

# Impact of Covid-19 on the voluntary sector

February 2021



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February 2021



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at: [www.senedd.wales/SeneddCommunities](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddCommunities)

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## Committee Chair:



**John Griffiths MS**  
Welsh Labour

## Current Committee membership:



**Dawn Bowden MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Huw Irranca-Davies MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Delyth Jewell MS**  
Plaid Cymru



**Laura Anne Jones MS\***  
Welsh Conservatives



**Mandy Jones MS**  
Independent Alliance for Reform  
Group

\*Laura Anne Jones MS was not a member of the Committee during this inquiry.

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The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry.



**Mark Isherwood MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

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## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** That the Welsh Government recognises the role the current voluntary structure has played in improving the pandemic response. We would urge any future Welsh Government to maintain the current third sector infrastructure, and look to identify how these structures can be improved and made even more robust. ....Page 12

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government monitors any significant shift in the voluntary sector's presence in Wales to enable a future Welsh Government to engage with these charities and encourage them to reinstate a Welsh presence when they are in a position to do so.....Page 14

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should work with stakeholders to review the role of the voluntary sector in responding to future emergencies. This should include:

- Clearly identifying and recognising the vital role of the voluntary sector in responding to emergencies;
- Sharing of best practice from the response to both the pandemic and the flooding in 2020; and
- Assessing the extent to which the voluntary sector is integrated into formal and informal emergency planning structures and how partnerships can be strengthened. ....Page 20

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should work with the Third Sector Partnership Council to ensure the forthcoming digital strategy for Wales fully reflects the work of the voluntary sector and the move to digital service delivery. ....Page 21

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should review the effectiveness of partnership working across Wales during the pandemic. The review should identify good practice that can be replicated across Wales and consider whether there is a need to strengthen formal mechanisms to ensure there is meaningful co-production and partnership working between statutory bodies, non-statutory bodies, and citizens. ....Page 25

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should work with the voluntary sector to identify areas across its work where volunteering can support the post COVID-19 recovery, public services and well-being.....Page 31



**Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government should develop a programme of empowering communities across Wales with the voluntary sector, acting as an enabling state for community action. We support the WCVA's call for this to include a Community Wealth Fund and legislation to provide greater ability for communities to be involved in local action. ....Page 31

**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government should work with stakeholders to explore opportunities to enable new community groups formed during the pandemic, who wish to continue and have been successfully supporting their local communities, to receive the support and advice they need to carry on their work. ....Page 31

**Recommendation 9.** Building on the Third Sector Resilience Fund, the Welsh Government should provide funding to increase the resilience of the sector and its ability to play its part in immediate support for communities during the recovery. Given the length of the crisis, consideration should be given to extending this beyond the current financial year.....Page 40

**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government should work with the Wales Funders Forum to help funders continue to share information and work collaboratively post-pandemic. ....Page 40

**Recommendation 11.** The Welsh Government should, where appropriate, examine and investigate allowing unspent funding to be carried forward into the next financial year. ....Page 40

**Recommendation 12.** The Welsh Government should take into account the particular challenges faced by BAME voluntary sector organisations, when considering funding for the third sector. This should include considering any additional barriers BAME groups may face in accessing funding administered by the Welsh Government and work to minimise these barriers.....Page 41

**Recommendation 13.** The Welsh Government should consider and reflect on the findings from Community Foundation Wales ***Loud and Clear*** report and encourage funders to support core costs so organisations have the freedom to adapt in ever-changing situations to sustain and develop key service or programme outcomes. ....Page 41



**Recommendation 14.** The Welsh Government should make representations to the UK Government regarding the impact of current international obligations in relation to State Aid rules on support to the charity retail sector.....Page 42

**Recommendation 15.** The Welsh Government should carry out further research to assess the social value of its investment in the voluntary sector.....Page 42

**Recommendation 16.** The Welsh Government should work with the voluntary sector to identify areas across its work where the sector can support the recovery, public services, building sustainable community resilience and well-being.....Page 46

**Recommendation 17.** The Welsh Government should invest in voluntary sector programmes which support the recovery, in a similar manner to the Voluntary Services Recovery Fund. Given the length of the crisis, consideration should be given to extending this beyond the current financial year. ....Page 46

**Recommendation 18.** In future recovery work, the Welsh Government should ensure that all parts of the public sector engage with the voluntary sector in policy-making and service delivery. This should also lead to greater partnership working beyond the recovery and include the voices of the voluntary sector as well as the people with whom they work.  
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**Recommendation 19.** The Welsh Government should report publicly on the effectiveness of the Connected Communities strategy in tackling loneliness and isolation within 12 months.....Page 47

**Recommendation 20.** The Welsh Government explores further how new technology, including the app that Hafod is developing, can be used to help address loneliness and isolation. As part of this, the Welsh Government should take account of issues around the digital divide and ensure that solutions take account of these issues around digital access.  
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## 1. Background

Having looked at the impact of COVID-19 across our remit, we decided to do a focused piece of work looking at the voluntary sector. As part of this work, we took oral and written evidence, alongside engagement work listening to front line staff and volunteers.

1. Since the start of the pandemic, we have focused our work on the impact of COVID-19. We have published a report looking at the impact of the pandemic on inequalities<sup>1</sup>, as well as scrutinising the impact on local government and housing. At the start of the autumn term, we decided to do a focused piece of work looking at the impact on the voluntary sector.
2. We issued a written consultation asking for views on the impact of the pandemic on the voluntary sector, but specifically looking at:
  - Funding and service delivery;
  - The effectiveness of support from the UK and Welsh government and local authorities;
  - Volunteering and community resilience; and
  - Good practice and future opportunities and challenges.<sup>2</sup>
3. In issuing this consultation, we made it clear we did not expect lengthy submissions, as we wanted to encourage as many people to respond who had views or experience to share. We received 27 written submissions, which can all be viewed on our [website](#).
4. We held 7 oral evidence sessions, with a range of key stakeholders including the third sector; funders; and the NHS and Local Government. We concluded our oral evidence sessions by taking evidence from the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.
5. We also held seven online focus groups with 42 people from across all five of the Senedd electoral regions. This was an opportunity for us to hear directly from volunteers and front line staff. The participants were sourced through a number of organisations and forums, including:
  - The Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services;
  - Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales ("EYST");
  - Wales Council for Voluntary Action ("WCVA");

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<sup>1</sup> ELGC Committee, [Into sharp relief: inequality and the pandemic](#), August 2020

<sup>2</sup> [Letter from ELGC Committee Chair, Scrutiny of COVID-19 and its impact on the voluntary sector, October 2020](#)

- Interfaith Council for Wales;
- Third Sector Partnership Council; and
- Third Sector Support Wales.

**6.** A summary of the key themes we heard during these sessions is available **online**. We would like to thank all those who contributed, especially when we know the resources and time of people are very stretched as they deliver key services to support communities across Wales.

## 2. The voluntary sector in Wales

Before the pandemic, the voluntary sector was playing an increasingly important role in supporting statutory services, as well as providing essential preventative work. The sector in Wales was diverse and vibrant, although it was already facing a number of significant challenges.

**7.** The voluntary sector in Wales, before the pandemic, was large and diverse, ranging from small community groups, run entirely with volunteers, and no income; to large national or even multi-national organisations supported by professional staff. It included not just charities, but social enterprises, support and welfare organisations; community groups, and housing associations amongst others. The voluntary sector worked across all the areas of devolved and non-devolved activity, but education/training, health and sport had the largest number of voluntary sector organisations.<sup>3</sup>

**8.** The Welsh Government tends to use the term “third sector” to capture the range of activity undertaken by the voluntary sector. It’s statutory **Third Sector Scheme**<sup>4</sup> defines these organisations as:

- “independent, non-governmental bodies;
- established voluntarily by people who choose to organise themselves;
- ‘value-driven’ and motivated by social, cultural or environmental objectives, rather than simply to make a profit;
- committed to reinvesting their surpluses to further their social aims and for the benefit of people and communities in Wales.”<sup>5</sup>

**9.** According to the WCVA there are 32,000 voluntary organisations in Wales, of which 7,300 are charities. The sector in Wales is dominated by small and micro charities. Wales has the highest proportion of micro charities in the UK (53%), and a further 32% are small charities. A micro charity is defined as having income less than £10,000, while a small charity has an income less than £100,000. The WCVA also highlight that charitable income per head is “half what it is for charities based in England and Scotland. (approx. £400 per head in Wales and £800 in England and Scotland).” They attribute this

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<sup>3</sup> **COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence**

<sup>4</sup> The Scheme is made under Section 74 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 which requires Welsh Ministers to make a scheme setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations. This scheme has been in place for 21 years.

<sup>5</sup> **Welsh Government, Third Sector Scheme, January 2014, paragraph 1.12**

“partly due to the location of registered offices of major charities who operate UK-wide, and are registered outside of Wales.”<sup>6</sup>

**10.** The structures underpinning the voluntary sector are unique to Wales, and differ significantly to those in England. The Deputy Minister described this infrastructure as being “a huge positive” during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

**11.** WISERD in looking at the different approaches across the UK, said that Wales was “notable” for the way in which the Welsh Government “worked with and through existing institutional systems.” They added that in meeting requirements in the Government of Wales Act 2006:

“...successive Welsh Governments have invested in the third sector and supported mechanisms for joint-working. It is notable that through the pandemic, the Welsh Government has continued to work through these existing structures, strengthening but not replacing them.”<sup>8</sup>

**12.** The WCVA is the national membership body for the voluntary sector in Wales. Across Wales, there are then 19 County Voluntary Councils (“CVCs”) who work to support and develop the sector by providing information, advice and support to local organisations. The WCVA and CVCs work together as Third Sector Support Wales. Additionally, the Welsh Government has a Third Sector Partnership Council which brings together representatives from the Third Sector, with Welsh Government Ministers and officials. It meets regularly, and the minutes are published on the Welsh Government [website](#).

**13.** One of the key themes we heard throughout the evidence was the effectiveness of these structures in responding to the pandemic. The WCVA recognised the “unique third sector scheme....and unique third sector infrastructure” within Wales, and that this had led to “locally sourced ideas, local solutions to local problems” which were often the “quickest and most effective” in the early weeks of the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> They also told us about the importance of balancing local and national interventions:

“.....‘A local solution might often be best. If a national solution is required, then let’s look at it as a national support solution.’ Let’s, for goodness’ sake, not look at a national smothering blanket, because nobody wants anybody to be smothered. People want people to be supported, and that co-produced, local connection, whether that’s through the unique infrastructure or through new, informal mutual aid groups and activities in local neighbourhoods, there’s space for all of it.”<sup>10</sup>

**14.** The WLGA noted that at the outset of the pandemic, the Chief Executive of the WCVA was present at an early “high-level meeting of a small group of Ministers.....so the voluntary sector and local government were in the room with Ministers ahead of some significant announcements that were due to be made by the First Minister and Prime Minister.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence](#)

<sup>7</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [11]

<sup>8</sup> [COV VS 20 Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data \(WISERD\) written evidence](#)

<sup>9</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [49]

<sup>10</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [50]

<sup>11</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [35]

**15.** The Deputy Minister told us that the third sector structures have “proved to be very robust...” adding that they were “very much established at a national level for Welsh Government to engage with....” enabling them to do this with the many different organisations within the sector. The Third Sector Partnership Council also met with the Counsel General when he was preparing the COVID-19 Recovery Plan.<sup>12</sup> The Deputy Minister also acknowledged that it was important that the third sector is “kept in those arenas of policy” such as the regional and local resilience forums.<sup>13</sup>

**16.** While we will explore partnership working, later in this report, we thought it was important to reflect on the national structures that pre-dated the pandemic. Such structures are not established by accident, nor can we assume that they will always exist. They take work, and they take resourcing. It is clear that these structures helped ensure that the voluntary sector were able to contribute to the response of the pandemic from the very outset. Maintaining that dialogue during the course of the pandemic, and enabling the voluntary sector to have a direct line to the Welsh Government, but also other important local statutory services such as Health Boards and local government has clearly played a vital role in the pandemic response.

