

# Strategic Framework 2017-22 background paper



## Forewords

WCVA has been supporting people and organisations for over 80 years. As an organisation, we have been through many changes. We are now in another period of change. Since 2015, WCVA has appointed a new Board, a new Chief Executive, a new Senior Management Team and undertaken a staff restructure.

We are also working in a context of wider change for the third sector and society in Wales. Given recent developments in Wales, the UK and internationally, it is clear that more change is on the horizon in the coming years. This is a crucial moment in WCVA's history.

That is why WCVA's Board decided it was time to review and refresh our vision, mission and ways of working, as well as our goals for the coming years. This Strategic Framework sets out our refreshed direction. It is part of our commitment to regularly review and look forward so that we continue our long and successful history of supporting the third sector and volunteering in Wales into future.

**Peter Davies CBE, WCVA Chair**

This Strategic Framework sets out the direction for WCVA's work over the next five years. The Framework is based on work that we undertook through the summer and early autumn of 2016. We looked at a broad range of evidence to get a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead. Given our many shared goals, a big part of this was done in partnership with our County Voluntary Council partners across Wales.

Our policy team undertook a literature review, looking at existing research evidence and recent thinking about the sector. We wanted to explore not only the context for our work today, but potential challenges and opportunities over the coming 20 years. This led to a futures exercise which identified future trends and potential scenarios for the third sector in Wales. Working with a range of partners, we looked at implications for the sector, WCVA and other stakeholders. Reports from this work are published on our website and I hope they'll be useful for others as well.

Our Strategic Framework also draws on a huge number of conversations that we had with staff, Trustees, members and our wider partners across and beyond Wales. We asked people what mattered to them about WCVA and our work going forward. Through September 2016, we engaged on a draft framework which all fed into this final document.

This Strategic Framework sets out a new vision, mission and way of working for WCVA. It also sets out five high-level goals for 2017-22. I look forward to continuing to engage with others internally and externally as we work to deliver against these goals.

**Ruth Marks. WCVA Chief Executive**

## Who we are

WCVA is the national membership organisation for the third sector in Wales.

As a membership body, it is our members who make up who we are, set our direction and hold us to account. It is through our members that we are building a movement to support the whole sector and achieve our vision. Whilst we always want to work with others to help achieve our goals, we are an independent organisation.

Our membership is made up of third sector organisations across Wales. The third sector includes an amazingly diverse mix of activity that runs right through our society. It includes charities, voluntary organisations, community associations, self-help groups, faith-based organisations, development trusts, social enterprises, co-operatives and mutual organisations. Third sector groups in Wales range from informal neighbourhood and community groups through to complex global organisations with operations in Wales.

As a national organisation, we focus on where we can make most difference at an all-Wales national level. We work closely with our County Voluntary Council partners, who perform a similar role at a local and regional level. We also work closely with sister organisations across the UK, Europe and internationally. Part of our national role is making those connections.

## Our Vision

Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive across Wales, improving wellbeing for all.

This is our ultimate goal; what we think real success would look like. We want to see third sector organisations thriving, and we want to see volunteering thriving, too. It's really important to us that this doesn't happen just in pockets of Wales or involve only some people and communities but not others. We want to see this happening right across Wales and involving everyone.

We don't want a thriving sector just for its own sake. Our vision sets out clearly that we want to see volunteering and third sector activity improving people's wellbeing. Wellbeing can mean different things in different contexts. Here, we mean improving people's lives in the long term, as well as the short term, and doing so in a way that doesn't harm other people living elsewhere. We recognise that this means improving social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in Wales.

There are over 33,000 third sector organisations in Wales. Together, these groups touch on nearly all of our lives at some time or another. It might be as a nursery group or after school club when we're growing up, or through the care we receive at the end of our lives. It's includes what we do to meet friends and have a laugh at the end of the day, a local darts team or a film club; through to movements we join to protest or influence decisions we care about. It's about different business models with values at their core - social enterprises and co-operatives. It's about our local sports and leisure clubs through to international movements that tackle big economic and environmental issues such as poverty and climate change.

The third sector contributes to society through the diverse services and activities it delivers; in its contribution to a healthy democracy; and by providing spaces where people can connect, share ideas and debate differences and problems. Through these activities the third sector makes a vital contribution to improving well-being in Wales. We want to see it making the biggest difference possible.

## Our Mission

WCVA's mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by:

- Connecting
- Enabling
- Influencing

### *Connecting*

Our membership is made up of thousands of organisations right across Wales. It is enormously diverse. It has a wealth of skills, experiences and ideas. WCVA can add huge value by simply helping these groups to connect so that they can share with and learn from each other.

Bringing groups together also provides opportunities for those different and unexpected conversations that are vital for sparking innovative ideas and practices.

We want to provide a link with similar third sector networks not only in Wales but across the UK and internationally.

We also facilitate links at a national level between the third sector and other sectors. Collaborating with partners across sectors will be essential for achieving our vision .

### *Enabling*

Achieving our vision will be down to the success of diverse third sector groups and volunteers. There are things that can help and hinder that success. WCVA has a key role to play in helping to create a context which makes it easier for those groups to succeed.

We can support learning about what does and doesn't work, improve skills, share information and advice and provide a range of practical services and support. Facilitating networking, and peer-to-peer support is an important part of this.

WCVA will never provide all the practical advice, services and ideas that our members and the wider sector need. An equally important role for us is to sign post and work with others to connect the sector with the range of services it needs, and create that positive environment for the third sector and volunteering.

