

Third Sector Partnership Council

15 July 2021

Microsoft Teams meeting

Meeting Note

Minister for Social Justice

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership

Lowri Jones

Gareth Coles - Arts, Culture Heritage

Andrea Cleaver - Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Chris Johnes - Building Communities Trust

Radway Hadassch

Susie Ventriss Field - International

Sian Rees -

Glenn Bowen - Social Enterprise Network

Clair Brick - Employment

Carl Cooper - Intermediaries

David Bowles - Animal Welfare

Claire O'Shea - International

Eleanor Norton - Volunteering

Richard Flowerdew - Volunteering

Rocio Cifuentes - Ethnic Minorities

Catrin James

Rob Simkins - Homes for All Cymru

Phil Fiander - Chair, TSPC Funding and Compliance Sub Committee

Ruth Marks - Chief Executive, WCVA

Anna Nicholl - WCVA

Ben Lloyd - WCVA

Neil Surman - Welsh Government

Karen Higgins - Welsh Government

Chris Buchan - Welsh Government

Helen Brown - Welsh Government (Note Taker)

Kate Bacon – Welsh Government

Peter Keller – Welsh Government

Apologies

Paul Glaze - Youth

Karen Whitfield - Environment

Gethin Rhys - Religion

Katie Chappelle - Age Alliance Wales

Helene Hayes

Rebecca Rose

Cath Hicks

Open and Welcome

The Minister for Social Justice (MSJ) opened the meeting by introducing the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (DMSP) and welcoming TSPC members including those new members to the first TSPC of the new Senedd term.

MSJ set out some of her Government priorities which under the programme for Government commits to continue a strong partnership with voluntary organisations across the range of our responsibilities. MSJ spoke about some of the priorities under her new portfolio area which are -

- A Wales where we tackle poverty; protect our most vulnerable communities; create the best possible working conditions; and champion equality. Social Justice means a fair and equal Wales, where no one is held back and no one is left behind.
- The development of a small pilot for Basic Income in Wales, and create a Community Bank.
- The introduction of our Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill to help ensure Wales is a fair work nation.
- Supporting Credit Unions who in turn will support the most financially vulnerable in our society.
- The continued support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence; raise awareness of hate crime and encourage reporting of it also will continue.

TSPC Recovery Report update

Before handing over to Ruth Marks (RM) to lead on the update from TSPC on the recovery report, MSJ endorsed the recommendation of TSPC to appoint Phil Fiander as Chair of TSPC Funding and Compliance sub-committee.

RM noted that TSPC were keen to work with Ministers and officials to turn the recommendations from the covid recovery report and also the Equalities Communities and Local Government enquiry report on the impact of covid on the third sector into actions.

AN briefly recapped that a lot of work had been undertaken collectively undertaken over the last year and stressed that TSPC are keen to progress this work. However as this is a large piece of work which cannot remain static, TSPC are proposing a small working group be developed with officials to take this forward and will bring back the progress back to TSPC.

Chris Johnes (CN) –commented that we need to recognise that there are very deep routed issues which have underpinned the mixed relationships in the past which have gone into cultural issues, ways of working, regulations, capacity and different places. Leading us to recognise that meeting the principles in the recovery is a long term project where there is unlikely to be much progress quickly and TSPC should not too critical about this and recognise that this will require cross sector working which will take longer than a year to achieve.

In response MSJ agreed that we need to take stock and not rush this work to make sure we get this right.

Catrin James (CJ) –explained that she felt it was a fantastic opportunity to look at some of the changes and the readiness of the sector to embrace them. Adding that a longer term project which will give an excellent opportunity to take a positive step in building relationships.

Richard Flowerdew (RF) – RF thanked MSJ on behalf of the volunteering networks for her support during volunteers' week. RF also thanked officials for the approach used in the development of guidance which has been there to support the sector over the last year. It was a very different way of working but has allowed organisations to be able to continue to offer their services to their beneficiaries. The Minister's officials have been a consistent, accessible source of support and information which along with the additional volunteering in Wales grants which have done so well to support the sector. It highlights what can be achieved when we collaborate. RF highlighted the Helpforce approach where WCVA and the TUC have worked together on the Charter of volunteering. Wales has a strong tradition of mutual support and volunteering which enhances, social capital, community cohesion and citizen involvement in the delivery of key public services. Volunteers can play a distinctive role in public services without duplicating or displacing those paid workers but this can only be achieved with ministerial support. Reminding those responsible to include volunteers in these developments rather than the sector being an add on partner.

