

Ein cyf/Our ref: CEO4250
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Dyddiad/Date: 3 November 2020

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John Griffiths MS
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Email: SeneddCommunities@senedd.wales

Dear Mr Griffiths

Re: Scrutiny of COVID-19 and its impact on the voluntary sector

Thank you for your letter regarding the inquiry being undertaken by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee into Covid-19 and its impact on the voluntary sector.

Funding and Service Delivery

Several grants have been offered nationally to support the sector at a time when opportunities for fundraising and income generation have been very sorely impacted. However, many organisations have not been able to apply due to lack of human resources (HR) support with staff furloughed. In addition, most of the grants offered have had a short turn around with all funds needing to be spent by March 2021, which is in itself a challenge.

Community buildings were especially effected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but many have benefitted from the £10,000 business rate relief payments, managed locally through the Local Authorities (Carmarthenshire County Council, Pembrokeshire County Council and Ceredigion County Council). The Local Authorities were proactive in ensuring the grant was offered to community buildings. Within Carmarthenshire, the Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS) formed a Community Building network, supporting community buildings in their journey towards re-opening.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, local County Voluntary Councils worked with a number of partners to bring local funding streams together. In Carmarthenshire, they created the Covid-19 Response Fund and in Pembrokeshire, they created the Supporting Community Action Fund.

The Covid-19 Response Fund provided micro-grants of up to £250 to informal volunteer-led groups; seven grants were allocated. In addition, grants of up to £1,000 for constituted organisations were provided. Two funding rounds were completed between April 2020 and September 2020, with 27 grants totalling £22,060 awarded. The CAVS also provided a Covid-19 Support grant; to date, 10 grants have been awarded totalling £12,222, with the grant scheme open until the end of November 2020.

The Supporting Community Action Fund provided micro-grants of up to £500 to informal volunteer-led groups, as well as grants of up to £2,000 for constituted organisations. Two funding rounds were completed between April 2020 and September 2020, with 95 grants totalling £120,172.49 awarded.

The availability of accessible, local grant schemes administered by the Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO) with the support of the Local Authority, has been critical to fund very small scale, time limited activity quickly in local communities. ID Badges, car stickers and hand sanitizer were all centrally purchased by CAVO and distributed to local support groups. Groups requesting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) were given correct and clear information on the type of PPE required and how to source appropriate PPE with the support of Local Authority and Public Health Wales colleagues.

The Friend in Need and Carers Innovative Support grant is currently open and there are plans to launch further funding for Community Pathways to assist those working with children, young people, older people, people with learning and additional needs, and people with dementia.

Voluntary groups have worked quickly to alter their models of service delivery to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic, with many groups moving their face-to-face services to online or telephone support. Service providers making regular preventative check in calls are a staple of future provision to ensure people feel less isolated. Many others have continued to provide front-line services in support of health and social care delivery, including shopping, prescription delivery/collections, food banks and community transport. Sustaining this continued provision will aid relieving winter pressures.

Information and advice service providers have come together in Ceredigion to promote service availability, share best practice and clarify referral processes.

Different funding streams have been pooled together to create a coherent community based response, which is testimony to the strength of the partnership approach taken by statutory agencies, the local County Voluntary Councils, the third sector and local communities.

Effectiveness of Support from the UK/Welsh Government and Local Authorities

The Local Authorities, Health Board and local County Voluntary Councils came together to ensure that their local populations were supported as much as possible during the initial lockdown. Each area set up a single point of contact for all enquiries. The swift development of this service was extremely effective at this time; local weekly meetings were convened to highlight any problems, and work to resolve them. At a national level, programmes were developed that were implemented locally.

The availability of funding to deliver health and social care services differently in the region meant that we were well placed as a Sector to support the needs of communities. The availability of local grant funding allowed the voluntary sector and Health Board to mobilise additional activity and provision quickly and ensure that there was minimal duplication of efforts.

At this time, there was a large uptake of people wanting to provide help where they could. Volunteer Officers worked quickly to set up opportunities for volunteers to be placed. Over 1,000 potential volunteers were recruited in under three weeks. A time banking platform was established so that people in the community could exchange their own resources and skills. As a result, the Health Board saw 360 volunteers to assist with the set-up of the Field Hospitals.

In March 2020, the Carmarthenshire United Support Service (CUSP) a collaboration of third sector organisations was asked to provide a Home from Hospital service. However, it was clear after a couple of months that the service needed to revert back to its original concept of 'Home **from** Hospital Home **not** Hospital' and together with CUSP, we have continued to deliver this service.

Volunteering and Community Resilience

Within the first few weeks, over 200 volunteer-led community response groups came into being either through new groups or established groups changing their services. These groups were supported to become part of the Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Connect Community Support Networks.

These were supported by the Community Volunteering Development Officer (a Transformation funded post). Weekly meetings have been held to maintain communication, share good practice and provide mutual support and a closed Facebook group was set up for group Co-ordinators. Most groups have indicated an intention to continue in some shape, size or form, and both the Connect Community Support Networks in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire continue to meet monthly.

During lockdown, CAVS introduced a loyalty a scheme for local businesses that have gone the extra mile, and has now established a community recognition programme. Local support groups in Ceredigion helped to distribute activity packs for young children and support packs for carers and the elderly and the support of Young Farmer Clubs throughout Ceredigion was invaluable.

Under the direction of colleagues in Ceredigion County Council, a map of local provision has been created to ensure that no gaps in provision were evident. Best practice models are being collated and communities will be supported to adopt different approaches to ensure there is a network of anchor organisations that can spontaneously respond to community needs in future.

Over 1,000 people came forward to volunteer within the Hywel Dda University Health Board area, but unfortunately, many groups have shut down their volunteering opportunities. Volunteers have been signposted to their local Connect Community Support Network groups for support.

CAVO has worked with Third Sector groups to identify available opportunities and organised a series of Virtual Volunteering Fairs focussed on practical support and digital opportunities. There are future opportunities to explore the possibility of sharing pooled volunteers between service providers with the development of shared recruitment and training programmes. This would further develop the links between informal offers of support and formal provision in the Third Sector, which could address rural capacity and access challenges faced in Ceredigion.

The Health Board fast-tracked the development of the 'Connect to Carmarthenshire and Connect to Pembrokeshire' platforms, as a tool for groups to match offers of help with requests for support. More recently, the national Connect to Kindness platform has also been launched, encouraging people to carry out acts of kindness in their communities.

Overall, communities across the Health Board have demonstrated resilience, and shown that without any policy or strategy they are able to support their local communities and assist others in need.

Good Practice and Future Opportunities and Challenges

There have been many examples of good practice and shared learning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which have been communicated through a variety of networks. A video and infographic were developed to showcase the range of activity and community response. The following [link](#) will take you to the video.

I trust you will find this information useful.

Yours sincerely



Steve Moore
Chief Executive