definition of what is meant by 'key characteristics' would be useful. The characteristics used in the documentation are a combination of some of the Protected Characteristics from the Equality Act (disability and race are mentioned), along with 'children'. It is vital that all understand exactly what these characteristics are so that we know what is being measured. It is worth noting, on this subject, that there are disproportionate numbers of certain groups of people living in poverty – for example, asylum seekers – who are not captured by the Equality Act, but must be considered overall within this milestone.
8. On the subject of measurement, there is a commitment for setting 'a stretching growth target', but it is unclear exactly when this will be set. For the sake of clarity and accurate measurement, this must be set on publication of the final report.
9. It is useful to remember at this moment that we are in a cost of living crisis that is sure to only get worse in the immediate future. It will undoubtedly have a huge impact on income policy, in both Wales and across the UK.

## HOW CAN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HELP ACHIEVE THIS MILESTONE?

10.

- Welsh Government should be consistently and constantly working with the voluntary sector to help achieve the aims of the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#). Those from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, so it is essential that the Plan is considered in all work designed to tackle poverty.
- It would be useful for the voluntary sector (particularly advocacy services) and Welsh Government to work in partnership to bring together all data in Wales about benefits and entry into work. In this way it can gain a fuller overall picture of people's income and the services/advice they seek.
- Rural Wales should not be overlooked in work towards this milestone. The sector is better-placed than most to reach isolated communities, understand their needs, and provide support. An opportunity to work with the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales on this would be welcomed.

## DO YOU AGREE WITH THE PROPOSED NATIONAL MILESTONE FOR INDICATOR 28: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO VOLUNTEER?

11. Our engagement work suggests the sector broadly agrees with the milestone but almost universally has some reservations, with a significant minority finding it entirely unsuitable.
12. The primary concerns expressed to us revolve around the challenges of capturing meaningful data to inform this milestone.
13. Respondents to our survey pointed out a national increase of 10% could be achieved but still hide vast regional disparities in volunteering numbers. [Data from the National Survey](#) in 2019-20 shows us a local variance score of 24.4, with standard deviation at nearly 5%. Local growth and decline trends don't follow a uniform pattern either. To illustrate, we've observed a national drop of volunteer numbers from 28% in 2016-17 to 26% in 2019-20, but if we look closer, the percentage for the lowest-scoring county for this period has dropped from 20.7% to 15.9%, while the highest-scoring county has recorded an increase from 30.8% to 32.9%. In this extreme example, the higher scoring county went from having 1/3 more volunteers to having over twice the amount of the lower-scoring county over a two year period. There is a concern the milestone does not account for regional disparities and could mask a reality of volunteering percentage gaps widening.
14. Another metric unaccounted for is the diversity of people volunteering. In light of the cost of living crisis, the sector is concerned with deepening inequalities. In order to achieve our ambition as a volunteering nation we need to ensure volunteering is accessible to all – people of all ages, means, backgrounds, races, abilities and lifestyles. We may be able to achieve the 10% increase without diversifying our volunteering opportunities, and therefore our volunteer cohorts at all – thus hitting the milestone, but failing the Well-being of Future Generations Act's goal for A More Equal Wales.

15. It's important to note any data collected would only present an incomplete picture so long as 'volunteering' means different things to different people. Informal, neighbourly forms of volunteering, such as many of the activities we observed during the pandemic, often remain unreported as individuals would often think the volunteering label is reserved for those regularly giving their time to a registered charity or community group. Even then, faith communities represent organised groups who often heavily rely on voluntary action; however the individuals giving their time would describe their involvement as 'ministry' or 'obedience to God' rather than volunteering and would likely not self-ID as a volunteer in a survey.
16. In terms of the feasibility of the target, some of the responders argued the milestone was not ambitious enough, while others felt a prolonged cost of living crisis may affect our ability to meet an even modestly ambitious target. There is a strong sense that the way the milestone is achieved matters more than the percentage itself – is the growth sustainable, evenly distributed and do all people in Wales have equal access and opportunity to volunteer?
17. Many of the suggestions we've received support the stakeholder recommendations as outlined in the consultation paper, including the measurement of hours volunteered, the expansion of the indicators to better represent the impact of volunteering, the inclusion of younger people, and the collection of diversity data. In addition, development of connections with the private sector through collaborations and via the work of social enterprises is seen as an important aspect of building a volunteering nation, despite the lack of formal monitoring through this milestone.

## **HOW CAN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HELP ACHIEVE THIS MILESTONE?**

18.
  - The sector can help provide training to facilitate inclusion, links to underprivileged communities, expertise on what is needed to expand or establish volunteering activities. We will always highlight the benefits of volunteering, championing the fact that those who volunteer can benefit as much as the people they are supporting. However, the sector will continue to need sustainable funding to enable the development of volunteering opportunities with appropriate support. This milestone cannot be achieved without ensuring a stable voluntary sector environment.

## **DO YOU AGREE WITH THE PROPOSED NATIONAL MILESTONE FOR INDICATOR 44: STATUS OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN WALES?**

19. This is the indicator that WCVA would give the most unqualified welcome to; however there are still elements that the sector has questioned. These look at the timeline in particular, with some suggesting clear recovery should be sought ahead of 2050. It would be a good idea to set out some baseline targets, such as a net stabilisation of protected species numbers across a defined period of five

years.

20. One organisation said that the data being used is very narrow, citing 'distribution of priority species', so it does not provide enough grounds to measure progress on the 'status of species and ecosystems' in a comprehensive and robust way. Further development of Indicator 44 would help here, along with a clearer link to Indicator 43, and a species-abundance indicator developed.
21. It was also suggested that while reducing chemical dependency in food and farming is laudable, it should be accompanied by an increase in organic and permaculture food production.

## **HOW CAN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HELP ACHIEVE THIS MILESTONE?**

22.
  - The voluntary sector can work with Welsh Government to help set the baselines, share data and monitor impact. On this subject, it must be recognised that this milestone is not the equivalent of the legally-binding nature recovery targets that Welsh Government has committed to bringing forward in legislation. These targets remain an urgent priority to reverse nature loss in Wales and provide full accountability.
  - The sector can work with communities to co-design projects to scale up successful reduction and mitigation techniques, and educate local authorities in biodiversity reparation programmes and techniques. It has a key role to play in sharing information about biodiversity and planting in people a desire to protect nature.
  - Adult Community Learning providers can help educate people on the importance of biodiversity.

## **HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD COMMUNICATE WITH THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES OF WALES ON THE NATIONAL MILESTONES?**

23. It will be important to communicate in Plain English/Cymraeg Clir to help understand the importance and worth of this work. It is very data-heavy and jargonistic, so every effort must be made to communicate as simple as possible. A simple communication strategy regarding the nature, drivers and proposed outcomes on the National Milestones would ensure effective communication and a stronger national understanding.
24. Communication should not only take place online. Newspapers, radio and television still all have a role to play, particularly in getting these messages out to older people.
25. The voluntary sector is key in achieving these Indicators and Milestones, and therefore the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The sector should be asked to help communicate and co-productively work with communities, the

public sector and Welsh Government to demonstrate why this is important work affecting everyone in Wales, and – crucially – how everyone in Wales can play their part in making it a success.

26. When considering communication and engagement, we suggest Welsh Government utilise the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#), relaunched this year by the First Minister.
27. It is worth noting that engagement with organisations and advocates who embody protected characteristics and have lived experience of the intersectional contributors to poverty requires more than simply consultation, but supporting, empowering, and enabling people affected to be active and equal participants in discussions and finding/implementing solutions. Engagement with individuals on the part of public bodies can be problematic for all manner of reasons, not least exacerbation of trauma. Sometimes, it requires the intervention and support of grassroots and peer-led organisations to give people the confidence they need to participate and remain involved in policy-making and relevant service-design. However, funding for this kind of activity is limited and often not accessible.

## **PLEASE PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF CONNECTIONS AND INTERDEPENDENCIES BETWEEN MILESTONES AND INDICATORS**

28. As noted above, this is highly intersectional work. Nobody should be disadvantaged unintentionally by Welsh Government seeking to make progress towards achieving some of these milestones. This is why Welsh Government must pay particular attention to its Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, as well as its [LGBTQ+ Action Plan](#) and the latest version of the [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation](#). Work towards achieving these Milestones must not hinder work towards achieving the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, the LGBTQ+ Action Plan or the Learning Disability Strategic Action Plan. Also, it would be easy to overlook climate change in efforts towards achieving some of the other indicators with perhaps more immediate and tangible outcomes. This must be avoided. The aims of [Net Zero Wales](#) should be a central part of the Milestones and Indicators work.
29. We also note the national milestone for volunteering can act as both an indicator of how impactful work towards the other milestones has been (e.g. increased life expectancy would enable people to volunteer for longer in their retirement), and as an aid to other milestones (e.g. more conservation-related volunteering will contribute towards the biodiversity milestone).
30. WCVA would like to see similar information collected for the voluntary sector as for business.
  - Percentage of businesses which are innovative – it would be useful to collect for voluntary organisations as well
  - The global footprint of Wales – it would be useful to see this broken down to include a separate footprint for the voluntary sector
  - Capacity (in MW) of renewable energy equipment installed – is it possible to get breakdown to see what proportion is voluntary sector led/owned?

- Percentage of people in employment – again, a breakdown for the voluntary sector would be helpful, as would be knowing figures for permanent/temporary contracts within the sector and who earns at least the Real Living Wage.
- Pay difference for gender, disability and ethnicity – Could this be collected in a way that would give a breakdown for voluntary sector?
- Percentage of people satisfied with their ability to get to/access the facilities and services they need.

31. We think the indicator ‘Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area’ still leaves something important missing. We want to know not just who feels they can ‘influence’ others but who feels they can participate in making positive change. The correlations with ‘percentage of people who are lonely’ and the questions on ‘Percentage of people agreeing that they belong to an area: that people from different backgrounds get on well together; that people treat each other with respect’ would help to give us some real insight into the difference this makes. Ideally, we’d want to be able also understand to what extent that links to people feeling a sense of belonging and sense of purpose as a result. These are so important to people’s wellbeing.

## **ANY OTHER COMMENTS?**

32. WCVA’s response has been informed by conversations with the voluntary sector, including the Third Sector Support Wales infrastructure, as well as a survey of the sector. Ahead of this survey, we decided to focus on questions on four of what we felt were the indicators of most relevance to our membership and the voluntary sector as a whole. This is why we have not answered every question within the consultation.

33. We thank Welsh Government for the opportunity to respond to this consultation and put forward some views from the voluntary sector.

34. We will be happy to discuss these points further with Welsh Government Ministers or officials if requested.

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