

1. Introduction

1..1. This evidence has been prepared to inform the National Assembly's committee consultation on the Welsh Government's administrative and financial response to Brexit.

1..2. About WCVA

WCVA is the national membership organisation for the third sector in Wales. Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive, improving wellbeing for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by connecting, enabling and influencing.

1..3. WCVA is an Intermediate Body, which acts on behalf of the Welsh

European Funding Office (WEFO), providing funding through the European Structural and Investment Funds to the third, public and private sectors across Wales.

2. What are the main issues facing your sector as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, and how should the Welsh Government respond to these?

2..1. Loss of funding

2..1.1. The EU's investment in Wales represents a significant source of funding for the third sector and supports multiple initiatives that

contribute to the social and economic regeneration of Wales' most deprived regions. Initiatives that perhaps wouldn't be funded through domestic sources.

2..1.2. Under the 2007–2013 Structural Funds programmes:

EU funds of £100m supported 45 schemes led by the third sector, helping 8,545 people into work and 21,825 people to gain qualifications, creating 405 enterprises and 720 (gross) jobs. Through procured contracts, over £187m (10% of total value of procurement contracts) were awarded to the third sector to deliver the activities of projects.

2..1.3. Under the current 2014–2020 Structural Funds programmes, so far the third sector is leading multiple operations worth in excess of £80million and many more organisations are accessing funds through a number of regional frameworks and contracts.

2..1.4. Welsh Government should:

- support the third sector to have a voice in shaping the future of the Shared Prosperity Fund in Wales.
- ensure the Shared Prosperity Fund (through utilising the partnership principle) invests in the third sector and other agencies to co-produce activities that build resilience and prosperity within our most deprived communities.
- pursue unrestricted access to the European transnational cooperation programmes such as Daphne, Development, Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) and Erasmus+. The withdrawal of youth driven initiatives funded through Erasmus+ would significantly disadvantage Wales' younger generation's ability to engage with European employment and educational opportunities post Brexit.

2..2. The EU (Withdrawal) Bill and the threat it poses to devolution

- 2..2.1. The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill circumvents current assumptions about how devolution works – namely that power not explicitly reserved should be automatically devolved to Wales. We are concerned that any powers taken by Westminster would not later be devolved. Any decision to reverse devolved powers must be open to proper democratic participation.
- 2..2.2. Devolution has encouraged cross–sectoral working in Wales and allowed the third sector greater accessibility to engage with the governing institutions in relation to policy development, scrutiny and delivery. The benefits of existing engagement mechanisms available to the third sector, such as the Third Sector Partnership Council and membership of the Programme Monitoring Committee, would be lost if control is removed from Welsh Government and retained by the UK Government.
- 2..2.3. The promotion and protection of equality and human rights is woven into the Welsh devolution settlement. Wales has chosen to strengthen its rights protections through such measures as the Rights of Children and Young People (Wales) Measure 2011, the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. These Acts were written in the context of devolution and the ability for these to achieve success may be severely limited if powers are removed from Wales.
- 2..2.4. We are concerned that the Bill would enable those rights and protections to be weakened (realised to some extent already through the decision taken to exclude the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights from domestic law post Brexit). Any weakening of rights will indicate little recognition for the Welsh devolved perspective.

2..3. Equality and Human Rights

2..3.1. In a Brexit survey undertaken by WCVA in March of this year, our members valued the protection of existing human and environmental rights and building community cohesion and minimising hate crime, above safeguarding funding opportunities for the sector.

2..3.2. Following the EU referendum result in Wales:

- reported incidents of hate crime have risen by 28%¹
- immigration issues have increased by 19%, with 'white - other' the largest group seeking advice²
- enquiries in relation to national citizenship have increased by 63%³
 - hate crimes against Muslim women have risen by an estimated 300%⁴

2..3.3. The EU has served as a safety net, setting minimum standards for equalities and human rights legislation, and deep reservations have been expressed regarding the prospect of these commitments being weakened over time.

2..3.4. The Equality and Human Rights Coalition, facilitated by WCVA, has produced a paper on the impact of Brexit on equality and human rights. It contains a number of recommendations, including several for Welsh Government. The paper can be accessed here.

¹ Citizens Advice Cymru. February 2017. Presentation: Information, advice and Brexit.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Women's Budget Group, *If 'Brexit means Brexit' what will that mean for women?*,

<<http://wbg.org.uk/analysis/brexit-means-brexit-will-mean-women/>> [accessed 7 February 2017].

2..4. Health and social care

2..4.1. Third sector organisations play a key role in the provision of health and social care within Wales, supporting people with disabilities, older people and those with chronic health conditions. The health and social care sector is particularly reliant on EU migrant workers and Brexit further compounds the difficulties associated with the recruitment and retention of a suitably qualified workforce.

3. What advice, support or assistance have you received from Welsh Government to date in preparation for Brexit?

3..1. The Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) has engaged with the sector through WCVA and its other third sector led operations post referendum result. WCVA would be pleased to facilitate further engagement between WEFO and the sector. We are aware that the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs has engaged third sector groups in some of its Brexit planning.

3..2. WCVA has been engaged in discussions at a strategic level, including through the External Advisory Group on Brexit, Chaired by Mark Drakeford. We have also facilitated discussion between third sector representatives and Welsh Government on Brexit at a recent meeting of the Third Sector Partnership Council. The Welsh Government's position on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, and the subsequent tabled amendments, have provided clarity on Welsh Government's thinking at a strategic level.

3..3. However, we are not aware of direct advice, support or assistance for the sector from other Welsh Government divisions in relation to Brexit.

There has been little communication about what Brexit really means for Wales.

4. What advice or support would you like to see from Welsh Government that will help you and your sector prepare for Brexit?

4..1. The sector requires clear, open and accessible dialogue in relation to the direction of travel. It's extremely difficult to engage with Brexit discussion if we don't know what it is we're engaging with.

4..2. The third sector plays a vital role in society promoting positive values, being a voice for more marginalised groups and developing creative solutions to some of our society's most problematic issues.

4..3. WCVA believes it's crucial that the third sector and wider civil society is fully engaged in debates and decisions around Brexit in order to support better outcomes for all.

4..4. A good example of supporting participation on these complex issues is the The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, facilitated by Involve, a partner in the Open Government Pioneers project, hosted by WCVA in Wales.

5. Discussion

5..1. If requested, we would be pleased to discuss further these or any other points relating to this consultation.