**17.** We should not take this infrastructure for granted. We believe it is imperative that future Welsh Governments recognise the importance of these structures and look for ways to strengthen them through its Third Sector Scheme. Some of our further recommendations, such as those relating to the formal role the voluntary sector can play in emergency planning will also link to this.

**Recommendation 1.** That the Welsh Government recognises the role the current voluntary structure has played in improving the pandemic response. We would urge any future Welsh Government to maintain the current third sector infrastructure, and look to identify how these structures can be improved and made even more robust.

## Challenges to the sector pre-pandemic

**18.** While our evidence was very much focused on the impact of the pandemic, many highlighted that even before March 2020 the sector was facing a challenging and uncertain period. Hafod highlighted the on-going impact of years of austerity and public sector cuts.<sup>14</sup> The Co-Production Network linked funding cuts happening at the same time as increased demand for services.<sup>15</sup> While others, such as the National Lottery Community Fund highlighted the on-going uncertainty around leaving the European Union, and how the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (which will replace EU Structural Funds) will work.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [18]

<sup>13</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [60]

<sup>14</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [110]

<sup>15</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [16]

<sup>16</sup> **COV VS 1 National Lottery Community Fund, paragraph 4.1**

## Loss of the Welsh expertise in national charities

**19.** As a result of some of these challenges, we know that some national charities were already restructuring or reconsidering their level of presence in Wales. Stakeholders told us that it was their perception that this process was being accelerated as the impact of the pandemic hit.

**20.** The WCVA highlighted that this was in the main the case for “big organisations with corporate headquarters outside of Wales...” leading to a reduction in staff employed and level of activities in Wales.<sup>17</sup> The Moondance Foundation highlighted that three cancer charities have made the Head of Wales position redundant.<sup>18</sup> The Moondance Foundation expanded in oral evidence that some national charities are creating one Director post to cover all the devolved nations. They had concerns about this approach:

“I think, if anything, COVID has emphasised just how differently the Governments of the [UK] nations work, and it is concerning, because a number of cancer charities are obviously struggling and are looking to reduce their costs. Just how that voice will then input into Wales—because, really, a national director might not know or understand the workings of what happens in Wales, and therefore they miss the point, and they really don’t represent the people. So, that’s been a concern that we’ve seen in a number of cancer charities.”<sup>19</sup>

**21.** The WCVA shared these concerns highlighting that a lack of a Welsh expertise will affect the sector’s ability to contribute to policy development as well as ensuring such policy is co-produced. They told us that this would not just affect policy development, and engagement but also would impact on “practice on the ground in terms of any regional or local activities that some of those charities might be involved in.”<sup>20</sup>

**22.** The Welsh NHS Confederation placed this potential loss in the context of the increase in powers to the Senedd over recent years; and the development of party manifestos ahead of the Senedd elections later this year (2021). They highlighted the key role of third sector organisations to:

“...provide information, research, knowledge and intelligence which enable political parties to put forward calls and pledges that will improve services for the people of Wales.”<sup>21</sup>

**23.** We share these concerns of stakeholders. This is particularly worrying in those areas, such as health and education, which are devolved. It will be more difficult for charities with either limited or no Welsh presence or expertise to advocate for the people they support in Wales; to inform the development of policy or help to aid in scrutiny. This will have an impact on the ability of a future Senedd to hold the Welsh Government to account or for any individual MS to advocate on particular issues.

**24.** It is disappointing that for some national charities the approach is to appoint a single Head of the Nations, when the political context, as well as the day to day operation on the ground is significantly

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<sup>17</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [34]

<sup>18</sup> **COV VS 04 Moondance Foundation written evidence**

<sup>19</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [251]

<sup>20</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November, RoP [35]

<sup>21</sup> **COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraph 40**



different in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. We do, of course, understand the challenging financial situation facing many charities, and the difficult decisions that they face. The voluntary sector will play an essential role in post COVID-19 recovery. It is therefore hoped that any reduction in staff presence in Wales will only be a temporary move; and once the financial situation improves those that have had to reduce their presence are able to return to Wales.

**25.** We would urge the Welsh Government that once we move out of the current crisis and move into recovery that they seek to encourage those voluntary organisations to re-establish their Welsh presence. As part of this, the Welsh Government should monitor which charities have pulled out any substantive staffing or offices, to enable them to start discussions with the relevant organisations to encourage them to return when the time is right.

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government monitors any significant shift in the voluntary sector's presence in Wales to enable a future Welsh Government to engage with these charities and encourage them to reinstate a Welsh presence when they are in a position to do so.

### Response to the floods

**26.** The pandemic was not the only emergency situation to occur in Wales in 2020. Just weeks prior to the outset of the pandemic, areas, such as in Rhondda Cynon Taf, were flooded. The Moondance Foundation said that the flood victims "were somewhat forgotten at the beginning of lockdown." They said that they have provided greater support in these areas.<sup>22</sup>

**27.** Cllr Andrew Morgan who was speaking to us in his capacity as Leader of the WLGA drew on his experience in his own local authority Rhondda Cynon Taf to say the floods were "the first real emphasis with community volunteering, where we had a whole raft of volunteers, pop-up groups, agencies coming together."<sup>23</sup> He felt that this experience meant that his council was better placed than others, when they then had to establish similar mechanisms to respond to the pandemic.

**28.** It is important that when reflecting on the role and impact of the voluntary sector in relation to the pandemic, their role in responding to the flooding is not forgotten. We have made reference to this in recommendation 3.

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<sup>22</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [176]

<sup>23</sup> ELGC Committee 9 November 2020, RoP [71]

### 3. Responding to the pandemic

The voluntary sector played a critical and vital role in responding to challenges of the pandemic. The sector's agility in responding to differing needs across Wales was very impressive, and despite some of the difficulties the sector was already facing pre-pandemic.

#### The sector's response to the pandemic

**29.** It was clear from the evidence and our own experiences of the early days of COVID-19, that the voluntary sector played a pivotal role in the response. Long established groups, both local and national, immediately adapted their services and ways of working to deal with the pressing issues. While many informal hyper-local groups were formed to deal with needs within their local communities. We were told of so many good examples of the voluntary sector going the extra mile to support both individuals and public services which were under considerable strain. It is clear that the response to the pandemic would have been far weaker if the voluntary sector had either not responded, or been prevented from responding, in the way it did.

**30.** We applaud the hard work of all the organisations across the voluntary sector, both the staff and the volunteers for coming together in the most challenging of circumstances. The sector is staffed by many committed and experienced individuals, including qualified professionals, who are driven by a strong desire to support people. This commitment and vocational drive has led to staff going above and beyond throughout the pandemic. We also acknowledge, in particular, the informal work done at a hyper local level by mutual aid groups, neighbours, friends and family. They showed the very best of people, communities and Wales. The breadth of the contributions is far too large to capture it all in the report, but we would signpost to the wealth of examples within our written and oral evidence.

**31.** As we highlighted in paragraph 13, the importance of a local response to the initial crisis was vital in the immediate weeks, and the already existing structures in Wales helped support this. A number of witnesses agreed local initiatives were often the most effective in the early days. Building Communities Trust said that community organisations "shifted their operations almost immediately lockdown was declared." This work was focused on dealing with basic needs such as food, medicines, and sharing key information. They said that these established groups "already possessed the infrastructure to underpin community responses" with them already having equipment, buildings, and vehicles, as well as "local knowledge" all of which helped "power" the response.<sup>24</sup>

**32.** Powys Teaching Health Board described the sector as "an agile emergency responder" echoing the comments made by others that it can develop local solutions to local issues "very quickly."<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>24</sup> **COV VS 10 Building Communities Trust written evidence**

<sup>25</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [14]

the WLGA observed “communities actually came together for themselves – probably in some cases, much quicker than we could...”<sup>26</sup>

### The sector’s role in emergency planning and response

**33.** We will look in more detail at the partnership working throughout the pandemic in the next chapter. However, in terms of the immediate response, some stakeholders highlighted a potential gap in terms of the formal emergency planning structures.

**34.** Swansea Council for Voluntary Services (“SCVS”) said that at the very outset of COVID-19 the sector could have been drawn on for emergency planning. While they understood why they were not included at the outset that it “felt a little bit like we were late to the table in those very, very early days.....” adding that once they were at the table “we made some considerable gains and progress by coming together and drawing out our strengths in each different agency.”<sup>27</sup>

**35.** This was supported by colleagues from the health sector. Powys Teaching Health Board said that there would be “some reflection about how we see the third and community sector as an equal emergency response partner...” They agreed that these sectors had played a “very important role” and that there was an opportunity to think about best practice in the future for response planning.<sup>28</sup> The Welsh NHS Confederation said that it was “really important” that the voluntary sector is involved in future emergency planning at “national, regional and local levels.”<sup>29</sup>

**36.** As described in more detail in paragraphs 63 - 64, including the voluntary sector into emergency planning pays dividends. It helps ensure information is shared and that joined up working happens effectively.

**37.** Community Foundation Wales highlighted that funders were not part of the decision making structures at either a local or regional level. They said this was despite attempts to engage alongside the Welsh Resilience Forum and local partnerships. They felt that in a “different emergency scenario” this may be a more pressing issue where it may be “crucially important....that...funding strategies are aligned.” They believed there needed to be “stronger links” between funders and the “resilience community”.<sup>30</sup>

**38.** It is clear that the voluntary sector infrastructure that we covered in the previous chapter, has been important to ensuring an effective response. However, it appears that there has been a gap in the emergency planning structures that meant it was not always the case that the voluntary sector was at the table for some of the critical emergency planning response. There is clearly something to be learnt from the experience of Mantell Gwynedd in North Wales, where they felt fully involved in the resilience planning. We think this issue needs careful consideration, and therefore have highlighted this in **Recommendation 3.**

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<sup>26</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [70]

<sup>27</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [103]

<sup>28</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [40]

<sup>29</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [99]

<sup>30</sup> **COV VS 03 Community Foundation Wales written evidence**

## Using technology to deliver services remotely

**39.** Restrictions put in place to tackle COVID-19, not least requirements to stay at home and to observe social distancing, meant services have had to be delivered differently. As with every other sector, the voluntary sector has had to grapple with an increasing reliance on digital in terms of staff moving to working from home where possible, to delivering services digitally, and recruiting, training and retaining volunteers. All stakeholders described both the challenges and opportunities that arose from the drive to digital.

