

CONSULTATION REPORT

How should local communities be supported to achieve their wellbeing plans?

The views of regional and national organisations

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Together for Change: Summary of Consultation Report 2024

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INTRODUCTION:

We live in challenging times - austerity, inequality, climate emergency are all taking their toll on people and government both here in Wales and the wider world. All too often the response is to try to do more of what we've always done with less or to pass the responsibility of meeting needs down the line to someone else, whether that's the third or voluntary sector or communities.

In contrast, Wales is rich in policy and legislation that puts people and their voices front and centre of how we tackle need and boost wellbeing. A wealth of strategies designed to do things differently through collaboration and co production have been developed. However, it is widely acknowledged that something is being lost in translation, despite the best efforts of all involved. There's an implementation gap between policy and how systems operate in practice. In reality, even where the value and impact of cross sector collaborations is agreed, few place-based initiatives scale and spread beyond their own communities, while frameworks for joint working too often sit on the shelf unused.

In this context, Together for Change (TfC) has held a series of interviews and conversations to explore:

- what is needed to support communities to maximise their impact on living well and what that tells us about how gaps in the current support structures can be filled
- how by working together people and organisations can learn and share knowledge effectively to scale and spread change.

This report reflects those conversations and the way over six months a shared perspective on what might support transformational change is beginning to emerge.

Further work with partners is now planned for the Autumn to begin building effective partnerships able to address concerns and deliver a shared vision of a way forward that people and organisations can work on together.

BACKGROUND: TfC grew out of the grassroot charity Solva Care with core funding from Wales Community Lottery Fund and grants from public sector organisations. In the last four years, it has focused on developing, directly and indirectly, the strength and power of communities. TfC is now exploring ways to grow. This report reflects on a series of in depth, user-led interviews, combined with workshops and presentations held to consider ways forward for the organisation.

METHODOLOGY: Our methodology aims to first understand, then build insights with sector partners through in-depth engagement. Key organisations and people were identified working collaboratively with Together for Change and its partners. Regular touch points were held with TfC's senior team as work progressed to reflect, test assumptions and identify emerging themes to explore further. Each interview examined key questions from differing perspectives. Interviewees discussed challenges in the current system; ways to tackle them and improve impact in the future. All participants held senior positions and represented key sector interests.

In all, TfC commissioned 12 in depth, user-led research interviews with key people in the third and public sector. as the foundation for this report. All participants were selected for their wide experience of the sector and of community and place-based working. These interviews were part of a wider consultation carried out by TfC's senior team with organisations and partners. Information emerging from the interviews was compared and contrasted with that gathered by TfC's senior team in the wider consultation. This was done to test, explore and develop emerging themes and ideas.

The aim of this work is to identify gaps in current ways of working with communities where TfC can use its skills and experience to help partners tackle challenges and address gaps in the system. The findings, with TfC's senior teams own conversations with key partners and organisations, will inform TfC's future development.

User-led interviews are a qualitative research method where the researcher aims to understand people's experience by asking participants guided questions on how they interact with the service or system. In this instance, TfC wanted to explore:

- how organisations currently support grassroots community groups to maximise their impact on living well
- what would help them increase the impact of this work
- where they saw gaps in the current support structures in Wales and
- how they thought those gaps could be strengthened

Interviewees reflect a range of experiences. Their views are their own, not those of their organisations, although they reflect their organisation's perspective. Each spoke candidly from their point of view and should be quoted anonymously as comments represent sector perspectives, not official organisational views.

What we learned... Across this series of interviews and conversations shared themes have emerged. These are summarised below and explored in this report in further detail.

Participants described the public sector model that grew out of NHS development and the social care system as **no longer fit for purpose**. They wanted **fundamental change** to focus resources in communities. Many felt place-based work was already providing answers that could be scaled and spread, if people had the space, time and capacity to "join the dots" and share learning.

Others saw a need to challenge traditional cultural attitudes that the state will provide. They reflected on how people could be supported to develop the capacity to explore and learn from place-based work in the current pressurised, competitive and complex system.

