

SC 14

Ymateb gan: Yr Ymddiriedolaeth Adeiladu Cymunedau

Response from: Building Communities Trust

About Building Communities Trust

Building Communities Trust is a Welsh charity funded by a National Lottery Community Fund endowment to promote asset-based community development in some of Wales's poorest communities, providing both funding and support. We support local people to build on the strengths and talents within their communities and take action to make their areas even better places to live.

We run three separate programmes - funding 13 place-based community development initiatives at a neighbourhood level, 11 community anchor organisations and 5 community networks over a long-term period.

We use learning derived from our programme work, as well as specific research findings to advocate for policy and practices which enhance and support community-led action throughout Wales.

This response

This response has been written by BCT's Policy and Research Advisor, Eleri Williams. It is informed by the experiences of communities participating in BCT's programme work as well as others in our wider networks, notably Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE). It is underpinned by a range of research and evidence available publicly. Our response unequivocally recognises the critical role that community-based assets and community action play in improving the lives of local people and in fostering community and social cohesion. Not only is this where our expertise lies, it is where we feel that the Welsh Government and Senedd Cymru could have the most impact as several key levers in relation to social cohesion (policing and immigration amongst others) reside with politicians in Westminster.

Overview

BCT believes in supporting people in their own communities to do the things that matter to them. Most of these things are social activities which bring enjoyment to peoples' lives with others offering support that people need in harder times and some mixing enjoyment and mutual support. For many of the groups we work with, the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have meant an increasing focus on reacting to and meeting the basic needs of people in their communities.

All these activities reflect the degree of social cohesion (and mutual trust) within an area; namely the degree to which people are willing to collaborate and cooperate with each other to do the things they all want, and successful community activities help build wider cohesion, so they become mutually reinforcing.

It is our hope that our evidence to this inquiry will result in a wider conception of community and social cohesion, which recognises the role of place, community action and importance of building social capital more fully.

Community Action and Community Cohesion

Community action is the term we use to describe activities led by local third sector organisations (formally or informally established) in specific places. The overall purpose is to build happier, healthier, and more resilient communities. At its heart it draws on local people's confidence, capacity and skills to organise and develop social infrastructure and mutual support within their communities.

Community action takes many forms including the operation and provision of local facilities ranging from play spaces to gardens and a wide range of indoor spaces; provision of social activities that make life more enjoyable and aid positive mental health; as well as actions to mitigate the worst impacts of poverty including advice services, cheap services and informal provision of essentials, notably food. The activities we describe as community action therefore provide a substantial contribution to community cohesion, which is defined as “attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities” in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act.¹ The individuals involved in community groups and organisations thus make a significant contribution to community cohesion, amongst other actors. We consider community cohesion to come from a feeling of togetherness for which inclusive and accessible organisations, with the ability to access spaces to run their activities, and strong levels of trust are essential.

Factors which enable community action

We have identified several factors which enable sustainable community action and therefore contribute to social cohesion. They are as follows:

- **Access to community-owned or community-led space/ facilities**
- **Good levels of social capital; quality of relationships, trust**
- **Enough volunteers – with the flexibility and ability to evolve**
- **Connections and ability to leverage resources (people, things, cash)**

We will prioritise two of these factors (access to community-owned or community-led space/facilities and good levels of social capital; quality of relationships, trust) in this response.

Access to community-owned or community-led space/facilities

A substantial body of evidence recognises the importance of maintaining and protecting physical spaces which allow people to meet, socialise and carry out activities, along lines of difference.² The What Works Centre for Wellbeing's evidence

¹ WBFGA, 2015.

² [What Works Wellbeing, *Left Behind? Mapping Community Assets in Wales, Resilient Communities: meeting the challenge of being at the margins.*](#)

review found that places like community hubs – as well as green space, such as parks, or blue space, such as rivers or lakes – could help in promoting social cohesion, increasing social capital and trust, and widening participation.³ The importance of low-cost spaces and places for people to go, things to do and people to meet, is all the more acute following a sustained period of austerity, underinvestment and hollowing out in some communities. Research from The Institute for Public Policy Research found that an estimated 75,000 council assets, including buildings and land, at an approximate asset value of £15 billion (cash prices) are estimated to have been sold since 2010, in England alone - the figures for Wales are unknown.⁴ In one [Invest Local](#) community, an interviewee observed that (in their view) it was a community that feels “[s]tuff has been taken away from it”. They cited examples such as closure of community buildings, spaces and play equipment that was judged unsafe and removed by the local authority, but not replaced, leaving a play area “desolate”.⁵ Whilst maintaining and protecting existing assets is important, it does not go far enough in helping to build social cohesion. Throughout our programme work we have witnessed growing levels of interest in ownership and control of facilities become a priority for many communities.