**40.** The Wales Funders Forum said that digital delivery “was a key theme” and that:

“Anecdotally we have evidence that there were some groups that failed to make this work, with digital exclusion, and for staff access to devices, connectivity and training all proving to be issues. Some groups found that engagement wasn’t as fruitful, but others, especially those working with children and young people on the autism spectrum or with emotional challenges, found digital sessions to be good.”<sup>31</sup>

**41.** One of the particular areas of concern is that the digital divide disproportionately affects some specific groups, often those who are already facing other barriers. The Welsh NHS Confederation highlighted that in particular digital services do not work as well for people needing advocacy support, or for those with some types of disability. This is because digital support relies on people self reporting, where as a home visit may well reveal where additional help is needed.<sup>32</sup>

**42.** There is a more fundamental issue of people having access to either the necessary technology, whether that be hardware such as laptops, tablets or smartphones or as is the issue in many places in Wales, particularly more rural locations, reliable broadband. Additionally, we heard that often volunteers traditionally come from an older cohort who may be less familiar with digital technology.<sup>33</sup> This was a particular theme that came up in our focus groups with volunteers and front line staff.

**43.** The WCVA told us that we needed to recognise that “one size of digital does not fit all. And in actual fact, digital does not fit all.”<sup>34</sup> They also highlighted, along with other stakeholders, the importance of using more traditional forms of communication, and in particular the telephone:

“I remember having a conversation with Tegwen, who runs Merched y Wawr, who said, ‘Do you know, Ruth, what’s really come into fashion in the last few weeks?’ And I said, ‘What’s that then, Tegwen?’ She said, ‘The phone.’ And she said, ‘I don’t even mean the mobile phone—landline.’ For an awful lot of people, especially in locations where there is no good broadband or no good digital system, or if people haven’t got kit, then actually being able to talk on the phone really came back into a new lease of life, I think, especially in those early days of the first UK-wide national lockdown.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> **COV VS 07 Wales Funders Forum written evidence, paragraph 2.10**

<sup>32</sup> **COV VS 13 Welsh NHS Confederation written evidence, paragraph 29**

<sup>33</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [128]

<sup>34</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [19]

<sup>35</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [20]

**44.** On the flipside, we also heard that digital technology was actually removing some barriers and leading to services being delivered more effectively, and making it easier to connect with people across Wales. The WCVA said:

“Digital is helping people to reach out, engage, organise, deliver activities, and even fundraise. Overnight, people are discovering digital solutions that previously would have been seen as impossible. A whole range of service are going online creating possibilities for the longer term. We have seen collaboration across organisational and sectoral boundaries – people working together to focus on the immediate crisis, putting traditional barriers aside.”<sup>36</sup>

**45.** The Welsh NHS Confederation also highlighted that digital methods have led to more people being supported over a wider geography “with none of the usual travel and transport difficulties that can be experienced in rural parts of Wales.” This has meant more support has been provided, at no additional cost, leading to “greater value and leverage of public monies.”<sup>37</sup>

**46.** The Deputy Minister told us that the Welsh Government has supported the sector’s move to digital, with the voluntary services emergency fund being made available to help services move to digital provision. This was in line with the Welsh Government’s broader policy of “no citizen to be left behind as we embrace that digital-first approach.” She acknowledged that this had been a particular issue and challenge to the sector but that they have been “remarkable in the way that they’ve responded.”<sup>38</sup>

## Communication

**47.** The voluntary sector played an invaluable role in sharing essential messages to communities and the people they support, particularly at the outset of the pandemic. Powys Teaching Health Board told us of how this was a “critical and important” role in Powys, particularly because of the cross-border issues. The voluntary sector helped emphasise that the “NHS is still open for business, and helping us to support self-care and prevention initiatives.”<sup>39</sup>

**48.** SCVS said that one of their priorities was on “communicating information both internally and externally.” They reconfigured their website, to include a COVID-19 micro-site, with sections focused on volunteering; where individuals could access support; and information for third sector organisations.<sup>40</sup>

**49.** In our **focus groups**, we heard of the challenges some groups found in terms of disseminating information. Participants told us about the challenge of often finding the most up to date information; and that there was sometimes duplication between communication at a local and a national level.

**50.** The Welsh NHS Confederation told us that one of the challenges was the “range and amount” of guidance emanating from the UK and Welsh Government both at the outset and throughout the pandemic. They outlined, how they had used their already established policy forum, which has over 60

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<sup>36</sup> **COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence**

<sup>37</sup> **COV VS 13 Welsh NHS Confederation written evidence, paragraph 8**

<sup>38</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [8]

<sup>39</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [14]

<sup>40</sup> **COV VS 15 Swansea Council for Voluntary Service written evidence**

health and care organisations,<sup>41</sup> to share information with the likes of WCVA, and Macmillan, then enabling those organisations to “distribute that information both within their communication channels and to their service users.”

**51.** Race Council Cymru highlighted a particular challenge of ensuring that information was available in the full range of languages spoken in Wales. They needed to translate information into an “increasing number of languages”. This was an issue that they have pursued with Public Health Wales and said that they have had “a lot of discussions around how we alleviate this language barrier...”<sup>42</sup>

## Impact on the sector

**52.** As the voluntary sector has stepped up to the mark throughout the pandemic, it is clear that the combination of COVID-19 related restrictions and increased demand for services has had a significant impact on the sector. Witnesses described to us what this meant in practical terms. One of the primary impacts has been on income and funding, which we will look at in more detail in chapter 0.

**53.** The WCVA said that simply the pandemic has “increased hardship in Wales, leading to greater demand for all voluntary sector services”. While the sector has responded to this need, it has been done “at a real cost.” They added that the sector is “less able to help those people we work with at the same time as when demand for our services is at its greatest.”<sup>43</sup>

**54.** Helpforce Cymru, along with others like Building Communities Trust<sup>44</sup>, explained that most voluntary groups immediately paused activities before then “reconsidering, reviewing, risk-assessing, repurposing sometimes, and then reintroducing.” This period of stock-taking has led to staff now doing what volunteers may have previously done “because the staff wanted to protect volunteers and keep them safe and at home...”<sup>45</sup>

**55.** The WCVA also said that both staff and volunteers “are tired”.<sup>46</sup> The issue of burn out amongst both staff and volunteers was supported by EYST and Race Council Cymru. EYST said “the issue of burnout and stress-the weight of that has really been felt, both on individuals and on community groups as a result.”<sup>47</sup> While RCC also described the “feeling of burnout” amongst their own volunteers.<sup>48</sup> Co-Production Network also talked about the level of uncertainty and associated stress “taking a huge toll on well-being and mental health across the sector.” They said that when introducing support for the sector, it should not be done in a way that creates a “tonne more work and stress. Give us security, give us ways of being flexible.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [54]

<sup>42</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [200]

<sup>43</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [6]

<sup>44</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [116]

<sup>45</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [28]

<sup>46</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [6]

<sup>47</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [194]

<sup>48</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [216]

<sup>49</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [40]

## Our view

**56.** The voluntary sector has played an invaluable role throughout the pandemic. The events have shown just how integral the sector is in supporting those providing statutory services, as well as providing support that is highly targeted to local need. The sector has shown great agility and responsiveness, and all of this needs to be captured and harnessed so we can build on this for the future.

**57.** While it is important that we learn the lessons for future emergency planning, it is also important that we use these experiences to inform working practices, relationships and structures as we move through recovery and reconstruction into the “new normal” post pandemic. Hopefully, these experiences will ensure that the voluntary sector will not be taken for granted in the future.

**58.** We believe that the Welsh Government, once we are out of the immediate emergency, should reflect on these experiences to ensure that emergency plans in the future fully take account of the role the voluntary sector can, and should play. This work should include full and comprehensive engagement with the third sector so that plans can be properly co-produced and draw on the strengths of the sector.

**Recommendation 3.** The Welsh Government should work with stakeholders to review the role of the voluntary sector in responding to future emergencies. This should include:

- Clearly identifying and recognising the vital role of the voluntary sector in responding to emergencies;
- Sharing of best practice from the response to both the pandemic and the flooding in 2020; and
- Assessing the extent to which the voluntary sector is integrated into formal and informal emergency planning structures and how partnerships can be strengthened.

**59.** The pandemic has accelerated the move towards digital services in all sectors, and the voluntary sector has had to adapt to this with speed. As we note, while this has brought forward some positive changes to service delivery, and has in some places increased connectivity, it has also excluded some people and not all services work in a digital format. There are also some concerns about the basic lack of broadband for some people, and this is particularly an issue in rural areas. We are concerned that those who are the most vulnerable may be the least likely to access to digital services. This can be a result of a number of factors including access to devices or broadband, or lacking the skills or confidence to communicate digitally. There is a need for mechanisms and networks at the local level to ensure these gaps are addressed. The Welsh Government should work with, and support the voluntary sector to address this digital divide, building on the work of the **Digital Communities Wales** project it supports.



**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should work with the Third Sector Partnership Council to ensure the forthcoming digital strategy for Wales fully reflects the work of the voluntary sector and the move to digital service delivery.

## 4. Partnership working

While the picture was mixed across Wales, it was clear that the crisis in some places “turbo-charged” partnership working, causing traditional silos to be broken down. This meant that limited resources were more effectively used, and led to better outcomes.

**60.** In paragraphs 7 - 17 we outlined the current voluntary sector structures that were in place pre-pandemic. As we noted, these existing structures played an important role in enabling the voluntary sector to best direct it’s work during the early months of the pandemic.

**61.** We considered a lot of evidence outlining different experiences of partnership working across Wales. Many exemplified best practice. For example, we heard of how the British Red Cross worked in partnership with the Welsh Government and St John Ambulance Cymru to run the prescription delivery service to people shielding. Over a six month period, they delivered 4,100 prescriptions across 33 pharmacies all across Wales. They said that as a result they have now got “some really good strengthened relationships.”<sup>50</sup>

**62.** St John Ambulance Cymru also highlighted this particular partnership, and said that they are looking to build on this relationship, in particular in relation to the:

“mass vaccination programme requirements from health boards. BRC and SJAC have unique skill sets and working in partnership enables a more holistic approach and response from the third sector to health boards.”<sup>51</sup>

**63.** We also heard of the structures in North Wales which brought together all the core partners. Mantell Gwynedd are a member of the North Wales Resilience Sub-Group, which is co-ordinated by North Wales Police, and brings together:

- Public Health Wales;
- Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board;
- The six local authorities;
- The six County Voluntary Councils; and
- North Wales Police.

**64.** This group met weekly initially and now meets monthly providing “the space needed for the wider regional discussions and joint approaches.” As well as being on this regional group, Mantell Gwynedd are on the Gwynedd Resilience Group, which also includes the local authority, housing associations and others. They described this as “an invaluable forum to promote joint working, avoid duplication and seek

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<sup>50</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [113 -114]

<sup>51</sup> COV VS 25 St John Ambulance Cymru written evidence

joined up approaches to community challenges. It worked well.”<sup>52</sup> Where such regional and local structures are working effectively, lessons should be learnt, and where appropriate such structures should be replicated in other parts of Wales, as we have suggested in Recommendation 3.

**65.** For more examples of some good practice we would refer people to the examples in both the written and oral evidence on our [website](#).

**66.** Statutory bodies, such as Powys Teaching Health Board, talked of how the pandemic “accelerated” partnership working and that it brought together service delivery “in a more integrated way....”<sup>53</sup> The WLGA<sup>54</sup> and Welsh NHS Confederation<sup>55</sup> evidence outline specific examples of partnership working from both the local authority and NHS perspective.

