

Meeting with the Minister for Economy and Third Sector

9th November 2022

Time: 9:10 - 10:00 Venue: Microsoft Teams

Attending

Welsh Government

Minister for Economy, Vaughn Gething MS

Claire McDonald, DD Economic Policy

Morgan Phillips, Economic Policy

Third Sector

Matt Brown WCVA

Ben Lloyd WCVA

Gareth Coles Creative Lives

Glenn Bowen Cwmpas

Lisa Wills The Arts Factory

Michelle Rowson Coalfields Regeneration Trust

San Leonard Social Firms Wales

Susie Ventris Field WCIA

Miranda Glen Making Music

Clair Brick Siawns Teg

David Williams Llais y Goedwig

Helal Uddin EYST

Tabea Wilkes Wales Environment Link

Sue Husband Business in the Community

Catherine Evans Cwmpas

Matthew Williams Welsh Sports Association

Anne Marie Rogan St Giles Trust

Gurmit Singh Randhawa Interfaith Council for Wales

Kathryn Robson Adult Learning Wales

Hazel Lloyd Lubran CVC Cymru

Adam Kennerley DTA Wales

Apologies

Hadassah Radway Race Council Cymru

David Hagendyk Learning & Work Institution

The WCVA have submitted two papers for discussion, which formed the agenda:

Shared Prosperity Fund - this report outlined and identified key issues relating to the Third Sector and the Shared Prosperity Fund. The report also included suggestions about how current issues and concerns could be taken forwards.

Cost of Living Crisis with the Voluntary Sector – this report highlighted issues for the Third Sector caused by the current cost of living crisis, (including feedback from a recent WCVA survey). The paper listed key issues faced by organisations and communities as well as proposals and solutions.

The Economy Minister welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees if they would like to conduct formal introductions – attendees stated they would prefer to go straight into the agenda and will introduce themselves if they spoke.

Agenda 1: Shared prosperity fund.

The Minister thanked attendees for the paper and confirmed that the Welsh Government had no role in the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). He did confirm however, that Welsh Government officials had been supporting local government colleagues with their investment plans, to try and align them where possible with Welsh Government policies and avoid duplication and brokering collaboration with wider stakeholders and sectors. However, he noted the concerns of the Third Sector regarding duplication of engagement and potential outcomes.

The Third Sector representatives highlighted the disruption, inflexibility, and funding reduction with the SPF and the creation of an extremely challenging situation for many third sector organisations in Wales that have previously benefited from EU funds through the Welsh Government. This included the WCVA and the wider third sector. The Minister mentioned that budgets were under significant pressure having been cut in real terms and having being denied access to replacement EU funds for national programmes.

The Minister provided reassurance where he could and pointed to the regular contact being made with and through the WLGA to ensure opportunities for organisations to be supported out of what is regrettably a vastly reduced UK Fund. He noted the contribution and efforts the WCVA and the wider third sector have made to support those hardest to reach in the labour market through interventions supported by the European Structural Funds (ESF). He went on to explain that Welsh Government Community Employability Programmes had supported over 75,000 individuals from our most deprived communities over the past 7 years. Although Communities for Work is closing in March next year with the end of ESF, he announced the continuation and expansion of Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) from April 2023, which will focus support on those furthest from the labour market. Further explanation was also provided about the Young Person's Guarantee.

The Minister mentioned discussions with local authorities about alignment with national provision and that they might innovate and test methods of engagement and specialist niche provision with people over 50 years of age, disabled people, Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic individuals. He mentioned that the third sector also has a key role to play with regards to volunteering opportunities for the 19+ age bracket; and wraparound support on debt advice, mental health, and housing.

Agenda item 2: Cost of living and the voluntary sector – WCVA.

The paper was presented, and the Minister thanked the group and said that he would share both papers around to Cabinet colleagues as well as a note of this meeting.

Action: To circulate papers and note of meeting to Cabinet Members with an interest.

He said that hundreds and thousands of families right across Wales and the wider UK were facing the biggest fall in living standards since records began. He also

noted that people were going to face incredibly complex decisions as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and that the Welsh Government would continue to support individuals and families.

The Minister said that the Welsh Government had in total announced £380m funding to help Welsh households manage the cost-of-living crisis. It was vital that the third sector have visibility of the schemes, these included £150 cost-of-living payment was available for all households in properties in council tax bands A to D and to all households which receive support from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in all council tax bands. A further £25m had also been made available to local authorities in the form of a discretionary fund. This enabled them to provide additional funding to help households struggling with the current situation. £90m has been made available to run another Welsh Government Fuel Support Scheme in 2022-23 which will support people on low incomes with a non-repayable £200 payment towards their energy bills. The scheme has already made more than 200,000 payments.

In addition, he confirmed working in partnership with the Fuel Bank Foundation to deliver a £4m fuel voucher scheme aimed at providing crisis help to those households that must pay in advance for their energy and are unable to do so. 40 partners are at various stages of becoming FBF partners. There was also more than £4.9 million allocated to support access to food and tackle food poverty, a substantial amount of which will support community organisations to deliver food poverty initiatives and provide food to individuals in crisis.

Third Sector partners mentioned the rural aspects to poverty and how fast moving the situation was becoming, overnight people and families moved into poverty which many were unfamiliar with. There was a need to invest in homes and community hubs. The Minister confirmed the £1m to support Warm Hubs as safe and warm places in local communities that people can go to keep warm. As part of the funding Local Authorities were required to work in partnership with the public sector, voluntary sector and community partners to establish and deliver to local needs and in the distribution of funding at a local level to community groups wishing to operate or establish a Warm Hub.

Furthermore, the Minister said there should be a conscious effort of accessibility - we are encouraging people, through for example our Claim What's Yours Campaign, to contact Advice link Cymru service for support in assessing their financial situation and ensuring they are claiming everything to which they are entitled. This service is available by phone or online. Materials are being produced in various languages and format to ensure accessibility.

There was a final discussion and contributions on the 'heating or eating' topic, which led to a detailed discussions on the fact many people in Wales are currently having to decide on whether they can afford food or heating. The conversation then led on working from home or commuting to work and which is more cost efficient in terms of heating and whether employers need advice. The Minister provided some relative examples of employers providing support and advice to employees at this time.