RM stated that there were interesting links between the points that RF has made and the 2nd agenda item of today's meetings.

Glenn Bowen (GB) –GB raised the potential risks in relation to the possibility of losing direct access to structural funds. Adding that as we sit here today we do not know if the sector will have access to the shared prosperity fund, this means we have huge challenges ahead of us and we need to keep on top of this. The third sector can play a critical role in developing our relationships directly with civil servants being employed in Cardiff and the other Government departments to try and ensure that we learn from the best practice from current structural funds and feeding that into the new processes. However need to consider the back-up plan to ensure that we can effectively fund the third sector if unable to access the shared prosperity fund. GB recognised that there are lots of questions without any answers at the moment.

Phil Fiander (PF) – PF gave a brief update on the funding and compliance sub group. The work plan was presented to the Finance and Local Government Minister and the sub group will now work with those officials on some of the actions in the work plan. A growing concern from the sector is around a lot of what is happening at a Westminster level regarding replacement EU funding. The issue being that different departments in Westminster are able to apply their own rules, bypassing the very strong work we are doing in Wales. Although WCVA and Wales Co-op are doing some brilliant work in this area, this is a really important issue because it has the potential of not just to divert money away from the sector but also to undermine a lot of the last 20 years/25 years work of the Third Sector Scheme which ties into the recovery plan.

MSJ - thanked everyone for the very important points raised was encouraged to see the work progressing. MSJ is keen that the report is used as a basis for discussions between the sector and other cabinet ministers' portfolio meetings. **MSJ agreed to a small working group to oversee the recovery work.**

It is good to hear the response of volunteering in terms of the pandemic and community engagement has been just brilliant and we did have the infrastructure here in Wales to respond. MSJ met with the Chief Executive of the Charity Commission this week and was able to acknowledge at that meeting that the third sector infrastructure is unique in Wales which we need to sustain - this does not exist in England.

MSJ responded to the points on EU funding which is a cross Government response and acknowledging the sectors meeting request to the Economy Minister regarding the impact of leaving the European Union. We are trying our best to be engaged with all of the UK Government departments with regards to these confusing range and array of investment programmes to support communities like the community ownership fund, community renewal fund and the levelling up fund. The reality is that a lot of this funding is bypassing Welsh Government and therefore bypassing the code of practice; highlighting the need to alert each other. Adding the sector is independent and your voices, experiences are both creditable and authoritative.

Civil Society Forum in Wales is crucially important to this agenda, **MSJ would like to have another discussion at the next TSPC meeting** because the loss of funds are going to fall on the most vulnerable so there needs to be early engagement and involvement with the sector at every opportunity. We hold firm to our strength in the voluntary sector partnership which goes back since devolution.

Draft Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill

Deputy Minister for Social Partnership (DMSP) – DMSP thanked TSPC as it provided an opportunity to update the sector on the latest position. On the 13th July the summary of consultation responses were published, along with a short written statement. 85 responses were received from a good cross section of areas, including, employers, trade unions, voluntary/third sector and individuals which showed broad consensus round the value of social partnership for the proposed Bill.

The Social Partnership Council (SPC) would have a limit on the number of representatives sitting on it. The DMSP was keen to look across Government at the

various partnerships to understand how they all connect and fit in together. As we want to create a system where existing structures such as TSPC which will be able to feed into the SPC once established. DMSP invited Neil Surman (NS), Deputy Director Social Partnership to provide more details around developing the policy proposals around the Bill.

NS – There are several of policy issues that are being finalised ready for a draft bill in spring 2022. There were quite a few calls in the consultation responses for a wider representation of the SCP, some of these calls were from the third sector, some were from the commissioners. There were also some responses suggesting to continue to use the members of the shadow Social Partnership to form the SPC. However the shadow Social Partnership Council was set up with a specific mandate to deal with the Covid crisis, which in the longer term might not meet our aims. Over the autumn officials will be looking at existing structures to ensure alignment and not duplication of the SPC. Looking forward to when we have the SCP there will be a need to ensure that we have a dialogue with not just the SCP and the TUC but also with networks such as TSPC. Third sector will have a seat at the table here and as lead official for Social Partnership I will be looking to work with TSPC in the future.