TfC also identified potential opportunities for joint working around some of the themes identified in a series of conversations with key organisations in the sector. These conversations will be developed further throughout the coming year.

A dominant theme to emerge from the 1:1 interviews that was also reflected in some of TfC's discussions are the many barriers that currently get in the way of effective cross sector collaboration. These include:

- The **lack of a community development policy**. Community development currently falls across different policy and funding streams, with third sector, voluntary & grassroots groups navigating a complex, contradictory, competitive landscape.
- **Financial pressures** that have created a short-term, top-down approach that often results in a struggle for sustainable funding. Many felt this pressure fuelled wasteful competition and, even where initiatives were impactful, added to the sense that things could not be changed.
- Third sector and voluntary groups described how pressure to meet funding and short-term performance deadlines left **no time to reflect on learning** or work on ways to scale and spread things that could deliver on Wales' wellbeing priorities. They described a system where grassroots groups that grew out of local needs often struggle with funding and governance demands that were inequitable and exclusionary. They also felt **the lack of time, space and capacity to learn from the things** was getting in the way of culture change. Even successful groups like Medrwn Mon and some of the CVCs taking part in the 1:1 interviews felt they were at capacity sustaining and growing their current workload. They felt groups like theirs would have limited time or resources to participate in wider learning or capacity-building. At the same time, they wanted to support and explore and share their knowledge. They said there were vital lessons to be learned from place-based working, in the right space with facilitation, that could fuel transformational change.

Emerging from the interviews and discussions was a perceived need for **a national, coordinated focus on doing things differently.**

Alongside a need for **space and resources** for organisations to explore and share learning, there was a perceived need for support to come together to forge more **effective relationships** with communities - relationships that would support the development of sustainable, impactful cross sector, place-based approaches.

Many identified **community-based data collection, research and evaluation** as a gap that must be filled. They felt better information and mechanisms to share it would fuel collaboration and ultimately help challenge and change current cultures and mindsets. People saw **a role for an organisation that could pull together learning from communities**, including research, data and evaluation. They described that organisation acting as an interface between practical, place-based work and policy-makers in the statutory sector. Its role would be to **articulate and advocate for change**. They saw it working with partners to **convene cross-sector groups and facilitate learning** that not only enabled scale and spread, but also helped transform the way people thought and acted to embed the five ways of working set out in the Well Being of Future generations Act.

Convening around a platform for change was identified as a way to form the **strong partnerships needed to realise the vision and ambition** of Wales' world renowned legislation. Everyone reflected on the danger of duplicating effort in a crowded space and again partnership was identified as a way to overcome this challenge. Many felt **partnership working** was essential to maximise impact in a crowded system that was already under pressure.

Key points from TfC's own discussions with potential partners and sector leaders also revealed potential to explore:

- with the Resourceful Communities Partnership events and research over the coming year, including testing and evaluating engagement tools
- with the Third Sector Research Partnership advisory group the need for "a repository of projects"; coordinating training across both organisations and a future alliance
- gaps in implementation, as described in discussion with West Wales Regional Innovation Coordination hub to progress knowledge transfer or mobilisation
- future partnerships with organisations like Cwmpas or Medrwn Mon

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In summary, a need was identified for a national organisation to:

- **convene people** around a platform for change

- **join the dots so information flows** and knowledge is transferred in a way that helps groups & organisations build strong partnerships to focus on articulating the case for change
- **provide space** for discussion and relationship building
 - with **facilitation and resource** to help groups showcase what works and forge the partnerships needed to scale and spread
 - support **partnership working**, help identify new resources and share existing capacity to maximise impact. One participant spoke of the need to think about joining the dots between public and private philanthropy, particularly around social impact investment
- **support skills and capacity development** to help people work together generate research, data and evaluation of what works in communities.
 - develop new ways to **evidence the impact of place-based approaches** by working with communities on data collection, analysis, research and evaluation to make the case for change
- help **articulate and advocate for a new model of community engagement** capable of turning the dial on the most pressing challenges we face today.

