

Meeting Between the Minister for Finance and Local Government and Representatives of the Third Sector - 17 May 2023

Attendees:

Rebecca Evans - Minister for Finance & Local Government (Chair)

Third Sector

Andrea Cleaver - Welsh Refugee Council
Emily Lane - Citizens Advice Cymru
Gemma Lelliott - CTA Wales
Gethin Rhys - Cytun/ Interfaith Council for Wales
Iwan Thomas - PLANED
Sheila Hendrickson-Brown - C3SC/ County Voluntary Council Cymru
Katie Dalton - Cymorth Cymru
Rachel Wolfendale - Co-production Network for Wales
Kofo Oladunjoye - Race Council Cymru
Priscilla Addey - Race Council Cymru

WCVA

Ruth Marks - Chief Executive
Janine Downing - Head of Partnerships & Policy
Kelly Chamberlain - Partnerships Support Officer TBC
Alison Pritchard - Sustainable Funding Manager
Livia Pietromarchi - Policy Networks Officer

Welsh Government

Matt Wellington - Budget & Policy Delivery
Chris Buchan - Third Sector Policy & Support
Aaron Fortt - Third Sector Policy Manager
Lisa Clarridge - Third Sector Senior Policy Manager
Paula James - Local Government Strategic Engagement
Kelly Murphy - Ukraine Response Team
Peter Ryland - Welsh European Funding Office
Alison Sandford - Welsh European Funding Office
Sarah Rhodes - Housing Policy, Homelessness Prevention Team
Philippa Marsden - Special Adviser to the Minister
Paul McDonagh - Secretariat
Sandra Stephenson - Secretariat

1. Note of the meeting on 10 November 2022

1.1 The Minister noted that there had been a couple of suggested amendments to the note of the previous meeting but that the issues were being taken forward by the Funding and Compliance Sub Committee. A meeting between the WCVA and Welsh Government officials was being organised, engagement that the Minister was happy to support. She asked that links to information making it easier for people to understand the benefits available to them during the cost-of-living crisis be circulated:

2. Finance and Compliance Sub Committee

2.1 Alison Pritchard gave an update on behalf of the Funding and Compliance Sub-Committee. She reported that the Sub Committee's review of the Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector was well underway and now included 5 draft interconnected principles:

- Equity
- Early and Continuous Dialogue
- Valuing and Outcomes
- Appropriate Funding Basis
- Flexibility

2.2 The Sector asked for the Minister's continued support and for her to raise the issue at Cabinet and with local authorities. The Minister welcomed the update and noted that the approach aligned closely with the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. The Minister was aware that the Minister for Social Justice had been asked to raise this issue at Cabinet and agreed that she would support her in doing so. The Minister also agreed that she would promote this work to partner organisations wherever possible.

3. Local Authority Funding and Relationships, Including the Shared Prosperity Fund

3.1 Janine Downing spoke to this Third Sector paper. Janine acknowledged that this was a complex area, covering different Ministerial portfolios and partner organisations, with a varied picture of engagement. However, Janine stressed that the sector wanted to work with officials and to have a continuous dialogue. The ask in the paper was for the Minister to support the Sector's work with officials and to raise the issue at Cabinet.

3.2 Sheila Hendrickson-Brown called for greater equity, balance, and recognition of the role of the sector.

3.3 Katie Dalton advised that the Minister's statement to the Senedd on 2 May providing an update on the Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitment to reduce the administrative burden on local authorities had caused some concern to homelessness services. These concerns were based on a previous grants consolidation exercise which had initially consolidated a number of grants into one, but which, following engagement, were subsequently split into two grants, Housing and Non-Housing-related. This change had been welcomed by the sector. Katie stressed the need for assurance of a collaborative approach and early involvement of the Third Sector. She reported that the dehypothecation of the Housing Support Grant at a time of considerable pressure would cause concern.

3.4 Iwan Thomas added that the sector was at the forefront of communities. He acknowledged the difficulty of working regionally through the UK Government's SPF approach, as different local authorities in the South West had different deadlines for bidding rounds and decision-making. Iwan reported that the funding of some projects, support services and the expertise and skills built up over many years was at risk of being lost as decisions on SPF outcomes would not be known until the end of July or even September. He called for Welsh Government to intervene to enable the third sector and grassroots organisations to feed into decision making.