The experience of our innovative community development programme, [Invest Local](#), which operates in 13 areas across Wales, provides further evidence in support of the importance of community-owned assets. The development of community-owned or led assets has been the single biggest priority for the people and communities participating in Invest Local, with some choosing to invest in existing assets and others opting to build new assets. Focusing on ownership or management ensures local services and support remain, rather than risk permanent loss due to public sector cuts. Without access to community-owned or led assets, community activity becomes much more challenging as accessible locations are a prerequisite for most things that people want to do. In addition to access to space and facilities, the development of sustainable organisations is a key enabler for resilient community action.

Our research, [Mapping Community Assets in Wales](#), which remains the most comprehensive mapping of community assets in Wales to date, states that “safer, more attractive, and more connected communities appear to result from the presence of an active community asset. Having a physical place for people to convene, learn, socialise, and take part can really help to develop a strong sense of community and bring about positive ripple effects for individuals and groups of people.”⁶ The study highlighted the example of Penllergare Valley Woods in Swansea, previously a “magnet for joyriders” where 30 burnt out cars were found on the site when the group first took it over - this has now been hugely reduced as a result of the group’s development of the

³ What Works Wellbeing, [Places, Spaces, People and Wellbeing: A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure \(places and spaces\)](#), 2018, p.6.

⁴ Z. Billingham, S. Frost, R. Frost, and J. Webb, [Parallel lives: Regionally rebalancing wealth, power and opportunity](#), 2023, p.6

⁵ People and Work, [Evaluation of Invest Local: Weathering the Storms 2016 – 2023](#), 2023, p.49.

⁶ BCT, [Mapping Community Assets in Wales](#), 2020, p.5

land.⁷ There are numerous examples of how community ownership (or management) of assets contributes to community cohesion throughout the Invest Local programme. The Hubberston and Hakin Community Centre in Pembrokeshire came under community ownership in 2018 and has given the building a ‘new lease of life’, creating a strong social network and developing new community groups and friendships. The centre welcomes 300 people weekly, hosts over 20 clubs and runs multiple additional activities for all ages and abilities, and is considered a huge part of the backbone of the area.

In addition, [our work](#) to map and rank levels of community assets and resilience for each Mid-Layer Super Output Area (MSOA) in Wales, found that areas “with fewer places to meet, a less engaged and active community and poorer connectivity to the wider economy, experience significantly different social and economic outcomes compared to communities possessing more of these assets.”⁸ People living in places with weaker community infrastructure face higher rates of unemployment and limiting long-term illnesses, as well as fewer people possessing qualifications than people living in equally deprived places that are better connected, and Wales as a whole. Crime rates are also higher overall in doubly-disadvantaged, ‘Less Resilient Areas,’ across all the major crime types with violent crime offences higher than the Welsh average and rising. Less Resilient Areas have lower levels of key crimes than equally poor but more resilient areas on average. This is likely to be linked to their location in more peripheral areas (away from town centres and nightlife areas where various types of crime are more common). The trend of higher rates of violent crime offences in doubly disadvantaged communities mimics the national (UK-wide) pattern.⁹

There is considerable evidence that having strong social ties helps to reduce crime rates. Literature consistently finds that “strong social cohesion and active community participation significantly reduce adolescent criminal activity and violence.”¹⁰

It is clear therefore that without spaces and places for people to meet informally, fostering community action, resilience and cohesion is more challenging by default. This was also reflected during the pandemic, when we observed a real inequality in community responses. Many organisations and groups were active and played a vital role in the crisis, a significant number of organisations and groups closed down during the lockdown, due to a reliance on volunteers who needed to shield, or because trustees and committees were concerned about exposing staff and volunteers to contracting and/or spreading COVID-19, and associated liabilities for the organisation.