**67.** Despite lots of examples of effective partnership working, there was a broad consensus that the picture across Wales had been variable and mixed, primarily depending on how effective partnerships were pre-pandemic. Building Communities Trust said:

“Practical cooperation at community level was often good with local authorities though willingness to trust community groups has been very mixed. Pre-existing relationships (which contributed to levels of trust) were a major predictor of close working links during Lockdown. However, the crisis did help breakdown some of the pre-crisis barriers to co-operation such as poor communication, risk aversion and silo working, as people in both the statutory and voluntary sectors were driven overwhelmingly by the crisis to do things differently.”<sup>56</sup>

**68.** The WCVA also highlighted the “variability” across Wales. The examples of poor practice included “top-down decision-making within public bodies excluding voluntary sector and citizen engagement.” They called for lessons to be learnt to ensure that the good practice becomes universal, highlighting agile commissioning and data sharing as being areas that have worked effectively.<sup>57</sup>

## Challenges of partnership working

**69.** While partnership working has been critical to the success of response to COVID-19; it has not been without its challenges. The WLGA told us that while in the main local relationships have been “constructive and effective” there have been some tensions between partners, and these are often “where there have been funding pressures or capacity constraints.”<sup>58</sup>

**70.** EYST said “being in a partnership and entering into partnerships with any organisation actually takes resources.” They added there was “probably an unrealistic expectation on the part of public bodies when they seek to build partnerships with community groups.” They highlighted the challenges of

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<sup>52</sup> [COV VS 12 Mantell Gwynedd written evidence](#)

<sup>53</sup> [COV VS 11 Powys Teaching Health Board, written evidence, paragraph 23](#)

<sup>54</sup> [COV VS 16 WLGA, paragraphs 25 - 27](#)

<sup>55</sup> [COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraphs 11-19](#)

<sup>56</sup> [COV VS10 Building Communities Trust written evidence](#)

<sup>57</sup> [COV VS 08 WCVA written evidence](#)

<sup>58</sup> [COV VS 16 WLGA, paragraph 16](#)

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volunteers having to attend meetings and engage with people, when they are not being paid and it is not their “day job”.<sup>59</sup>

**71.** EYST also highlighted that pre-existing relationships (which from the evidence we have heard has very much predicted the likely effectiveness of partnership working during the pandemic) between the health sector and the BAME community sector was “weak”. They believed this was because most of the groups in this sector are much smaller, less well resourced and have not been in existence for as long. This part of the sector therefore does need “support and help to really mature and become more established.”<sup>60</sup>

**72.** St John Ambulance Cymru also highlighted challenges with the differences between Health Boards and how they operate. They found this challenging as their volunteers work across all the Health Boards. They said to support all the Health Boards means “working in different ways and with multiple contacts, additional infrastructure is required in order to manage and co-ordinate an effective response.”<sup>61</sup> We explore volunteering in more detail in Chapter 5.

## Co-production

**73.** The importance of co-production was another theme throughout our evidence. Co-production of solutions leads to responses that better meet local need.

**74.** The Co-Production Network defined co-production as:

“the partnership working and the sharing of power and responsibility; the shared decision making between people who provide services and people who are accessing those services—so, that equity and that partnership between professionals and citizens....”<sup>62</sup>

**75.** They told us that while these principles were being adopted across the public and voluntary sectors, it “is at variable levels of progress.” We heard that while those organisations already using co-production principles continued to do so in their response to the pandemic, other organisations were less willing to adopt a new way of working whilst dealing with a crisis. Many organisations therefore continued making decisions centrally. Reflecting on those organisations, the Co-production Network told us:

“It was just not the time and place for them to do it, so they kept on with the pattern of, ‘Well, let’s do two’, or, ‘Let’s do four and let’s make decisions centrally and roll them out’.”<sup>63</sup>

**76.** Other witnesses highlighted the importance of citizen engagement. The National Lottery Community Fund said that the experiences of the pandemic was “shining a light” on the relationship between the citizen and the state; and that this was an opportunity to “harness and support that...” which

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<sup>59</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [210]

<sup>60</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [211]

<sup>61</sup> **COV VS 25 St John Ambulance Cymru written evidence**

<sup>62</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [45]

<sup>63</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [45]

would open up the discussion about how everyone can work together to make Wales a better place to live.<sup>64</sup>

**77.** The Deputy Minister saw the experiences of COVID-19 as an opportunity to strengthen the opportunities for “representative organisations to give their views directly from people with the lived experience, and then to actually influence policy.”<sup>65</sup>

## Our view

**78.** In some places across Wales there has been strong and effective partnership working. However, there has been too much variability. Effectiveness was dependent on how well established local partnerships were pre-pandemic. In particular the role of the local authority in ensuring these relationships were established and / or maintained, is critical. We believe that after the current emergency is over, there is an opportunity to learn from the best practice across Wales to remove this variability and ensure that partnership working is more effective across all of Wales.

**79.** It also seems clear that in those areas where co-production is happening in a real and meaningful way, partnership working has been improved. We accept the points made by the Co-Production Network that the outset of an unprecedented global pandemic was not the time for those organisations not familiar with the concept or without knowledge or expertise to undertake co-production. We believe these principles now need to be hard-wired into systems to ensure that statutory bodies start to take on board this approach. This would also mean that in a future emergency situation, co-production and strength based approaches would be embedded in processes and the outcomes would be more effective.

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should review the effectiveness of partnership working across Wales during the pandemic. The review should identify good practice that can be replicated across Wales and consider whether there is a need to strengthen formal mechanisms to ensure there is meaningful co-production and partnership working between statutory bodies, non-statutory bodies, and citizens.

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<sup>64</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [269]

<sup>65</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [24]

## 5. Volunteering

Tens of thousands of people volunteered to help support the NHS and the wider emergency response. The surge in interest was one of the positive things to emerge from the early months of the pandemic. But it did not come without practical issues. There is a need to harness this community spirit to ensure it can be converted into a long term volunteering dividend.

“Volunteers aren’t paid not because they’re worthless, but it’s because they’re priceless.”<sup>66</sup>

**80.** The WCVA set out the historic context:

“Wales has a long-standing history of volunteering, mutual aid and voluntary action, especially at a community level. This has been reinforced throughout the last six months during the coronavirus pandemic (and the flooding as a consequence of Storm Dennis in February).”<sup>67</sup>

**81.** They also emphasised the “consistent volunteering infrastructure” that already existed in Wales, compared to the rest of the UK. We have explored the broader sector infrastructure in Chapter 0, and the important role this has played in helping the voluntary sector play a critical role in responding to the pandemic.

### Volunteering and the pandemic

#### The volunteering “surge”

**82.** One of the most visible and positive responses to the pandemic in the early weeks was the desire of so many people to either volunteer formally, or to set up very local mutual aid groups to help support others within their own communities. This was evident throughout Wales. We saw thousands of people seek formal opportunities; while many others used means such as Facebook or WhatsApp to provide support to neighbours and others in their communities.

**83.** In terms of numbers, it is hard to provide a reliable overall number of volunteers. Much went “under the radar” as people responded to local need in the most informal ways. The National Lottery

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<sup>66</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [142]

<sup>67</sup> COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence

Community Fund described the number of volunteers as “unprecedented.”<sup>68</sup> While Helpforce Cymru said their data showed some clear numbers and trends, with 18,000 people signing up to volunteer since March. But they acknowledged that is “only a very small part of the picture, because all the informal end, mutual aid, would operate completely differently.” They also highlighted that their figures would not capture those who had volunteered directly with the NHS, which they said “it’s quite remarkable that we weren’t able to answer questions from Ministers like, ‘Do you need more volunteers in the health service?’” They said that the “data is a hard nut to crack” and that further research was most probably needed especially to avoid “formalising the informal...”<sup>69</sup>

**84.** Helpforce Cymru said, that this “mass response of volunteers has been both a revelation of the public practical support...” before adding that this surge of interest had also:

“...created its problems, in that our infrastructure systems have been overwhelmed and unable to channel this community resource as quickly and effectively as one would like. So maybe individual volunteers experienced frustration for not being able to be given anything to do and not understanding why this was the case.”<sup>70</sup>

**85.** Nearly all the respondents to our inquiry, including the focus group participants, highlighted the practical challenges of managing this volunteering enthusiasm. This went beyond just the initial practical issue of allocating people to appropriate roles, but also covered issues such as safeguarding; managing people new to volunteering; the challenges between different approaches to volunteering management across areas in Wales, and different sectors.

**86.** One of the biggest challenges was the mismatch between the numbers of people volunteering; and the roles available. Helpforce Cymru said that the formal opportunities were in short supply because “of the need to reassess and redefine or adapt existing roles and processes, or to develop new ones.”<sup>71</sup> This was particularly apparent within the NHS. Glamorgan Voluntary Services also highlighted this saying that they received 991 volunteering enquiries in four months but that the opportunities “decreased dramatically and at one point there were only two active volunteering opportunities in the Vale of Glamorgan.”<sup>72</sup> Although Mantell Gwynedd said they registered over 600 new people over a fortnight, and while it took significant co-ordination, “the good news is that more than 50 per cent of those new volunteers had been placed to assist individuals and communities within the first fortnight.”<sup>73</sup>

**87.** Front-line volunteers and staff in our **focus groups** also highlighted this as a key challenge. A volunteer coordinator told us that this was a “massive challenge” and that they normally receive 200-220 referrals from statutory services for support, but in April they had 1,700 referrals.

**88.** The NHS Confederation said that there was clearly learning to be taken from the experience, as this was the first time they’ve had to deal with this “level of capacity to deploy...” They felt that learning for the future will need to consider “what are the key roles, tasks or jobs or elements of work that we

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<sup>68</sup> **COV VS 01 National Lottery Community Fund written evidence, paragraph 3.9**

<sup>69</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [61]

<sup>70</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [11]

<sup>71</sup> **COV VS 23 Helpforce Cymru written evidence**

<sup>72</sup> **COV VS 05 Glamorgan Voluntary Services written evidence**

<sup>73</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [109]



want to use volunteers in the context of an emergency pandemic response.”<sup>74</sup> SCVS supported the need for learning to come out from the pandemic, including having “almost a standing bank of emergency volunteers.....for whatever the situation....might be.” They felt that ensuring this could be done at pace was dependent on maintaining links with emergency planning forums.<sup>75</sup>

**89.** As we mentioned in paragraph 72, the issue of co-ordination of volunteers appeared to be particularly acute within the NHS. St John Ambulance Cymru said the lack of central co-ordination “resulted in missed opportunities for support in some areas.” They compared this against NHS volunteers being co-ordinated centrally in England. This meant that St John Ambulance Cymru had to “choose which areas of activity we would seek to prioritise and support rather than being able to mobilise our considerable volunteer base in the best way possible for Wales “generally”.<sup>76</sup> However, the Welsh NHS Confederation said that their members welcomed the co-ordinated approach to volunteering through Volunteers Wales. They said that a “significant number” of volunteers were deployed into health and care roles during the pandemic.<sup>77</sup>

**90.** Helpforce Cymru noted that there were “considerable differences” between health boards and that therefore it was difficult to get a “national picture” because reporting on volunteering does not “feature significantly” in health board reports to the Welsh Government. They acknowledged that health boards had established processes in place pre-pandemic, but they they struggled with processes that were not designed for “speedy onboarding of volunteers.”<sup>78</sup>