### *Influencing*

The biggest single feedback we had from our engagement sessions across Wales was that our members, staff and Trustees want to see WCVA actively influencing positive change in Wales.

Listening to our diverse membership, we are uniquely placed to capture the big issues that are concerning the sector - and different parts of the sector. WCVA can amplify our members' voices, not least through building coalitions on issues of shared concern, and push for change at the national level.

## The way we work

- Involve members
- Be open and inclusive
- Look forward
- Work with others
- Use evidence
- Maximise impact

As part of our review, we looked at our beliefs and values as an organisation, and how we reflect these in the way we work. Discussions with staff and Trustees were central to developing these. These are summarised in our six ways of working.

### *Involve members*

As a membership organisation, we want to involve our members across our work. Our members set our direction and hold us to account. We want to involve members not simply as recipients of services and member benefits. We want our members to be actively involved in achieving our vision and our goals.

### *Be open and inclusive*

One of the things we love about the third sector is its incredible diversity. We want to make sure we understand and respond to this diversity - working in ways that reach different people and places across Wales.

One of the ways to enable more people to get involved - and to hold us to account - is to be as open as we can. We should be clear in the way we communicate and make information publicly available. Opening up our systems where possible should be a positive resource for all those who share our goals.

### *Look forward*

The world that we and our members work in is changing - sometimes quickly and unpredictably. We need to be always looking ahead so that we can respond to these changes positively, and support our members to do so. This will help us to prevent problems occurring wherever we can, rather than coping with the consequences.

### *Work with others*

It's clear that if the vision and goals that we've set out here are to be achieved, we need to work with others. We need to work with the third sector and we need to work with partners across all sectors - businesses, thinkers and researchers, funders, public service providers and decision makers, government. We'll look to work with others wherever we can.

Just as importantly, our staff want WCVA's culture to support them to work much more closely with each other - across teams, departments and offices. We're committed to making this happen.

### *Use evidence*

We will create and use a strong evidence base and share this with others so they can also use it too. As an open organisation, we can be held to account on how well we do this.

## *Maximise impact*

We want to know that we're making the biggest difference we can. This isn't always easy. It involves testing out new ideas and ways of working, being happy to challenge ourselves, being ready to learn and to adapt where we can do things better. It also involves taking reasonable risks. We want a culture where staff are empowered to do this.

## Goals 2017-22

Based on the evidence we've reviewed and conversations we've had through our strategic review, we've set out five key goals for 2017-22. Three of these are goals that are external and will demand the collaboration of a range of partners. The final two are internal and about our development as an organisation.

### *External goals*

The change that WCVA wants to lead externally is for the third sector and volunteering in Wales to:

- **Be stronger and more resilient**

If the sector is to thrive, the groups and organisations that it's made up of will need to be strong. This will mean different things to different groups, but will include good governance, effective delivery, diverse funding streams and being able to make good use of available assets. The biggest strength of many organisations is citizen involvement.

We found that our members are working in an increasingly uncertain and complex world. Organisations will need to be more resilient if they are to survive and thrive. They will need to be more responsive and adapt to new demands and opportunities as they arise.

- **Be valued and trusted**

We found that trust in public institutions is declining and that this is also reflected in declining trust in charities. This is a critical issue for us and we want to play our role in reversing this in the coming years.

We also found that the value that the sector brings - not least its contribution to people's wellbeing - is not always understood. We therefore see a priority for WCVA as demonstrating and championing the value of the sector to our society.

- **Make a bigger impact on current and future wellbeing**

We want to help the sector do what it's already doing better - whether that's helping people into jobs, delivering services or getting people together to have fun, be active or improve their environment. As set out in our vision - this isn't just about the third sector and volunteering. It's about the positive difference that they make to people's wellbeing, and their communities.

Of course, the third sector and volunteering is already doing these things. We've set these as goals because we want to support the sector to do even more of the things they do to support people's wellbeing over the coming five years. We want to see these goals achieved across the diversity of the sector, and the people and communities with whom it works.

A challenge and opportunity for the sector is around maximising its impact. With decreasing financial resources and increasing demands, this is ever more challenging and ever more important. To do this, groups need to be able to understand and explain their impact. Those that can should be at a competitive edge with funders.

Increasing impact in today's context will sometimes mean doing things differently. Digital technology is not a panacea, but it does bring enormous potential and we want to support groups to get the maximum benefits from it.

### *Internal goals*

We've also set two high level goals to guide the internal change we want to see in WCVA.

- **Be more sustainable and responsible**

We want the organisation itself to be sustainable over the long term. This means being financially sustainable, but it also means being well governed and managed so that we stick to our purpose, mission and values. It means continuing to be valued by our members and being able to respond positively to change. We want to explore any areas where we can improve.

We also want to ensure that we are a responsible organisation, making sure that the way we do our business also contributes to social, economic, cultural and environment wellbeing.

- **Make better use of more diverse resources**

WCVA has an enormous range of resources to draw on to achieve its goals. We want to be better at recognising these and look at ways in which we might be able to use them better. For example, are we tapping into the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience across our membership and our staff? Are there areas where we could work better with partners to achieve shared goals? Could technology help staff connect better to share ideas? Could we develop more investment streams that help recycle resources?

### **Next steps**

Our new strategic framework sets our high-level direction for the next five years. We will now begin work on how we will deliver against this, not least in our operational plans from April 2017 onwards.

If we are to deliver against these ambitious goals, we know that we will need to involve our staff, Trustees and members as well as other external partners. We will continue to engage widely as we develop our delivery plans.

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