⁷ BCT, [Mapping Community Assets in Wales](#), 2020, p.30

⁸ BCT, [Resilient Communities: meeting the challenge of being at the margins](#), 2023 p.6

⁹ Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, [Community Resilience Index and ‘less resilient areas’ in Wales Technical report](#), 2023, p.7 and 41 and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, [Left Behind Areas 2020-interim set](#), 2020, p.34

¹⁰ Demos, [Social Capital 2025 A Protective Shield for Children, Families and Communities](#), 2025, p.12

There were also organisations that were solely building-based, such as community centres, that had to close.¹¹

Given the overwhelming evidence of the benefits that result from community organisations being able to own, manage, or, at a minimum, access key buildings and facilities, to facilitate activities which contribute to wellbeing and social cohesion, we recommend that:

The Welsh Government introduces a community right to buy assets, land or buildings at risk of loss, backed by a right of first refusal for assets coming on to the market.

Good levels of social capital; quality of relationships / trust

The ability to trust one another is vital to sustain community action, which is largely voluntary in nature. Fundamental to the success of community organisations and action is the ability to engender trust within their local neighbourhoods and the quality of relationships with local people. Trust is necessary *within* community groups and *between* them. Power To Change argue that “building capacity and increasing the provision of places and spaces for people to meet can help create conditions in which trust can be built between groups in an area...through local initiatives run by community organisations to address shared problems and opportunities or local government playing a convening role.”¹² A striking example of the importance of trust and relationships is highlighted in the analysis of the development of the Caerau and Ely Community Plan whereby “the development of trust was helped by one member of ACE’s engagement team being a local young person. Community members reported that this “local boy” helped them to feel comfortable because he was “one of our own” and could be trusted to communicate their views accurately.”¹³

We have witnessed a legacy of mistrust between residents and potential partner organisations in several of the communities where we work. Some of this can be traced to the long-term impact of cuts in public funding, ongoing stigma from public bodies and the legacy of mistrust left by earlier development initiatives that were felt to have failed in some communities. If left unresolved, a high degree of mistrust can pause or even delay collaborative working which in turn inhibits action to strengthen community and social cohesion.

Where there are lower levels of trust and weaker social capital, attempts to strengthen social and community cohesion can be hampered. Undoubtedly, cuts to services undermine trust in public bodies and act as a barrier to future collaborations. In our experience there has been a large degree of age bias in the cuts experienced, resulting in some younger people feeling alienated through loss of services. As such, developing or supporting youth clubs, play activities, sports facilities and cultural opportunities for younger members of each community have been priorities for Invest Local groups

¹¹S. Lloyd-Jones and D. Holtom, *A Community Response to Covid-19*, 2020, p.19

¹² Power To Change, *Fixing the Foundations*, 2024. P.16

¹³ M. Kitchener and P. Georgiou, *The Craft of Co-Production: Lessons From the Development of the Ely and Caerau Community Plan*, 2024, p. 4

across Wales, with specific initiatives in Blaenau Gwent, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Rhondda Cynon Taf. We understand that, following a public consultation, the funding from the expanded Dormant Assets Scheme, will be prioritised for activities working with children and young people. This presents an opportunity to rebuild activities in a sector which has faced consistent and significant cuts and could contribute to great social cohesion.

In addition, confidence levels in policing appears to vary dramatically by age. A recent report from The Children’s Commissioner for England, identified a “deep distrust of the police” as a driver in children’s motivation to participate in the riots of Summer 2024, contrary to the prevailing narrative which suggests racism and far-right views as the primary motivating factors.¹⁴ Following interviews with 14 children who had been charged in connection to the riots, the Commissioner found that children’s involvement was “largely spontaneous or unconsidered” but “many children spoke strongly about their hatred of the police, describing previous bad experiences and community mistrust. These children viewed the riots as an opportunity to retaliate against the police”.¹⁵

There can also be a high level of mistrust in local authorities, which can take time to repair. Relationships between community bodies and the public sector are often complicated by very different working cultures whilst largely sharing common goals and aspirations. Many community organisations report themselves taking on roles previously filled by the public sector¹⁶ as a response to reductions in spending. However, there is also limited growth in the number of more formalised collaboration models with local councils, although still small and mostly in more rural areas. One example of cross-sectoral collaboration is the [Gwynedd Hub model](#). The model, funded from the Regional Integration Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund, provides a contribution towards the work of thirteen trusted and recognised community organisations to use flexibly to meet evolving community needs. Since 2021, Cyngor Gwynedd has continued to contribute to the hub work of the 13 organisations as well as provide a dedicated point of contact within the local authority. Guiding each of these working relationships there is a Memorandum of Understanding between Cyngor Gwynedd and the community organisation/ enterprise. The work of the community hubs is varied, as each hub is unique, responding to the specific needs and wishes of its local community, which range from providing social activities and mental health support to addressing basic needs such as food and housing. The hubs have continued to adapt to meet evolving community needs, particularly in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Independent evaluation of the model has shown hubs consistently create significant social value, improve community cohesion, reduce stigma around seeking help, and enable their communities to access a range of advice, support and social activities in a safe and welcoming environment. By offering a broad range of support services, hubs have fostered a sense of community as well as providing critical assistance to

¹⁴ Children’s Commissioner, [Children’s Involvement in the 2024 riots](#), 2025, p.4

¹⁵ Children’s Commissioner, [Children’s Involvement in the 2024 riots](#), 2025, p.9

¹⁶ BCT, [Beyond Essentials: Community Responses to the Cost-of-Living Crisis](#), 2024, Foreword.

individuals. By working in partnership with community organisations already recognised, used by, and trusted by community members, it is more likely that individuals will feel able to access this vital help than support offered by similar programmes delivered entirely by the public sector in less familiar buildings and facilities.

In places and situations with an absence of trust and mechanisms providing opportunities to foster cross-sectoral collaboration, social and community cohesion is far more challenging to develop and achieve. In this sense, presence of community infrastructure in the form of community-owned or led assets and social capital in the form of trusted relationships, must be recognised as essential prerequisites for community and social cohesion.

We recommend that:

The Welsh Government should prioritise the development of a communities strategy incorporating a framework for collaboration and measures to build social capital.

Targeting interventions

In our view, interventions which aim to strengthen community and social cohesion need to be developed with flexibility in mind. This may include targeting specific demographic groups disproportionately affected by challenges to social cohesion, such as younger people, or key issues such as modern slavery and hate crime, as well as taking a place-based approach. We do not regard the choice to be mutually exclusive, instead we consider a broad holistic and flexible approach to be the most preferable. It is unclear if there are to be any further standalone community cohesion action plans, or if this policy area has been subsumed under the Strategic Equality Plans. We would however like to see more emphasis (and resource) put into how the Welsh Government and the public sector works collaboratively to build social capital and enable social cohesion, as opposed to resourcing reactive measures mitigating the worst harms. If adopted, this approach would clearly align with the long-term and prevention agendas, inherent in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We recommend that:

The Welsh Government and public sector adopt a flexible but proactive approach to building social capital in future community cohesion strategies or delivery plans.

Examples of best practice and role of the third sector in supporting social cohesion

In addition to the examples already highlighted throughout this response, we particularly wish to draw attention to the approach undertaken in developing the Community Plan for Caerau and Ely, following the riots of 2023. A recognised and “generally (but not, universally) respected” local community organisation, Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE), was invited to and supported by the Welsh Government, Cardiff Council and South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office, to embark on a listening exercise identifying the strengths and struggles of the community, which

culminated in the development of the Community Plan.¹⁷ This approach, focused on “identify[ing] and draw[ing] upon the existing strengths of the community, Ely & Caerau as a place, and all the fantastic things already happening [t]here, rather than simply identifying problems” is in stark contrast to the investigative approach undertaken in response to Swansea’s Mayhill Riots in 2021.¹⁸

The process consisted of four main stages: a listening exercise to identify key issues, community workshops to delve deeper into the major issues, a continuous and regular cross-sectoral community steering group, and the development and publication of the community plan. The process was resourced and took place over approximately ten months between August 2023 and May 2024. We consider the approach to funding (and trusting) a valued and locally rooted community organisation to facilitate this work, as innovative and successful. However, we recognise the element of perceived risk, on both sides- i.e. for ACE as well as those funding the work. Given ACE’s locally based foundations (and employees) the ability to ‘escape’ from sensitive and challenging community discussions was simply not possible. The perceived ‘risk’ for those funding the work relates to loss of control of the process, as well as putting trust in a community organisation to facilitate the work. However, in our view, this is not actually a risk and is instead a prudent way of working, demonstrating a strong and effective collaborative approach. In fact, asking distrusted organisations to lead such a process would be a far greater risk for those funding this type of work.

