

Dulliau gweithredu lleol ar gyfer lleihau tlodi: Deddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol a byrddau gwasanaethau cyhoeddus

Local Approaches to poverty reduction: The Well-Being of Future Generations Act and public service boards

Ymateb gan: Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Response from: Cyngor Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Cymru

A response from WCVA

1. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the third sector in Wales. Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive across Wales, improving wellbeing for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by connecting, enabling and influencing.
2. WCVA works with a range of national specialist agencies, county voluntary councils and other development agencies, to provide a support structure for the third sector in Wales. We have over 3,000 members, and are in touch with many more organisations through a wide range of national and local networks.
3. WCVA is pleased to respond to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's consultation, Local approaches to poverty reduction: The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Public Service Boards. We created a survey based on the consultation's Terms of Reference and asked our members for their thoughts. We thank all who took part and helped form our response.

**How can Public Service Boards best target improvements to public services in deprived communities across Wales?**

4. Feedback to our survey indicates that Public Service Boards (PSBs) must ensure that their membership includes those with experience of working in communities at grassroots level in order to include first-hand intelligence about the issues people face. To do so, there should be increased involvement of the third sector and/or community representatives at PSB level, which might be achieved through a compact arrangement between voluntary and community organisations, the third sector and PSBs.
5. To effectively implement the involvement principle of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WBFGA), PSBs must improve their engagement with citizens and communities, and the skills and resources needed through which to effectively involve citizens should not be underestimated. The [National Principles for Public Engagement](#), endorsed by Welsh Government, should be used as a tool to guide the engagement work of PSBs in order to gain a richer understanding of the issues that citizens and communities face.
6. PSBs could utilise community councils and community anchor organisations and their networks and reach out to find out what communities need by using venues

such as community centres, churches, libraries, leisure centres and pubs. The public must be given a range of ways to put forward their opinions and allow PSBs to witness the issues first hand.

7. However, as well as face to face, PSBs should also look towards greater digital engagement, whether by email, social media, webinar, etc. For instance, the [Open Government Pioneers Project](#) increases its participation by drawing on the new possibilities created by digital. Participation Cymru's [National Principles for Public Engagement](#) offers guidance on how to make engagement more effective.
8. There was some criticism of the focus of PSBs, perceived as having a top down approach to administrative processes in the creation of plans and documents that may not resonate with local issues and concerns. For PSBs to be considered as relevant, local people and communities need to feel a connection to the language that is used to express the issues citizens and communities face.
9. PSBs are encouraged to consider taking a similar approach to the Valleys Taskforce, by listening to the voices of local people, and reflecting concerns in language that is readily understood. The 'you said / we will' style approach, provides a benchmark against which public bodies can be accountable for their actions to improve the well-being of citizens. One survey respondent said simply: *"ask them, listen to the answers and act on the outcome"*.

### **How effectively are PSBs using evidence in the development of their local Wellbeing Plans in relation to the needs and experiences of people living in poverty?**

10. Our engagement suggests that the third sector does not believe PSBs are using evidence effectively, in particular the evidence held by third sector organisations. For example, one respondent told us that: *"As an organisation, we don't even know what PSBs do, who they are or how we can better engage with them. They should be interacting with the organisations on the front line and giving us an opportunity to feed back what we see and the struggles facing people."* There is a perceived gap between PSBs and third sector service providers that urgently needs to be bridged. This should not be considered solely as a task for third sector members of the PSB to address, but rather the PSB acting as one to engage with a spectrum of service providers, to find ways of enabling third sector organisations to share evidence and data in a way that is useful and useable for local planning purposes.
11. Those more aware of the work of PSBs were still critical, with their work in this area described as a *"tick box exercise – and wellbeing doesn't fit tick boxes"*. Another person said PSB reports suggested *"no joined-up approach to evidence gathering, making it impossible to create a fair benchmark across Wales"*, and expressed concern that this will lead to a patchwork of effective and ineffective service delivery.
12. The third sector in Wales possesses a wealth of evidence as to the impact of poverty on communities across the country that PSBs could tap into. There is however still work to be done to find better ways of enabling organisations to share this evidence in a usable way.

### **How do you feel PSBs are approaching the closure of Communities First?**

13. Our survey respondents were unaware of how PSBs are approaching the closure of Communities First and did not perceive that this had been addressed as a particular priority. PSBs were criticised for their lack of communication with the public and third sector and lack of information on their websites.

### **How are PSBs addressing poverty as part of their welfare plans?**

14. Again, the issue of engagement was raised, with third sector organisations reporting they have not been consulted by PSBs on tackling poverty. Greater dialogue with the sector is necessary to draw on our experience, expertise and evidence of the challenges people face in our society.
15. Others suggest methods of addressing poverty seem to vary from PSB to PSB, with one respondent suggesting that PSBs have not been given sufficient steer from Welsh Government as to what they should consider important across Wales.

### **What are your experiences of the development of Wellbeing Plans?**

16. Some respondents reported a great deal of involvement – the chance to be involved in deciding the drivers and outcomes around finances; commenting on draft objectives and strategies and taking part in a coordinated consultation exercise with the wider sector in Swansea.
17. Some welcomed the well-being plans and checklists as a useful tool for helping third sector organisations to frame what they are aiming to achieve in the context of local well-being.
18. However, others have reported that they have not been engaged with in these efforts, or that engagement has been perceived as a box-ticking exercise. This suggests that in this, as in other areas, there is little joined-up activity between PSBs, leading to patchy engagement across Wales.
19. One respondent sounded a note of caution, suggesting there are too many promises being made for the period following the publication of the Well-being Plans, yet minimal resources to back these up when cuts to services are inevitable.

### **What impact would greater regional working have on poverty in future?**

20. There is a split in opinion on this point. It was suggested that regional working might divert money from isolated communities. Others said that without reform of local government, regional working will have no impact, and that funding for services is vital or nothing will help tackle poverty.
21. However, it was also said that a regional approach could reduce bureaucracy, improve strategic thinking, promote successful examples of community empowerment and improve grassroots skills such as digital development. Multi-agency collaboration was also cited as key to making best use of limited funds.

### **Key recommendations**

22. Our engagement tells us that the third sector is keen to engage with PSBs yet find that the language and bureaucratic processes currently used inhibit them from doing so. A compact between the third sector and PSBs could provide a mechanism for strengthening the relationship.
23. Awareness of the PSBs is low. Information about the purpose, membership, vision and clear priorities for each PSB should be publicly available on a website for each local area, and ideally through the websites of all PSB partners.
24. PSBs require investment in skills and resources to effectively and meaningfully implement the principle of involvement, notably in respect of work to tackle poverty, it is vital that communities feel engaged and empowered as part of the change process. The approach of the Valleys Taskforce is highlighted as good practice in listening to the voices of local people, articulating their concerns and committing to a framework for action. The [National Principles for Public Engagement](#), endorsed by Welsh Government, should be used as a tool to guide the engagement work of PSBs in order to gain a richer understanding of the issues that citizens and communities face.
25. PSBs should work with the third sector to find ways of enabling third sector organisations to share evidence and data in a way that is useful and useable for local planning purposes.
26. We also recommend that PSBs seek to engage more effectively with each other in order to share experiences and good practice and offer a more effective, coherent approach to their work – recognising, of course, that different regions have different needs so each PSB will still need to work in its own way.

## **Discussion**

27. WCVA would welcome the opportunity to help the Committee receive oral evidence from a third sector PSB member and a representative of the Communities First Workforce.