

Voluntary sector meeting with the Minister for Health and Social Services

26 September 2022, 1pm-1.45pm

WCVA notes

Attendees

Voluntary sector

- Catrin Edwards, Carers Trust
- Simon Jones, Mind Cymru
- Tracy Jones, Ty Hafan
- Gemma Lelliott, CTA Cymru
- Helen Smith, St John Wales
- Chris Jones, Care and Repair Cymru
- Cath Lewis, Carers Trust
- Sharon Richards, VAMT
- Sarah Roche, RVS
- Claire Morgan, Carers Wales
- Selima Bahadur, EYST
- Debbie Shaffer, Fair Treatment for Women in Wales
- Matthew O'Grady, Stroke
- Uzo Iwobi, Race Council Cymru
- Wynne Roberts, Interfaith Council for Wales
- Kate Young, All Wales Forum of Parents and Carers
- Glyn Meredith, Cartrefi Cymru
- Johanna Davies, WCVA
- Fiona Liddell, WCVA
- Judith Stone, WCVA
- David Cook, WCVA

Welsh Government

- Sally Rees
- Ian Turner
- Andrew Pithouse
- Deputy Minister for Mental Health
- Minister for Health and Social Services

Submitted papers: *The impact of the cost of living crisis on the voluntary sector in Wales and Winter pressures*

Judith noted three key issues that cover both items

- The changing nature of the short term emergency response required to increase availability of funding when services are facing same increased demand as public sector. Health and social care are built on interdependence between sectors, but money is not going as far as it

was. The sector is starting from a weaker position this winter due to winter pressures and the cost of living crisis.

- The longer-term implementation agenda about the need to increase levels of integration of voluntary sector providers into planning cycles at all levels.
- The nature of investment already going into sector. It is often start-stop and short term. A move to longer term rather than seasonal investment is needed to build the kind of resilience that will allow for flexibility and capacity to respond to variations in demand.

Helen noted difficulties rises in the national minimum wage can cause to the voluntary sector, as it has no way to pass on these increased costs, with the cost of living crisis adding further difficulties.

Chris noted need for longer-term planning and strategic involvement in planning alongside health and social care and housing sectors, but even a short-term injection of money into the sector at this time would help the sector.

Judith said that Revenue Investment Fund is important, but a small investment stream in a large health and social care budget. We need to look at where long-term focus on investment could be, and how to get the sector involved in these discussions. Chris noted engagement issues around RIF, and that many ideas from the ICF were not embedded long-term. Sally added that the key role of RIF is to embed good practice moving forward from ICF and the Transformation Fund.

The Minister thanked the sector for all it has done over the last few years, and will continue to do. She noted dissatisfaction with the recent UK Government 'fiscal event'. She said short-term patterns of finance are not conducive to keeping people in jobs and that the sector needs some stability for the future. She would expect 20% of RIF to be spent in the voluntary sector, and needs to know if that is not happening.

The Minister said it is important in the move to RIF to learn lessons from what worked previously, and is bored of pilots. We know what works. She noted the need for outcomes that deliver best value for money, and that Health Boards have projects that have had lots of effort put in, but are not as good as similar projects elsewhere in the country. RPBs have been told to stop holding onto 'pet projects' if they are not delivering. The same should be true of the voluntary sector.

The Minister said she is aware of people in the sector who don't earn much and should be rewarded, but there is no more money. Energy costs alone have led to a massive overspend in health and significant cuts are needed. Tax cuts and a demographic timebomb will mean Welsh Government cannot pay for care as they do now. She would like to explore more what can be done in the volunteering space, but recognize the sector will need capacity to make that happen. She is considering how volunteers could do some of the things care workers do.

Catrin said that volunteers are part of the role in easing pressures in the care workforce. She added that unpaid carers are not volunteers, but part of an unpaid workforce supporting the system. Volunteers and unpaid carers need infrastructure and support.

Kate said it was important for Welsh Government to push messages to partners saying how important the voluntary sector is, and that it is having the same issues about retention and recruitment of staff. This would show the sector is valued.

Chris said that while the purpose of RIF is to embed learning and good practice from what's old and new, he didn't feel Local Health Boards had got the message about that.

Fiona spoke about how volunteers work in care homes and hospitals, and how volunteers can provide person, social and emotional support, but these things need investment and infrastructure. There is an issue about how feedback about how this works goes into the system, this feedback gets lost by statutory services.

The Minister said Wales relies on the voluntary sector, but understands it might feel a lack of appreciation. The system would be much worse without the sector. The Minister for Social Justice shouts loudly for the sector, and unpaid carers, in all meetings. She noted that the poor will feel the worst impacts of the Cost of Living Crisis. She noted that over 1000 people are in hospital that shouldn't be, due to a lack of community support, and that winter pressures are now all-year-round pressures. We need an all-year approach. She commented that Health Boards have built money into the system earlier this year.

The Minister recognized that volunteers can tick lots of boxes, but need support, safeguarding and infrastructure. She noted that any volunteering solutions in health and care need to be reliable, so that people aren't left without care in unforeseen circumstances. This would involve work with statutory partners. She also noted the wealth of voluntary sector organisations, and that the public don't know who they should be contacting if they need to. An easier-to-navigate system is needed. She will help push messages about the voluntary sector to RPBs.

Actions

- *Minister to communicate importance of the voluntary sector to RPBs.*
- *Voluntary sector to consider implications of increased role for volunteers in social care system.*