Whilst we consider the development of the Caerau and Ely Community Plan to be an example of best practice in fostering social cohesion, arguably from the bleakest of starting points, it is not without challenges. The timescales involved (approximately 10 months of resourced work) may have seemed like a long time to community members and funders but represented an additional element of pressure to ACE and the community engagement team who delivered the facilitation of the eventual plan. Additionally, resourcing the delivery or implementation of the plan’s 40 actions, across six themes, many of which are “for local public services, including local schools and the police, to deliver [whereas] some are for local groups and charities to lead on” beyond March 31st 2025 is uncertain at present.¹⁹ Should a similar approach be utilised elsewhere in future, we would recommend that funders consider the need to fund or help facilitate the delivery of actions over the long-term, at least in part, recognising that funding such changes will take time to achieve. It is also necessary to recognise that losing trust can happen very quickly, whereas rebuilding it often takes much longer.

We also heard that individuals and community members are keen to ‘drop the community plan branding,’ preferring to prioritise the substance of the actions identified, rather than potentially reminding individuals of the tragic events which led to

¹⁷ M. Kitchener and P. Georgiou, *The Craft of Co-Production: Lessons From the Development of the Ely and Caerau Community Plan*, 2024, p.4

¹⁸ *Community Plan for Ely and Caerau*. 2024, p.6

¹⁹ *Community Plan for Ely and Caerau*. 2024, p.3

the development of the plan. However, following the development of the plan, there are now much stronger cross sectoral relationships, brought about due to the creation of the steering group, which are proving beneficial in a range of ways. We heard that this had ‘changed the way that work happens in Ely’ which is now far more collaborative.

Support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and opportunities to provide additional support

Community organisations and the work they do is essential yet fragile. They support and sustain critical social infrastructure, provide activities and opportunities for local people, and are on-hand for urgent and immediate assistance, all whilst responding to erratic funding flows. In the past decade or so, the focus of community action has shifted in Wales from providing relatively personalised support to marginalised individuals to a focus on developing and supporting community organisations as a locus for community resilience, trying to ensure that local communities are able to provide for themselves a range of activities and services as the state retreats.

Community organisations provide places and opportunities for people to meet, access services, socialise and build social capital, across lines of difference. Often community organisations are the vital local glue which holds communities together.

Since Invest Local began in 2016, community groups and organisations have operated in consistently challenging circumstances and combined pressures – including the pandemic, austerity, and the cost-of-living – have made this work increasingly difficult. Groups have made every effort to maintain existing projects, extend their impact, and to respond to the essential needs of their community, throughout this uncertainty. Often community groups are reliant on short-term project-based grant cycles, as is common with the wider third sector. Short-term, project-based funding simply does not allow for long-term planning and development of sustainable activities to build social capital and social cohesion. The patchwork of community action across Wales ought to be recognised, with some organisations who can provide services to people with higher disposable incomes (such as residents or visitors) more likely to run a social enterprise. For others, working with aspects of health or social care or operating in areas with less disposable income, are more likely to secure government or grant funding, leaving them more dependent on erratic and short-term funding flows.

Our [Cost-of-Living research](#) exposed the fragility within the community sector, which has a ‘knock-on’ effect to supporting social cohesion. Over 80% of respondents told us that the Cost-of-Living Crisis had affected the work of their organisation markedly. More than half of respondents highlighted that demand on their services had increased, whilst income had decreased through general reductions in public funding, difficulties in securing grants and less income coming from their community members, who could no longer afford fees or to buy food and drink at activities.²⁰ The research also exposed a tension for community groups between their commitment to helping meet people’s most basic needs, and a sense of frustration at being distracted, or prevented, from

²⁰ BCT, [Beyond Essentials: Community Responses to the Cost-of-Living Crisis](#), 2024

longer-term activity and interventions that could build sustainable social capital and cohesion. An obvious gap in support to community groups and organisations is the lack of a long-term and flexible funding mechanism granting freedom of choice and representing trust in community organisations to do what matters in their community. Since the pandemic there has been a patchwork of short-term grants (including the first phase of Shared Prosperity Funding) which have kept some organisations alive but as these dry up a number of organisations which provide essential local community support are likely to close, putting an end to their vital work.

We recommend that:

The Welsh Government should develop a flexible, long-term funding model to support community anchor organisations to provide opportunities and activities that enhance the local area and build social cohesion.

Defining and measuring social cohesion: The Wellbeing Framework or Governmental delivery plans?