## Change in volunteer demographics and maintaining the initial enthusiasm

**91.** We also heard that the lockdown restrictions, coupled with the furlough scheme, led to a change in the type of person volunteering, with a switch from older people to younger people volunteering in large numbers. For many who volunteered at the outset of the pandemic, this was the first time they had done so. The RNIB highlighted that most of their volunteers pre-pandemic were older people and around a quarter have some form of sight loss, adding that these “two groups have been hardest hit by the pandemic.”<sup>79</sup>

**92.** Building Communities Trust said that this shift in demographic is now reverting back as the pandemic “brought forward a new cohort of younger volunteers, many of whom have struggled to retain involvement after lockdown, though older volunteers who shielded are slowly returning.”<sup>80</sup> The British Red Cross said that as the winter months were approached and people returned to work it was important that the needs of those who required support “are still met”.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [63]

<sup>75</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [146]

<sup>76</sup> COV VS 25 St John Ambulance Cymru written evidence

<sup>77</sup> COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraph 20

<sup>78</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [13]

<sup>79</sup> COV VS 22 RNIB Cymru written evidence

<sup>80</sup> COV VS 10 Building Communities Trust written evidence

<sup>81</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [121]

**93.** The Deputy Minister noted that there was more diversity in volunteering during COVID-19 “there are actually more women volunteering, and there are BAME people volunteering.”<sup>82</sup>

**94.** Linked to this issue, is maintaining enthusiasm so that people remain active post pandemic. The WCVA said that now is a “real opportunity” to sustain this longer term, and that the initial volunteering surge provides “scope to build on this response.”<sup>83</sup> While, Mantell Gwynedd said:

“.... if there’s one thing that I wish we could do from this pandemic it would be to put all that volunteer enthusiasm into a jar and put the lid on it and open it a little bit every time we need some of that in the future. If only we could do that.”<sup>84</sup>

**95.** They believed that the best way of doing this, is providing volunteers with “absolute support.” They are now trying to measure how many volunteers are continuing with their volunteering.<sup>85</sup> The Co-Production Network believed that the key to maintaining enthusiasm was to create the space and infrastructure for people to “do their thing, if we can enable those conversations, that relationship building between the front line and citizens...” that would help retain the “volunteering energy...”<sup>86</sup>

**96.** The WCVA said the latest information from CVCs suggest that 40% of volunteers are likely to remain involved.<sup>87</sup> Helpforce Cymru said that the issue of volunteer retention was “a very live issue” which CVCs are “very aware of”. In particular they are looking at how they support the more informal end of volunteering, in a way they have not previously. SCVS said they are currently “assessing” how to “convert enthusiasm into long term volunteering with established organisations across the sector...providing a positive, long-lasting legacy...”<sup>88</sup>

## Mutual aid and community groups

**97.** As we mentioned in paragraph 82, one of the features of the volunteering surge was the grass roots response, with people responding to local need in their own street, area or community using social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp to support people in the most informal way. Hafod described how they have seen this across their localities:

“Incredible support, door knocking, where they know that somebody is living alone and is vulnerable; that’s been very clear. Neighbours have been terrific in delivering food parcels, either organised by Hafod or other support agencies or people just doing a bit of home cooking and delivering. We’ve had mutual support where people need some help or just need somebody to talk to; that has been very, very notable.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [32]

<sup>83</sup> **COV VS 08 WCVA written evidence**

<sup>84</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [143]

<sup>85</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [143]

<sup>86</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [66]

<sup>87</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [57]

<sup>88</sup> **COV VS 15 Swansea Council for Voluntary Services written evidence**

<sup>89</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [126]

**98.** Powys Teaching Health Board said that “more than 120 community groups were set up” amounting to thousands of hours “to support communities, especially the most vulnerable, those shielding or isolated at home during the lockdown/restrictions.”<sup>90</sup>

**99.** Community Foundation Wales said that while much of this was unseen and informal it had “significant local impact”. They highlighted that in most cases they needed either no funding or only very small amounts. However, this sort of support poses “some important questions for the sector and society around our expectations on good governance and safeguarding.” They suggested that possibly a more “proportionate governance checklist for quick set up groups” was needed which would ensure they could undertake such beneficial activity without “too much red tape”.<sup>91</sup>

**100.** Both SCVS<sup>92</sup> and GVS<sup>93</sup> said that they have been approached for advice by new groups on how to incorporate or general governance queries. EYST said it was important to “put the focus back more on local and smaller community groups and support those to make sure that the volunteering that they can support is safe, and that we build their capacity to provide safe volunteering opportunities....” Their experience is that some CVCs did this very well while others “weren’t as forthcoming in giving that guidance.”<sup>94</sup>

**101.** As we highlighted in paragraph 96, supporting those new groups who wish to establish more formally is already underway. The Deputy Minister told us that CVCs have “streams of funding that could actually support those groups.”<sup>95</sup> She also said that “all these things must be captured in the lessons learned....”<sup>96</sup>

## Our view

**102.** The numbers of people who stepped forward to help others during the pandemic has been inspiring. All of these individual acts of kindness have coalesced to support statutory services and communities in a way that has been integral to ensuring those who need support have received it. In Wales we were already starting from a good base, with a robust structure to help support this volunteering.

**103.** Volunteering can also play a integral role in the post pandemic recovery. It is important that lessons are learnt from the initial volunteering surge in order to best support the recovery, and ensure that people are deployed in the most effective way. We therefore endorse the WCVA’s recommendation regarding the Welsh Government working together with the voluntary sector to identify how volunteering can support this.

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<sup>90</sup> **COV VS 11 Powys Teaching Local Health Board written evidence, paragraph 9**

<sup>91</sup> **COV VS 03 Community Foundation Wales written evidence**

<sup>92</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [147]

<sup>93</sup> **COV VS 05 Glamorgan Voluntary Services written evidence**

<sup>94</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [220]

<sup>95</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [21]

<sup>96</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [13]

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government should work with the voluntary sector to identify areas across its work where volunteering can support the post COVID-19 recovery, public services and well-being.

**104.** One of the strengths of the voluntary response, whether that be via formal volunteering, or the mutual aid groups that have sprung up across Wales, or the even more informal support provided by friends and neighbours is that it has shown in a very direct way, the importance of local solutions to local issues. We hope that this, along with the increased partnership working described in Chapter 4, is built on to help embed real community empowerment across Wales, and to ensure that local people are engaged and involved in finding the right solutions to the issues facing their own communities.

**Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government should develop a programme of empowering communities across Wales with the voluntary sector, acting as an enabling state for community action. We support the WCVA's call for this to include a Community Wealth Fund and legislation to provide greater ability for communities to be involved in local action.

**105.** We know that some of the mutual aid groups that have been established in response to the pandemic will eventually run their course, and will either close down or cease their activities. However some, as the evidence has shown, are already looking to formalise and constitute themselves as registered groups. However, others may wish to continue on the very informal basis with which they have started. This will be a decision for each individual group to make. One of the concerns for these more informal groups was about ensuring that they were aware of basic information such as safeguarding, basic social distancing, so that they could do their good work without putting either themselves or the people they are supporting at risk. We therefore believe it is important that there is a clear route to which people may be signposted for the appropriate level of advice that meets their needs and levels of desired structures and formality. We know that in some places this has been provided by the CVCs, but there has been a mixed picture across Wales, and it is important that people have access to the necessary information and guidance regardless of where they are in Wales.

**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government should work with stakeholders to explore opportunities to enable new community groups formed during the pandemic, who wish to continue and have been successfully supporting their local communities, to receive the support and advice they need to carry on their work.

## 6. Funding and Support

We heard a wide range of evidence about the effectiveness of support available nationally, regionally and locally. While funding was critical to this, support came in other forms, including advice and guidance. There are significant concerns about the longer-term sustainability of many groups / organisations in the voluntary sector, some of which pre-date the pandemic.

### Loss of income

**106.** As we outlined in Chapter 3, the impact of the pandemic on the sector has been extensive. One of the most serious has been around changes in income. We are aware that this has affected different organisations in different ways. The National Lottery Community Fund highlighted this:

“While many organisations have had to at least temporarily cease activities to a greater or lesser extent, those that rely on the delivery of those activities to sustain an income have been amongst the hardest hit. To this end, it is medium-sized and larger organisations that have borne the brunt, albeit in different ways. While smaller grassroots organisations may have experienced a hiatus, they tend to rely on modest income and the goodwill of volunteers and members rather than significant funding.”<sup>97</sup>

**107.** Prior to the pandemic, there had been a move towards a greater diversification of funding for the sector. Wales Funders Forum said:

“...the irony in all of this is that those organisations that had done the right thing, they’d gone out, they got a more diverse funding model, they were trading, they were raising funds from the public—it’s those organisations that have fared worse, whereas ones that were just operating on grants have been largely unaffected in terms of funding.”<sup>98</sup>

**108.** The Moondance Foundation agreed, saying those who had diversified their income were often the most affected. They highlighted that for these organisations their income ceased, as a result of this diversification and “in many cases innovation, was in this circumstance detrimental to their finances.”<sup>99</sup> The Welsh NHS Confederation agreed that it was those organisations who had a “strong reliance on grant funding” who were typically “the most financially secure” during the pandemic.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> COV VS 01 National Lottery Community Fund written evidence, paragraph 3.1

<sup>98</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [264]

<sup>99</sup> COV VS 04 Moondance Foundation written evidence

<sup>100</sup> COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraph 26

**109.** The WCVA said that across the UK charities are estimated to “lose 24% of their total income for the year.” They have estimated that for those charities headquartered in Wales this will be approximately £620m. They also raised concerns that large changes in fundraising income is “particularly problematic” for smaller charities.<sup>101</sup> As we note in paragraph 10, Wales has a larger proportion of smaller charities, meaning that this impact will be particularly felt by the voluntary sector in Wales.

**110.** St John Ambulance Cymru described the impact on their own charity, and that as the pandemic developed “the true impact...became clearer”. They lost national events, along with closure of income generating training and “regular” volunteering ceasing. As a result, projections at the end of March 2020 indicated that the charity was facing “a projected loss of income for 2020 in excess of £2.5m, whilst demand for our services was continuing to increase.”<sup>102</sup>

**111.** The Charity Commission said that the most common concerns from registered charities was about long-term financial sustainability. The statistics came from the serious incident reports that they have received, but they note that these figures do not necessarily represent the proportion of all charities experiencing issues.<sup>103</sup>

**112.** A core income source for many charities comes from charity shops. They had to close at the outset of lockdown, as well as closing down during the autumn 2020 firebreak, and the subsequent lockdown announced in December 2020. The British Heart Foundation described these closures as “dramatically” reducing their income and their ability to support “life saving research.” They welcomed the support that has been made available including 100% rate relief, and measures around rent collection, but said there were still gaps in support. In particular they said that large charity retailers have been “unable to maximise support” such as the UK Government’s Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund. This fund allows retailers to claim up to £25,000 per eligible retail outlet. They said though that “the application of State Aid rules in relation to charity retail means this support was capped at...just over £700,000”. As a result of this, they can only claim support which equates to approximately £1,300 per shop. Yet in the recent firebreak alone, they estimate they lost sales of £320k across their 35 shops in Wales.<sup>104</sup>

**113.** Other income sources that have been significantly impacted, include fundraising; and charges for services. The RNIB said they were projecting a “potential funding gap” as a result of “reduction in fundraised income across the board.” They said this loss of income came from “cancellation of challenge and mass participation events, postponed face-to-face fundraising activities and reduced legacy income.”<sup>105</sup> WISERD highlighted a range of other income sources including “charging for direct services, both to service users (e.g. attendance fees) and other professional groups (e.g. training), hiring facilities (e.g. rooms), and through a range of charitable activities (e.g. from cake sales to charity shops).” All of which they said will either have disappeared or reduced drastically.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> [COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence](#)

<sup>102</sup> [COV VS 25 St John Ambulance Cymru written evidence](#)

<sup>103</sup> [COV VS 24 Charity Commission for England and Wales written evidence](#)

<sup>104</sup> [COV VS 21 British Heart Foundation written evidence](#)

<sup>105</sup> [COV VS 22 RNIB Cymru written evidence](#)

<sup>106</sup> [COV VS 20 Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data \(WISERD\) written evidence](#)

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## Support available during the pandemic

**114.** There has been a range of support available to the sector both from the Welsh and UK Governments. On 27 March 2020, the Welsh Government announced an initial fund of £24m to support the sector. The Welsh Government Third Sector Covid-19 Response Fund support three strands of activity:

- Third Sector Resilience Fund – helping the sector financially through the crisis by providing direct financial support and paying bills and easing cash-flow;
- Voluntary Services Emergency Fund – support organisations in the community who are co-ordinating volunteers; and helping them to volunteers out of pocket expenses;
- Third Sector Infrastructure Enabling Fund – temporarily increasing the capacity of Third Sector Support Wales to support the sector, including the development of the Volunteering Wales website.<sup>107</sup>

**115.** The Voluntary Services Emergency Fund was then replaced by the Voluntary Services Recovery Fund in August 2020. This fund “aims to support a fair and just recovery for people in Wales.” It is administered by the WCVA.<sup>108</sup>

**116.** The voluntary sector has also been able to access other broader Welsh Government support schemes such as the business grants schemes, and Economic Resilience Fund, as well as UK Government schemes such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (commonly known as “furlough”).

**117.** We heard from a range of funders of how they responded to the pandemic. The National Lottery Community Fund told us that within three weeks of lockdown they “mobilised” their funding to support the response. As a result they prioritised applications from organisations who were:

- “supporting people who were at high risk from COVID-19
- supporting communities most likely to face increased demand and challenges as a direct result of measures to prevent the result of COVID-19
- connecting communities and supporting communities to work together to respond to COVID-19.”<sup>109</sup>

**118.** A common theme from the funders was the desire to reach out to new organisations and groups. The National Lottery Community Fund said that they have supported a “significant number of new organisations.”<sup>110</sup> While Community Foundation Wales said in trying to ensure equity of funding both geographically and across different communities they have “funded groups in areas of the communities

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<sup>107</sup> [Welsh Government Guidance, Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Support for the third sector](#) [accessed 16 December 2020]

<sup>108</sup> [WCVA Website, Voluntary Services Recovery Fund](#) [accessed 16 December 2020]

<sup>109</sup> [COV VS 01 National Lottery Community Funding written evidence, paragraph 2.2](#)

<sup>110</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [222]



that we haven't historically had relationships with..."<sup>111</sup> We will look specifically at the issues around funding for BAME groups in a separate section below.

**119.** We also heard from the funders of how they worked together to share details of funding to try to ensure the best spread of available funds. Moondance Foundation described this as "very effective".<sup>112</sup> The Wales Funders Forum said that working together meant that if a certain funder could not fund activity they could identify other funders who may be able to do so.

**120.** We heard from a range of different voluntary organisations of how they have used these different funding strands. Mantell Gwynedd told us that none of their work would have been possible without Welsh Government support, and "the voluntary services emergency fund was crucially important."<sup>113</sup> This had enabled them to increase their staff hours to help with community groups; and to set up and manage a small grants scheme for the sector in Gwynedd.<sup>114</sup>

**121.** While Building Communities Trust said that funding from government was "plentiful" although "occasionally had puzzling elements of bureaucracy"; while funding from trusts and the lottery was "ample and flexible" concluding that in "many ways it has never been easier to access flexible funding for community based working."<sup>115</sup>

**122.** The issue about the complexities of applying for funding was also highlighted by witnesses, such as Powys Teaching Health Board<sup>116</sup> who said the challenge for the sector was in trying to access different funding sources with different application processes and monitoring requirements. The Welsh NHS Confederation said that some organisations missed out on funding opportunities due to furloughing of staff, while others had increased their funding as staff had more time to submit bids and chase opportunities.<sup>117</sup>

### Importance of funding flexibilities

**123.** One of the key calls from the WCVA was around extending the current funding flexibilities longer term:

"Charities have robust accounting systems for restricted and unrestricted funds. Many funders have recently increased flexibility in their grant management. Given the length of the crisis, and in order to make the most effective use of funds going forwards, consideration should be given to being able to ring-fence and carry forward funds across financial years."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020 RoP [225]

<sup>112</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [201]

<sup>113</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [111]

<sup>114</sup> [COV VS 12 Mantell Gwynedd written evidence](#)

<sup>115</sup> [COV VS 10 Building Communities Trust written evidence](#)

<sup>116</sup> [COV VS 11 Powys Teaching Local Health Board, written evidence, paragraph 15](#)

<sup>117</sup> [COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraph 26](#)

<sup>118</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [7]

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**124.** They added having the flexibility to carry funds over into the next financial year “would be just so incredibly useful”. They said the sector could “account and track forward, and if not spent appropriately then to have courses of redress, obviously, to be completely open and transparent in that space....” They believed that such a change could be a “really, really valuable lesson” that could be held onto for the future from this “period of challenging time.”<sup>119</sup>

**125.** The Wales Funders Forum told us about the COVID-19 pledge that had been developed by the London Funders Network, where funders commit to “to supporting grant recipients by being flexible with grants, being flexible about reporting formats, being flexible about deadlines and actually signalling that you’re a listening ear as well...”<sup>120</sup> In their written evidence they detailed how different funders had adapted their work to support the voluntary sector.<sup>121</sup>

**126.** We heard from the Moondance Foundation how they “were able to let the brakes off and turn grants around within 48 hours” so that organisations got access to funds quickly. This has required “a large degree of trust.....”<sup>122</sup>

**127.** The Deputy Minister said that from the outset of the pandemic, the Welsh Government was flexible but with the caveat that “all the monitoring is very important about the spend.” She added that “funding flexibilities is one area that we need to look at.”<sup>123</sup>

### Future funding picture

**128.** There was a warning from the Wales Funders Forum that funders do not have a limitless amount of money to replace other income sources for the sector. They said that some such as foundations who are funded from investments may be able to “ride out some of the storms, and they are able to dig deep and fund....” Ultimately, though, broader economic shocks will affect them as “the economy isn’t delivering any more money for them.....to some extent, it is a zero sum game and you are robbing Peter to pay Paul.” The future continues to be very uncertain and is very dependent on “the future of the economy.”<sup>124</sup> Community Foundation Wales also warned of a “difficult year ahead” in terms of funding.<sup>125</sup>

**129.** Building Communities Trust shared concerns about the future funding picture saying that “tomorrow’s money has already been spent” by both government and non-governmental funders, which may severely limit the recovery response...”<sup>126</sup> Powys Teaching Health Board said that while short term COVID-19 related funding was important “a long term funding strategy for the third sector will be increasingly important to ensure sustainability and resilience going forward.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [84]

<sup>120</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [196]

<sup>121</sup> COV VS 07 Wales Funders Forum written evidence, paragraphs 2.5.1 – 2.5.3

<sup>122</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [200]

<sup>123</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [60]

<sup>124</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [210]

<sup>125</sup> COV VS 03 Community Foundation Wales written evidence

<sup>126</sup> COV VS 10 Building Communities Trust written evidence

<sup>127</sup> COV VS 11 Powys Teaching Local Health Board, written evidence, paragraph 21

**130.** SCVS highlighted the challenge faced by the sector as things return to normal. They have secured some monies to support the sector to adapt how they work but added that the “future funding landscape is uncertain.” Yet this is despite the fact that the pandemic has “shown the huge value of the third sector, it has shown it can be nimble, quickly solve local problems and work across a wide range of different partners to meet the needs of individuals in the communities.”<sup>128</sup>

**131.** The WLGA said the continuing uncertainty facing the sector “particularly those who fund-raise throughout the year” means the Welsh Government should continue an extension to the funding support offered, in particular in relation to the costs arising from the pandemic. While they welcomed the additional support that has been made available to domestic abuse and substance misuse charities, they said “more investment is needed as this crisis extends over a longer period.”<sup>129</sup>

### Funding for the BAME voluntary sector

**132.** An area we explored with stakeholders was the level of funding available to BAME groups. As we highlighted in our previous report on COVID-19 and inequalities, both the pandemic and the response has disproportionately affected the BAME community.<sup>130</sup> We were keen to understand what this meant for this part of the voluntary sector. Professor Ogbonna in his recent report for the Welsh Government highlighted research which said that nine out of ten BAME-led voluntary and community sector organisations are at risk of closure in the next three months. He added that “the sustainability of grassroots organisations needs to be addressed.”<sup>131</sup>

**133.** EYST told us that while there has been some targeting of funds and opportunities there is “a strong feeling that this part of the sector is not sufficiently well supported at the moment and that more could be done.”<sup>132</sup>

**134.** Race Council Cymru agreed that funding priorities had changed within a short space of time, but how long this will remain the case was uncertain. Funders have “altered their priority focus and have beamed their lights on the pandemic” to help alleviate the pressures on communities. But that:

“However, because of the enormity of the disproportionate effects of this pandemic and the existing socioeconomic effects as well on top of that, there is the need for increased funding and ensuring a wider distribution in such a way that the smaller BAME organisations are able to reach funding as quickly as possible.”<sup>133</sup>

**135.** We heard of how the two global events of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have “converged” resulting in the “realisation of funders of the need to focus funding at BAME community groups.” EYST said that as a result there have seen significant proportion of funding being ring-fenced, and some funders making it a requirement to fund BAME led organisations. They highlighted that some

<sup>128</sup> COV VS 15 Swansea Council for Voluntary Service written evidence

<sup>129</sup> COV VS 16 WLGA, paragraph 20

<sup>130</sup> ELGC Committee, Into sharp relief – inequality and the pandemic, August 2020

<sup>131</sup> Welsh Government, First Minister’s BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group, Report of the socioeconomic subgroup, June 2020, paragraph 51

<sup>132</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [195]

<sup>133</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [225]

of the big funders, such as Children in Need, the Big Lottery Fund, WCVA and Comic Relief “have all created emergency funding pots targeted at BAME community groups.”<sup>134</sup>

**136.** However, as with other parts of the sector, there are concerns about a potential “cliff edge” in the next financial year.<sup>135</sup> Race Council Cymru also said that some of the projects that have been funded, have been very short term.<sup>136</sup>

### Core funding and the use of reserves

**137.** The issue of providing additional core funding to help support the sustainability of the sector was raised by a number of witnesses. SCVS said that

“even small amounts of core funding will help people survive and then be able to rebuild, develop new strategies, post this. But if there’s nothing at the core, then it is really, really difficult for people to move on.”<sup>137</sup>

