

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Policy Response



Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy: Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

A response from WCVA

14 June 2012

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Wales Council for Voluntary Action

The third sector contribution to heritage, including the historic environment

Introduction to WCVA

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) represents the interests of voluntary organisations, community groups and volunteers in Wales. It has over 3,400 organisations and individuals as membership and is in contact with many more through national and regional networks.

WCVA's mission is to make Wales a better place by championing the voluntary, community and citizen action at the heart of Wales' third sector, in order to increase economic, social and environmental participation, inclusion, equality, wellbeing and sustainable activity.

The third sector contribution

This paper highlights the contribution of the third sector to heritage in Wales.

WCVA's database shows that there are more than 31,000 third sector organisations in Wales, of which 29,000 operate at a local level. The third sector covers a wide range of organisations: from local fundraising groups of national charities, tenants and residents groups or hobby and sports clubs to large national and UK charities with incomes of over £100 million.

The sector includes around 9,000 registered charities. Charities undertake an extremely diverse range of activities and are of vastly different sizes, but all exist to benefit the public in a way that the law agrees is charitable. Being a charity means having a distinct legal status, but charities can take a range of different legal forms: for example, charities can be unincorporated associations, trusts, companies or Industrial and Provident Societies. Most social enterprises have charitable status (about two thirds of social enterprises in Wales are registered charities), although others will be Community Interest Companies (CICs), which are not eligible to be charities.

617 organisations are involved in heritage; 480 of these are local organisations, whilst others work at a regional or national level.

The third sector is at the core of heritage activity. It includes very small groups working to get people involved in local action, and major organisations creating employment and providing significant services. They involve thousands of people of all ages as volunteers. They contribute to the economy through social enterprise. And they bring much wider

benefits - promoting health and well-being, improving skills, building confidence, developing strong communities and social capital. They have a huge potential to unify communities across ethnic, social, gender and generational boundaries.

Examples of third sector activity in specific areas within the historic environment include:

- Protection of ancient monuments and historic buildings, lands and coastal areas in Wales and their promotion as tourist attractions: the National Trust is a prime example of this.
- Conserving, protecting and sustaining the historic environment of Wales and informing people about it: many local museums engage volunteers in such activity and many depend upon them, as do archaeological trusts
- The preservation and maintenance of community buildings of local historical and cultural importance such as religious buildings and working people's clubs.

Both the Welsh Government and its sponsored bodies can help the sector's contribution to the wider heritage agenda, by giving priority to community-led activity, as well as supporting umbrella bodies that in turn stimulate and support local action. Lottery distributors also play a vital role, both within heritage and for the wider third sector. The Welsh Government can call on Lottery distributors to give more priority to community based projects in the historic environment, as well as encouraging all distributors to consider more sustainable ways of using Lottery funds to offer longer term support, including through the use of endowments that provide enduring funding.

Engaging with government and CADW

WCVA is involved in the activities being undertaken by CADW, as are other third sector organisations, in the lead-up to the Heritage Bill. It has been represented at a 'horizon-scanning' workshop and is supporting CADW in its intention to run a road-show, targeted at local citizens, concerning the Bill.

WCVA works with the major third sector umbrella bodies and networks relevant to this policy area, and the local county voluntary councils, and facilitates their involvement in the Third Sector Partnership Council and Ministerial meetings under the auspices of the Welsh Assembly Government's Third Sector Scheme. These networks harness the sector's knowledge and experience to inform, shape, and influence Welsh Government strategies and action plans. The subject of the forthcoming Heritage Bill was discussed with the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage in May 2012 and will be so again.

Conclusion

WCVA has highlighted this inquiry to the members of the third sector Housing, Regeneration and Heritage Forum and has asked that they cascade it to their members, as appropriate, so they can respond in their own right, particularly those which specifically undertake work in relation to the historic environment.

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