In our view, the Welsh Government's approach to and defining of social cohesion lacks clarity. There appears to be a spectrum of approaches to community cohesion, with the wellbeing framework's conception at one end, and the Welsh Government's national delivery plans at the other. The Terms of Reference of this inquiry, suggest that this Committee's implicit understanding of cohesion is more aligned to that of the wellbeing framework, which appears to differ quite significantly to the Welsh Government's.

The definition of the cohesive communities goal in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the 29 indicators in the wellbeing framework mapped against this goal are notably more expansive and holistic than the outcomes of the most recent (2016-2017) standalone Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan.

Recent Welsh Government documents consulting on the 2024-2028 Strategic Equality Plan's proposed principles, approach and objectives appear to summarise the primary activities of the Community Cohesion Programme as monitoring and mitigating racial tensions. As the evidence above suggests, many challenges to social cohesion lie elsewhere, perhaps indicating an inconsistency in overall approach to social and community cohesion.

In addition, there is a distinct lack of transparency and accountability surrounding the measurement of progress in developing social and community cohesion. The 2020-2024 Strategic Equality Plan includes an objective (number 6) to build on existing policies and interventions and develop a monitoring framework to measure progress towards community cohesion and the fostering of good relations.²¹ It is not possible to determine if the Welsh Government has undertaken this piece of work, from the limited information available in the public domain.

²¹ Welsh Government, [Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 Equality Aims, Objectives & Actions](#), 2020, p.33

The most recently available monitoring framework in relation to community cohesion, is the performance measurement framework included in the 2016-2017 Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan.²² This framework is markedly narrower in focus, with few quantitative measures. The quantitative measures it does incorporate include the number of referrals via the National Referral Mechanism and numbers of frontline staff accessing training in relation to modern slavery. It also includes performance measures such as the production of timely advice and briefings and community tensions being identified and mitigated. These measures are much more specific and are measuring responses to negative harms. Whilst there is a need to have data and evidence of these responses, we would encourage the adoption of additional broader measures such as the amount and impact of funding allocated to public bodies to distribute to community groups working on community and social inclusion. Beyond the funding of eight regional Community Cohesion Coordinators, there is little recognition of the role of place and social capital in fostering community cohesion in this delivery plan.

We note that the 2016-2017 Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan is the most recently available standalone community cohesion plan. It established the Community Cohesion Programme, which delivered some of the outcomes of the Strategic Equality Plan (2020-2024). We understand the programme was extended until 2025-2026, following an independent review which is also seemingly not accessible in the public domain. Despite the public consultation on the Strategic Equality Plan 2024- 2028's proposed principles, approach and objectives closing in February 2024, there is at the time of writing (February 2025) no summary of responses available to the public. This lack of transparency and accountability is concerning, particularly given the lack of clarity surrounding the Welsh Government's approach to social and community cohesion.

We recommend that:

The Welsh Government clarifies its approach to social cohesion and publishes a monitoring framework to measure progress towards its policy ambition and enable adequate scrutiny.

Conclusion

The role of community action in fostering social cohesion is undeniable, yet under-appreciated and poorly resourced. We recognise that several levers in relation to social cohesion reside with politicians in Westminster. For this reason, this response has prioritised areas which are within the Welsh Government's control. Community action, which undoubtedly supports social cohesion and other policy ambitions (consciously or unconsciously), is simply not possible without strong community groups, access to facilities and good levels of social capital, all of which require adequate and sustainable resourcing.

Social cohesion cannot be achieved in isolation and in silo. Amongst other measures, Welsh Government and the public sector must recognise, respect and enable

²² Welsh Government, [Community Cohesion National Delivery Plan 2016-2017](#), 2016.

community action more fully, if the ambition of more attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities is to be fulfilled.

Recommendations:

- The Welsh Government introduces a community right to buy assets, land or buildings at risk of loss, backed by a right of first refusal for assets coming on to the market.
- The Welsh Government should prioritise the development of a communities strategy incorporating a framework for collaboration and measures to build social capital.
- The Welsh Government and public sector adopt a flexible but proactive approach to building social capital in future community cohesion strategies or delivery plans.
- The Welsh Government should develop a flexible, long-term funding model to support community anchor organisations to provide opportunities and activities that enhance the local area and build social cohesion.
- The Welsh Government clarifies its approach to social cohesion and publishes a monitoring framework to measure progress towards its policy ambition and enable adequate scrutiny.