**138.** The British Red Cross said that while the third sector was “very reliant on piecing together short-term funding” such an approach presents a range of challenges including staff retention; and developing and evolving services to deliver the best service. They said that “longer and more sustainable funding packages” are needed going forward.<sup>138</sup>

**139.** Community Foundation Wales undertook a “big funding conversation with the third sector in Wales” while these happened before the pandemic, Community Foundation Wales state that the messages are even more relevant now. This project found that charities and communities groups “want funders to prioritise core funding and longer-term partnerships.” They found that “nearly all” the organisations they spoke to said their biggest challenge was funding, and that they needed more core funding to ensure they can continue to exist.<sup>139</sup> In their evidence to us, they said their findings should be used to “encourage funders to support core rather than projects, meaning organisations have the freedom to adapt in ever-changing situations.”<sup>140</sup>

**140.** Wales Funders Forum said as a result of the pandemic and the changes in approaches by funders that it is likely there will be more widespread flexible funding “including, for core costs.”<sup>141</sup>

**141.** The National Lottery Community Fund highlighted that larger organisations may have reserves to fall back on but said that this was not that “straight-forward” as they are often “tied up as financial investments...” and that the broader economic picture at the moment means “cashing in those investments is likely to yield a poor return.” They also highlighted that while additional support being

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<sup>134</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [234]

<sup>135</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [234]

<sup>136</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [230]

<sup>137</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [159]

<sup>138</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [146]

<sup>139</sup> **Community Foundation Wales, “Loud and Clear” report**

<sup>140</sup> **COV VS 03 Community Foundation Wales written evidence**

<sup>141</sup> **COV VS 07 Wales Funders Forum written evidence, paragraph**

available is a positive, that seeking and securing this additional funding takes a great deal of extra work and energy, and is adding to an already over-burdened sector.<sup>142</sup>

**142.** Moondance Foundation told us that a number of charities had previously had good reserves but that they were “running out”. This will have a longer term impact on charities,<sup>143</sup> as it could be years before you see the full financial impact on the sector. The Welsh NHS Confederation agreed that a reduction in income will lead to “increased dependence on financial reserves...” and that this proves how important it will be to have a long term funding strategy for the sector.<sup>144</sup>

**143.** Reserves play a role in the financial sustainability of organisations. Clearly, it is still too early to have a full understanding of the impact of the pandemic on reserves. However, initial research undertaken by the University of Birmingham and University of Southampton suggest that “a significant minority” of charities have reserves that would only enable them to survive for three months or less. Although it varies depending on the type and size of organisation, in particular, larger organisations are more likely to have reserves that cover longer periods.<sup>145</sup>

### Measuring the social value of the voluntary sector

**144.** The voluntary sector faces many challenges in relation to a likely decrease in income and funding, while demand for services continues to grow. It will therefore become even more important to understand and ensure best value for money within the sector. We heard of the growing importance of measuring the social value of investment, and how it will be even more relevant in a post pandemic world.

**145.** Mantell Gwynedd define social value as “understanding the value/worth of changes to people’s lives. Placing a value on these changes means we can invest in what provides the greatest social return so that we create even more positive change in people’s lives.” They are currently measuring the social value of the Voluntary Sector Emergency Funding that two third sector organisations received in Gwynedd.<sup>146</sup>

**146.** We heard that Mantell Gwynedd have been at the forefront of this work, pre-pandemic, and have developed the **Social Value Cymru** website. They said that this work is “exceptionally important”. They have been measuring social value “for some years” and that it is “very important...as we move to post-COVID period, so that we can ensure that we invest our resources in those things that make the biggest difference.”<sup>147</sup> They told us that measuring social value enables you to invest in the areas where you will get the greatest return and “make the greatest difference to communities and people’s lives....”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> **COV VS 01 National Lottery Community Fund written evidence paragraph 3.1**

<sup>143</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [218]

<sup>144</sup> **COV VS 13 NHS Confederation, paragraph 34**

<sup>145</sup> **COV VS 26 University of Birmingham and University of Southampton written evidence**

<sup>146</sup> **COV VS 12 Mantell Gwynedd written evidence**

<sup>147</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [112]

<sup>148</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [172]

## Our view

**147.** The funding that has been made available to the sector from the Welsh and UK Governments, as well as funders has been much welcomed and has broadly helped the sector weather the initial months of the crisis. The funding has helped the voluntary sector play a vital role in responding to the pandemic and supporting communities across Wales.

**148.** We understand that the financial climate is incredibly uncertain. The combination of economic impact of the pandemic, combined with changes arising from the UK leaving the EU, means the future is currently not clear, and likely to be challenging.

**149.** There is, therefore, much nervousness about what funding will be available to the sector in the next financial year. While we understand the financial pressures which the Welsh Government is under, we believe that further funding should be made available to the sector to improve its resilience and to ensure it can continue to play an active role in the response to the crisis, and the recovery. It is clear from our inquiry that the voluntary sector has more than played its part in supporting communities across Wales through the darkest days of the pandemic, and that they will continue to do so. If the voluntary sector is not sufficiently resourced, it is likely that this will put pressure on statutory services. It is therefore a prudent investment by the Welsh Government.

**Recommendation 9.** Building on the Third Sector Resilience Fund, the Welsh Government should provide funding to increase the resilience of the sector and its ability to play its part in immediate support for communities during the recovery. Given the length of the crisis, consideration should be given to extending this beyond the current financial year.

**150.** It is clear that the flexible approach to funding has also helped the sector as it has responded to COVID-19. We heard the calls from the WCVA and others that providing further funding flexibilities, and in particular allowing them to carry forward un-spent funds to the next financial year would help ease some of the initial financial challenges they are facing. We were persuaded by the WCVA's explanation that the sector has robust accounting and is able to track spend effectively.

**151.** The way in which the funders in Wales have come together to share knowledge and information on awards has also clearly played an effective role in ensuring that funds are best spread across Wales, both in terms of need and geography. We applaud the way they funders have done this, and hope that this will continue after the pandemic. We believe the Welsh Government should work with funders to ensure that this will continue.

**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government should work with the Wales Funders Forum to help funders continue to share information and work collaboratively post-pandemic.

**Recommendation 11.** The Welsh Government should, where appropriate, examine and investigate allowing unspent funding to be carried forward into the next financial year.

**152.** It is clear that while the financial situation is precarious for many organisations in the voluntary sector, it is perilous for BAME organisations. While we welcome the spotlight that has been placed on BAME groups, and the fact that funders have specifically targeted or ring-fenced funds for these groups, more clearly needs to be done. These are often smaller organisations which are run on much smaller budgets and staffing, but are doing invaluable work within communities. They have faced increased pressure, as the pandemic has adversely affected the communities they support. It is clear that in considering funding options for the sector in the future, the Welsh Government must specifically consider the needs of these particular groups.

**Recommendation 12.** The Welsh Government should take into account the particular challenges faced by BAME voluntary sector organisations, when considering funding for the third sector. This should include considering any additional barriers BAME groups may face in accessing funding administered by the Welsh Government and work to minimise these barriers.

**153.** We note the calls from across the sector for more widespread core funding to be made available in the sector. We acknowledge that there is a careful balancing to be struck between providing core funding, which can lead to more adaptability, but potentially turns organisations into semi-statutory bodies. We are also aware of many organisations with little or no funding doing great work, but we believe that there is a need to consider whether core funding will help support voluntary sector organisations to deliver on their key outcomes. We therefore feel this needs more careful consideration and reflection by the Welsh Government. We believe the Welsh Government should look in more detail at the findings of the Community Foundations Loud and Clear report, before reporting back on the viability and desirability of increased core funding.

**Recommendation 13.** The Welsh Government should consider and reflect on the findings from Community Foundation Wales ***Loud and Clear*** report and encourage funders to support core costs so organisations have the freedom to adapt in ever-changing situations to sustain and develop key service or programme outcomes.

**154.** We are sympathetic to the calls from the British Heart Foundation that changes should be made to ensure that the larger charity retailers are not prevented from securing certain grant relief as a result of State Aid restrictions. As an EU Member State, the UK was previously required to grant State Aid in accordance with the EU's regime. However, the EU State Aid regime, which the British Heart Foundation highlighted, no longer applies to the UK. We understand that this aspect of State Aid is not devolved. The UK Government is planning to have its own system, but in the meantime, the UK must adhere to other international obligations, such as World Trade Organisation rules and the recently concluded UK-EU agreement. We believe there is merit in the Welsh Government making representations to the UK Government regarding this issue as the UK Government may choose to adopt the same approach that generated the issue described by the British Heart Foundation in future, regardless of any previous restrictions of EU state aid rules.

**Recommendation 14.** The Welsh Government should make representations to the UK Government regarding the impact of current international obligations in relation to State Aid rules on support to the charity retail sector.

**155.** The importance of measuring the broader impact of public expenditure is widely recognised. It is impossible to fully understand which policy interventions and financial spend has been the most effective without considering the outcomes in the most holistic way. We know that Mantell Gwynedd have relevant expertise and resources which can be accessed by others in the sector. However, we also believe there is a role for the Welsh Government to support this work. For many in the voluntary sector they do not have the expertise or resource to fully assess the social value of their work, this is a particular issue for the smaller organisations, especially those who are embedded in their communities, offering support at a grassroots level.

**Recommendation 15.** The Welsh Government should carry out further research to assess the social value of its investment in the voluntary sector.



## 7. Recovery and reconstruction

The voluntary sector has an important role to play in recovery and reconstruction. In particular, the sector's expertise in supporting preventative work will be critical and must be effectively harnessed.

**156.** It was very clear from all those who gave evidence that as well as trying to respond to the emergency facing them, the sector was already thinking about the role it can play in recovery and reconstruction. Part of this will include learning lessons from the pandemic, and continuing with the good practice that is sustainable and appropriate in a non-emergency situation.

**157.** Both the WCVA<sup>149</sup> and Building Communities Trust<sup>150</sup> highlighted a number of areas where they believed the sector could play an important part. These included but were not restricted to; mental health, poverty relief, employment support; community nature and conservation projects; support for young people. All of this work would be rooted within local communities, utilising the local knowledge and on the ground intelligence which statutory services can lack. The breadth of the areas in which the voluntary sector can help with the recovery is a demonstration of how vital harnessing the sector will be, especially as statutory services will face increasing pressures.

**158.** Building Communities Trust said that previously community organisations have often been an “under-recognised asset” and that it was important to recognise the contribution they can play in what will be “a very, very tough recovery period.”<sup>151</sup>

**159.** Representatives of the statutory sector, such as the WLGA recognised the importance of the voluntary sector in the recovery period. The WLGA said that local authorities would seek to build on the partnership working developed over the pandemic to “build on what has worked well.....and plan for longer-term, sustainable recovery.”<sup>152</sup>

**160.** Witnesses reminded us that even when the current crisis is over, we continue to face a number of significant issues such as “climate change...and food safety, and a load of other big national and social problems.”<sup>153</sup> The WCVA highlighted “leaving the EU....transforming service models including in health and social care and adapting to digitally driven change...”<sup>154</sup> as all having a significant impact as well.