3.5 In respect of partnership working, the Minister recognised the good work being done locally. The Minister agreed that the mapping work previously carried out under the Review of Strategic Partnerships in June 2020 would be circulated after the meeting. The Minister advised that the final report would go back to the Partnership Council in July.

3.6 On reducing the administrative burden on local authorities, the Minister advised that this was just the start of the engagement. The Cabinet had agreed to a review of existing grants to reduce the number of revenue grants paid to local authorities from 2024-25, and to improve the management and administration of those that remain. The changes were expected to have a positive impact for both public and voluntary sectors, with any potential for unintended consequences being considered in equality impact assessments being undertaken by individual Ministers and their officials during the review of their grants. The Minister suggested that the review of each grant will involve officials engaging with relevant local authority and voluntary sector organisations involved in the delivery of the related programme or policy. The Minister advised that the sector should engage with relevant policy leads on any concerns.

3.7 Paula James advised that the need for timely and well communicated funding decisions as referred to by Iwan Thomas earlier was one of the key drivers for this review. Local authorities had talked about the importance of early and clear communication on decisions made by Welsh Government in relation to funding of programmes, in the same way as Iwan had raised the importance of this in the funding provided by local authorities to the third sector. Paula emphasised that improved ways of working in the future should benefit the third sector and other partner organisations as well as local authorities.

3.8 On SPF, Peter Ryland noted that the consequences the Welsh Government warned of regarding the UK Government approach are unfortunately now playing out. Peter recognised the importance of a clear access pathway, capacity-building and a consistent approach to how the fund is delivered. However, this was not a Welsh Government scheme, and with the SPF being very small and short-term, there was little that could be done to change things; however, Ministers will keep raising these issues with the UK Government.

3.9 The Minister asked Peter to ensure that the sector's concerns were reflected in the Minister for Economy's briefing for his evidence session on the SPF to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs (ETRA) Committee in June. Peter invited the sector to send examples via the WCVA. The Minister also agreed to raise the sector's concerns directly with the Minister for Economy.

Action:

- Mapping undertaken as part of the Review of Strategic Partnerships in June 2020 to be circulated – Paula James
- Sector's concerns on the SPF to be noted in the Minister for Economy's briefing for the ETRA Committee – Peter Ryland
- Minister to highlight the issues to the Minister for Economy – Minister
- Third Sector to forward examples to Peter Ryland via the WCVA – Third Sector

4. Refugee Support and Local Authority Infrastructure

4.1 Andrea Cleaver spoke to this issue on behalf of the sector. Andrea accepted that the issue was not within the Minister's portfolio but asked that she raise it with the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip.

4.2 By way of background, Andrea advised that, previously, asylum seekers were dispersed to 4 local authority areas in Wales, but the UK Government has now mandated that all local authorities should be involved. This would result in asylum seekers being sent to areas where local authorities are ill-equipped, do not have systems in place and where there are no support services. Andrea advised that this was the biggest shake-up of immigration policy in our lifetime and would raise a range of challenges, with no extra funding and no face-to-face services. As a consequence, Andrea predicted that homelessness numbers would increase across Wales. Andrea requested that the Minister put pressure on the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip.

4.3 Sarah Rhodes advised that she would welcome a conversation with Andrea from an equalities and communities' perspective and agreed to contact her outside the meeting. Kelly Murphy advised that she too would welcome a conversation with Andrea but meanwhile assured her that the Social Justice Minister was well aware of the situation and that her officials continue to work with Home Office.

4.4 The Minister advised that the Minister for Social Justice had outlined plans for broadening the scope of the existing Refugee Taskforce to create the external Nation of Sanctuary Taskforce. The Minister asked Andrea to provide a short paper highlighting the issues.

Action:

- Discussions to be arranged with Andrea Cleaver to hear more detailed concerns - Sarah Rhodes and Kelly Murphy.
- Short note to be produced around issues to inform work being undertaken by Minister for Social Justice - Andrea Cleaver.