Emerging themes...

Four clear themes or needs emerged as essential to support change. These can be expressed as the need for:

1. **Strategic leadership** - that champions change to move beyond managing decline. Some identified this as the need for a voice to articulate and advocate for community-led, place-based, cross-sector collaboration, others spoke of the need for data and research on the impact of community work to fuel a change in government policy on community development. One interviewee (the Office of Future Generations policy lead) spoke of a role for an organisation to identify and champion good practice in the community. She spoke of how an organisation could work in partnership with the OFT to bring community voices to the public sector (their stakeholders) to work on the scale and spread of ways of working that implement the WBFGs Act. This would be in line with their Cymru Can strategy.

2. **Space for joined-up thinking** - where people can share, learn and develop ideas, approaches and solutions together. This discussion also covered how information flows now. People said they were overwhelmed by information, but had little space or capacity to reflect on their own work or explore what others were doing. They wanted space and support to explore and learn from what works and build the

relationships they need to form their own effective cross-sector public service/ community partnerships. One gave the example of Menter Mon. They wanted to explore what that group was doing in context of the bigger picture of how we address systemic barriers of top down, short-term thinking in a complex, over-stretched system. Others felt there was a real need for capacity-building and culture change before people would be able to work well together.

3. Data, research and evaluation - interviewees wanted communities to be supported to develop focused metrics that go beyond traditional economic indicators to measure what matters. They felt that community-based research, data and evaluation would enable a better understanding of what has impact and why, which in turn would help scale and spread what works.

4. Funding and community support - all interviewees felt the current system was top-down, short-term, competitive and prevented partnership working. Many wanted funding that prioritised community initiatives as a way to promote system change. They didn't see this as a role for one single organisation, but did see the need for an organisation that could advocate for place-based, community-led work and provide the data and research that made the case for change. They describe this organisation as bringing people together to identify gaps in research, find ways to fill those gaps and locate funding for partnership working to support change.

Emerging themes... summary

- **Need for strategic leadership and advocacy for change:** about prioritising the long-term and supporting community development to build people's capacity
- **Need for resources:** not all about fiscal pressure but also the need to rethink funding to enable culture change
- **Need for space:** Partnering with organisations like the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner to convene in spaces that enable different players to come together to work on change. Some called for "a centre" for knowledge where people can "deposit" learning and look for partners
- **Need for place-based research by communities (better data & understanding):** What is working, where's it working? What can we learn from that and how can we develop scale and spread?
- **Need to:** remove competition
 - work for culture change
 - improve comms on what's going on & the potential for partnership

- build shared definitions to fuel honest conversations

Key warnings...

- **Need to be aware of roles played by others:** great potential for duplication, particularly with think tanks, community groups, existing networks
- **Need to be aware of systemic pressures:** so much is being asked of people at all levels, any activity must take pressure off not add to the burden
- **Need to be aware of the value of relationships:** People felt TfC's greatest strength was its relationships with partners in Pembrokeshire. They were concerned about how to replicate that nationally
- **Need to be future focused:** Have a clear vision on where TfC wants to go and build the relationships needed to succeed. It's essential to avoid silo thinking

For the consultation involving communities please see:
[Research on Communities and Evidence](#)

Ysgrifennwyd ac adolygwyd yr adroddiad hwn gan

This report was written and reviewed by:

Babs Lewis, Freelance Consultant in Wales whose extensive expertise in innovating for social good and knowledge of the sector underpins this report

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Organisations and partnerships involved:

Resourceful Communities Partnership Governance Group, Third Sector Research Partnership, West Wales Research Partnership, West Wales Research & Innovation Hub, Medrwn Mon Anglesey CVC, Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, Cwmpas, Office Future Generations Commissioner Wales, WCVA, Community Foundation Wales, Co Production Network Wales, PAVO, CAVO, C3SC, Interlink RCT, Public Service Board, Hywel Dda University Board Research and Innovation, Bevan Commission, Bevan Foundation