**161.** The WCVA said that “encouraging an ongoing changing of behaviours and culture to share power better locally, regionally and nationally will, I think, build that greater resilience.” This along with “hard-wiring” key relationships between different organisations where necessary; and ensuring that decision

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<sup>149</sup> [COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence](#)

<sup>150</sup> [COV VS 10 Building Communities Trust written evidence](#)

<sup>151</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [173]

<sup>152</sup> [COV VS 16 WLGA, paragraph 36](#)

<sup>153</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [78]

<sup>154</sup> [COV VS 08 WCVA Written evidence](#)

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makers “truly trust their colleagues in their communities....”<sup>155</sup> are essential. The Co-Production Network agreed that hard-wiring relationships would build resilience and mean that there can be improved responses, as well as the creation of “local solutions to not just local problems, but also the national problems.”<sup>156</sup>

**162.** The British Red Cross outlined that their priority was ensuring services and community assets “are sustained during and after the pandemic”. They highlighted that the focus must be on the most vulnerable, but that it was important to acknowledge that vulnerability was not “static” and that in the recovery they would be assessing vulnerability regularly and ensuring they were “focussed....on the most vulnerable...”<sup>157</sup>

**163.** As we have alluded to in the previous chapter, the financial climate for the voluntary sector is very challenging, and numerous witnesses including Building Communities Trust, British Red Cross<sup>158</sup> and the WCVA, told us that it was likely the sector would change and possibly contract, as some charities and organisations will either not return post COVID-19, or will not continue with activities started during the pandemic.

**164.** As highlighted in paragraph 55, stakeholders, including the Moondance Foundation<sup>159</sup> and Race Council Cymru<sup>160</sup> also described the fatigue and burn out amongst staff and volunteers that it seems is widespread across the sector. There are concerns that this, along with other issues such as uncertainty around funding, could hamper the sector’s ability to play the fullest role in recovery and reconstruction.

## Prevention and the Well-Being of Future Generations Act

**165.** A common theme across all the evidence we gathered, across all the main themes, was the role the sector plays in preventative services. This agenda is closely linked to the approach set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

**166.** Powys Teaching Health Board said that the five ways of working in the Act is a really helpful framework to support our long-term recovery planning.” As part of this longer term planning, they are looking at the role of the third sector.<sup>161</sup>

**167.** The British Red Cross said that historically funding structures have been “a bit upside down and haven’t been really targeted at prevention.....” They believed that the pandemic was possible an opportunity to “flip these structure on their head” and really start to focus on preventative work.<sup>162</sup>

**168.** This view was supported by the Wales Funders Forum who put in a “plea” to stop the narrow focus on funding a emergency response when funders could “...look upstream to see some of the amazing

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<sup>155</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [75-76]

<sup>156</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [78]

<sup>157</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [165]

<sup>158</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [165]

<sup>159</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [177]

<sup>160</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [216]

<sup>161</sup> ELGC Committee, 9 November 2020, RoP [15]

<sup>162</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [166]

work” that the voluntary sector does to “stop an issue escalating to the point” where statutory services have to intervene. They believed that often the impact of the voluntary sector was not viewed in the broadest sense.<sup>163</sup>

**169.** The Deputy Minister acknowledged that preventative work was “the great strength” of the sector. She believed that this was where there was a “real strength” and that the Government would use their resources and guidance to “pave a way.”<sup>164</sup>

## Isolation and loneliness

**170.** We heard that a key priority for the sector in the recovery, will be to tackle the high levels of isolation and loneliness within communities. The British Red Cross said that loneliness has been “exacerbated” during the pandemic and that it would have a wider impact for the sector as well as on health and social care services.<sup>165</sup> While Race Council Cymru said this was a particular issue for Windrush elders, and that they have had to find additional volunteer hours to address this.<sup>166</sup> British Red Cross want to see “sustained action” to tackle loneliness as part of the recovery<sup>167</sup>, along with ring-fenced funding for tackling loneliness and isolation.<sup>168</sup>

**171.** Hafod Housing described how they have been seeking to address this within their communities. The app they have developed in conjunction with University of Swansea, Amazon and Accenture sounds particularly interesting. This they believe is the “first application for loneliness and isolation.”<sup>169</sup>

## Our view

**172.** It is absolutely essential that the power, agility and expertise of the third sector is properly harnessed as part of the recovery. As part of the pandemic response, they have shown that they can help alleviate pressures on statutory services, in some cases preventing issues from needing a public sector response. They have also demonstrated that they can often come up with efficient, effective solutions to local issues that better take account of local assets and needs.

**173.** In order to ensure that the sector can play an effective role, it is important that sufficient funding is available to the sector to continue to deliver much needed support as the pandemic continues, and then into the recovery period over the coming months and years. This funding needs to be guaranteed beyond the current financial year.

**174.** We are pleased to see that the Welsh Government is using the Third Sector Partnership Council as a vehicle at a national level to better understand the role the sector can play in recovery. We have heard throughout our inquiry about the importance of local, regional and national partnerships during the

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<sup>163</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [273]

<sup>164</sup> ELGC Committee, 16 November 2020, RoP [73]

<sup>165</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [92]

<sup>166</sup> **COV VS 17 Race Council Cymru written evidence**

<sup>167</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [92]

<sup>168</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [145]

<sup>169</sup> ELGC Committee, 2 November 2020, RoP [134]

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emergency response in formal and informal forums. At every level, these partnerships must be effective. Where partnerships are ineffective, this could lead to patchy involvement and engagement with the third sector. Effective partnership working is essential and the Welsh Government should ensure that the voluntary sector is effectively engaged across Wales at local, regional and national levels.

**Recommendation 16.** The Welsh Government should work with the voluntary sector to identify areas across its work where the sector can support the recovery, public services, building sustainable community resilience and well-being.

**Recommendation 17.** The Welsh Government should invest in voluntary sector programmes which support the recovery, in a similar manner to the Voluntary Services Recovery Fund. Given the length of the crisis, consideration should be given to extending this beyond the current financial year.

**Recommendation 18.** In future recovery work, the Welsh Government should ensure that all parts of the public sector engage with the voluntary sector in policy-making and service delivery. This should also lead to greater partnership working beyond the recovery and include the voices of the voluntary sector as well as the people with whom they work.

**175.** Preventative work is at the heart of much of what the sector does. We see in its work much of the Future Generations of Well-Being (Wales) Act in practice. This must be built on to ensure a fair and just recovery for all of Wales. Although through our previous work on Public Service Boards, and general scrutiny of the Future Generations Commissioner, we continue to have concerns about the patchiness of the spirit of the legislation being fully adopted by all public sector bodies across Wales. There is still too much of a tick box exercise and not enough of the cultural change that is needed.

**176.** We believe that more work is needed to better understand how widespread the cultural shift is across public sector bodies. If all public sector bodies embraced both the spirit and letter of the legislation, many of the issues raised in this report, would fade away.

**177.** We share the significant concerns of stakeholders about the levels of loneliness and isolation across Wales. This was a problem pre-COVID-19, but the pandemic has shone a spotlight on it. As we move into recovery, it is essential this spotlight remains. The voluntary sector plays an important role in tackling this scourge, but it cannot be done alone, or without sufficient funding and support.

**178.** Just prior to the outset of the pandemic, the Welsh Government published **Connected Communities: a strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections**. The approach set out in the strategy was broadly welcomed by the voluntary sector. As a key driver for addressing loneliness and isolation, it is important that the effectiveness of the strategy is kept under review, and publicly reported on, so that lessons can be learnt and changes made if necessary.

**Recommendation 19.** The Welsh Government should report publicly on the effectiveness of the Connected Communities strategy in tackling loneliness and isolation within 12 months.

**179.** We were very interested in the experience of Hafod in developing an app to address loneliness. During the pandemic we have also seen examples of technology being used to address this, for example care homes using technology to ensure residents can stay in touch with family and friends. This is an opportunity to learn how technology can reduce loneliness and isolation. While acknowledging the issues around the digital divide which we explored in Chapter 3, there is clearly an opportunity to harness technology to reduce loneliness and isolation.

**Recommendation 20.** The Welsh Government explores further how new technology, including the app that Hafod is developing, can be used to help address loneliness and isolation. As part of this, the Welsh Government should take account of issues around the digital divide and ensure that solutions take account of these issues around digital access.

## Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and organisation
<b>2 November 2020</b>	<p>Ruth Marks, Chief Executive, WCVA</p> <p>Fiona Liddell, Manager, Helpforce Cymru</p> <p>Noreen Blanluet, Lead consultant, Co-production Network for Wales</p>
<b>2 November 2020</b>	<p>Carol Mack, Chair, Wales Funders Forum</p> <p>Rebecca Watkins, Foundation Director, Moondance Foundation</p> <p>Richard Williams, Chief Executive, Community Foundation Wales</p> <p>John Rose, Wales Director, National Lottery Community Fund</p>
<b>2 November 2020</b>	<p>Kate Griffiths, Director for Wales, British Red Cross</p> <p>Jas Bains, Chief Executive, Hafod</p>
<b>9 November 2020</b>	<p>Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director, Welsh NHS Confederation</p> <p>Hayley Thomas, Executive Director of Planning and Performance, Powys Teaching Health Board</p> <p>Councillor Andrew Morgan, Leader, Welsh Local Government Association</p> <p>Daniel Hurford, Head of Policy (Improvement and Governance), Welsh Local Government Association</p>

<b>9 November 2020</b>	<p>Amanda Carr, Director, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service</p> <p>Bethan Russell Williams, Chief Officer, Mantell Gwynedd</p> <p>Chris Johnnes, Chief Executive, Building Communities Trust</p>
<b>9 November 2020</b>	<p>Patience Bentu, National Community Engagement Lead, Race Council Cymru</p> <p>Rocio Cifuentes, Chief Executive, Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales (EYST)</p>
<b>16 November 2020</b>	<p>Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip</p> <p>Chris Buchan, Head of Community &amp; Third Sector Policy, Welsh Government</p>

## Annex B: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Reference	Organisation
<b>COV VS 01</b>	National Lottery Community Fund
<b>COV VS 02</b>	Hafod (Leaving no one behind COVID-19 story board)
<b>COV VS 03</b>	Community Foundation Wales
<b>COV VS 04</b>	Moondance Foundation
<b>COV VS 05</b>	Glamorgan Voluntary Services
<b>COV VS 06</b>	Co-production Network
<b>COV VS 07</b>	Wales Funders Forum
<b>COV VS 08</b>	WCVA
<b>COV VS 09</b>	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
<b>COV VS 10</b>	Building Communities Trust
<b>COV VS 11</b>	Powys Teaching Health Board
<b>COV VS 12</b>	Mantell Gwynedd
<b>COV VS 13</b>	Welsh NHS Confederation
<b>COV VS 14</b>	Hywel Dda University Health Board
<b>COV VS 15</b>	Swansea Council for Voluntary Service
<b>COV VS 16</b>	Welsh Local Government Association
<b>COV VS 17</b>	Race Council Cymru
<b>COV VS 18</b>	Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
<b>COV VS 19</b>	Bevan Foundation
<b>COV VS 20</b>	Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD)
<b>COV VS 21</b>	British Heart Foundation
<b>COV VS 22</b>	RNIB



<b>COV VS 23</b>	Helpforce Cymru
<b>COV VS 24</b>	Charity Commission for England and Wales
<b>COV VS 25</b>	St John Ambulance Cymru
<b>COV VS 26</b>	Birmingham University and Southampton University
<b>COV VS 27</b>	National Aids Trust

## Additional information

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
COV VS 23a - additional information from Helpforce Cymru and WCVA	13 November 2020