RM – The sector feels broadly that we have a huge amount to offer in relation to this agenda and pleased to have been included on the shadow Social Partnership Council. However only a few in the sector feel close to the Social Partnership procurement agenda at this particular this moment in time although several of us had supported the consultation response. We feel that this is highly relevant and really important not just for activities in Wales but also taking on board the globally responsible Wales agenda item. There are also connections of work which the sector has been involved in over this agenda over recent years, e.g. Volunteering Charter and National framework for volunteering for health and social care.

Linking to MSJ's early comments RM stated that the civil society forum on Brexit has just received additional funding from the legal education foundation to be able to take forward its work and hopefully influence the development and establishment of the new civil society forum which the UK Government has made a commitment to.

RM was invited to give evidence to the House of Lords select committee who were looking at issues regarding procurement and frameworks along with the lack of engagement between UK Government and devolved Governments. Highlighting that the sector are using every opportunity to get information, influence and emphasise how the working relationships in Wales are different. With the sector seen not just as a valued partner but an equal partner.

GB – From the Wales Co-op perspective we have put our response in and a number of points we raised have been picked up by NS. The one that we would push on would be around representation either direct representation on the council or finding ways to input into that process. The third sector is such a large diverse sector so to have just that one voice around the table would be a challenge. From a social business and social enterprise perspective the sector is right at the heart of the fair working agenda with the whole ethos of the social partnership work and its agenda. In terms of gender balance we have good female representation in our leadership groups and within our management group. As well as representation from ethnic minority communities in the management groups within social business. In relation to supply chains development it would be really useful to have that voice around the

table The social business sector could bring a lot of knowledge and expertise and possibly bring something that the private sector partners would not be able to bring to the table.

Susie Ventris Field – Issues around equality and poverty have been massively exasperated by covid in Wales and also globally. It is particularly important that the procurement work reflects issues around fair work and sustainability do not just apply in Wales but also apply to the global supply chains. It is really important to make sure that a fair work nation doesn't mean that we export unfair work to other countries. It is important that that international and global setting is considered also really important from the gender equality perspective internationally thinking about who we procure from in terms of women in business.

AN – Across the networks when promoting fair work or disabled people, different ethnicities or gender is where the sector has huge expertise that we can offer. If we are going to achieve the vision that we have set out in the TSPC third sector recovery report around greener fairer more just society so if we can work with the DMSP and NS we can get to a much stronger position that we are collectively trying to get to on this agenda.

MSJ – The links between the first agenda item and this in terms of the recovery plan and the challenges of EU funding etc. all links up to the overall portfolio responsibilities for equalities. We have to influence and engage with our colleagues across Welsh Government on all of these points.

DMSP - Thanked everyone for the points raised including some of the broader issues we are looking at around the bill. The bill is a significant step forward and significant lever in terms of driving those fair work agendas in Wales but also as a policy intervention that we may be able to put around it as well. This is why broader conversation with the sector is so important to look at how we can actually do that in practice. We have published a written statement but it's hoped that early in the autumn term to be able to do a bit more with an oral statement. The bill won't be able to cover all the points raised today but we are at the start of another 5 year Government.

MSJ – Hopefully TSPC will be encouraged and reassured by the messages from the DMSP. It's been valuable to have this item on the agenda today and it is good that this is happening in the first year of this new Senedd term. It is also good to see RM on the shadow social partnership council with other stakeholders providing a strong third sector voice. MSJ asked RM if she was happy that we are safeguarding and strengthening the standing of your role as the partnership bill goes forward.

RM - Most certainly, everyone in the meeting today will have heard with gratitude the range of comments and commitments from the MSJ and DMSP. The sector are keen to work with officials across government. Being able to demonstrate the value and impact of the sector both in its formal, organised sense, as well as its less formal and organised differently senses. We all know that the sector has so many different voices and there are many other mechanisms. It is that two way relationship that co-produced solution that we are really committed to. The sector are looking forward to future meetings with the MSJ, DMSP and other ministers in the autumn term.

NS and RM to arrange a follow-up discussion with members of the Council on procurement or any other aspects of the Bill

MSJ – Closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending.