

Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales: Response from Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales is the organisation responsible for the work carried out by the three former organisations, the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales. It is also responsible for some functions previously undertaken by Welsh Government. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, used and enhanced, now and in the future.

We work for the communities of Wales to protect people and their homes as much as possible from environmental incidents like flooding and pollution. We provide opportunities for people to learn, use and benefit from Wales' natural resources.

We work to support Wales' economy by enabling the sustainable use of natural resources to support jobs and enterprise. We help businesses and developers to understand and consider environmental limits when they make important decisions.

We work to maintain and improve the quality of the environment for everyone and we work towards making the environment and our natural resources more resilient to climate change and other pressures.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on Welsh Government's *Review of its relationship with the Third Sector Continuity and Change – Refreshing the Relationship between Welsh Government and the Third Sector in Wales*. The Third Sector plays a key role in the sustainable management and use of the Welsh environment and its support is vital to NRW, as a public sector organisation, in helping us deliver our functions and services in all parts of Wales and helping to extend the reach of our work, which is vital to sustaining the economy, health and wellbeing of Wales, into different sectors and communities.

We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to

- support further growth and development of the sector's capacity
- strengthen communities of place and interest,
- harness the knowledge and expertise of the sector to help design better public policies and services and
- to encourage and support the sector to contribute to the delivery of citizen centred public services.

We also very much welcome the proposal to have clear read-across from Programme for Government and other WG strategies and policies to the Third Sector partnership agreement. This should help to ensure that action to deliver key aims is resourced and supported.

Q2. We believe the five strategic themes are broadly useful. However, we would emphasise the importance of sustaining current voluntary action alongside growing and developing the sector. From our long experience of working with Third Sector organisations we understand how difficult it can be, particularly for small-medium voluntary organisations, to continually strive for new initiatives to secure funding, as opposed to sustaining and consolidating their current activities.

Whilst we have supported the development of a range of environmental-based social enterprises over the years, and believe that it is important for Government to emphasise and acknowledge the innovative and leading role played by the Third Sector, we would advise that this theme heading is broadened to cover 'supporting diverse models of business delivery that achieve environmental, social and economic benefits', as very few of the organisations we have supported, whilst successfully delivering against these 3 agendas, have been established as social enterprise models.

Likewise we would advise that the last theme 'Personalising public services' is broadened to encompass more clearly the range of 'public services' that the Third Sector can help deliver. In the case of the natural environment, third sector organisations are involved in a wide range of direct and indirect activity that are indistinguishable in terms of their importance to the wellbeing of citizens and communities: an example of a direct 'service delivery' activity might be running outdoor learning or recreation sessions for primary school pupils; an example of an indirect activity that cannot be personalised and yet has a profound influence on individuals' lives would be restoration of an upland that in turn helps to regulate water flow and alleviate flood risk downstream.

As additional themes we would suggest inclusion of a Government commitment encourage development and promotion of volunteering opportunities within all the public bodies it funds and to work with public bodies to promote and support delivery of the National Principles for Public Engagement, to ensure better collaborative working between the 3rd and public sectors and help give citizens a voice in decision making in Wales. Exploring and encouraging linkages between the private and third sectors is another theme that could usefully be included.

Q5. We welcome the role that Infrastructure organisations play in supporting the sector, driving standards, sharing information and guidance, developing the evidence base, sharing learning and training. As a public sector we rely on infrastructure organisations to keep abreast of

developments that are relevant to the third sector and to share those with ourselves and with the organisations that we support. We particularly rely on them to help support growth in the number of people volunteering in the environment sector and to provide a ready source of freely accessible advice and support to community organisations on aspects of governance, funding and sustainability.

Q6 and Q7. We are not well placed to comment in detail on Q6 but we would reiterate the importance of ensuring sufficient funding to infrastructure organisations to allow them to effectively fulfil the important and unique roles outlined above and to allow them to operate at national, regional and local level. We feel there is scope to strengthen the working relationship between infrastructure organisations, their constituent member organisations, sector specific umbrella organisations (such as Wales Environment Link) and public sector organisations at different geographic levels, as appropriate, to increase opportunities for collaboration and to increase accountability right through to national levels.

NRW is wary of the proposal to introduce a Third Sector Innovation Fund for two reasons, Firstly, the establishment of such a fund could effectively represent a further cut in the funding available to maintain vital and valued core Third Sector support services. Secondly, and as previously mentioned, we are conscious, from our own experience of supporting third sector delivery, of the burden placed on small-medium organisations when forced to continually chase the 'new' and 'different' rather than sustain what is already successful. We would also be concerned that its scope would be limited – the document refers to the fund being relevant only to developing collaborative service delivery at a regional level.

However, should an Innovation Fund be established NRW would recommend that its scope allows for a focus on innovation in different contexts and should include the following:

(a) A component of funding aimed at innovation in creating community level enterprises and jobs. NRW has already piloted one scheme entitled *Communities and Nature* (CAN). This has been funded as a strategic project by the Welsh Government's Welsh European Funding Office and is due to complete in the first part of 2014. One of the objectives of CAN is to stimulate the creation of enterprises based on the enjoyment of the natural heritage in Wales by visitors, by both tourists and local people. NRW has been impressed by the innovative ideas that third sector organisations in receipt of CAN funding have come forward with. This has shown that, with appropriate mechanisms for stimulation and support, third sector organisations in the environmental field are able to reap economic benefits from the environmental assets on their doorstep. There is considerable scope to extend this approach. One such extension would be to seek additional innovative solutions to enable policy learning via the Innovation Fund suggested in the consultation paper.

(b) Inclusion of disadvantaged groups, through third sector facilitation, in project activities aimed at economic development and regeneration.

The CAN-model requires all projects seeking funding to set out provisions for inclusion of disadvantaged groups in project activities. (These typically comprise on the job training, work placements or volunteering opportunities). Third sector organisations have demonstrated many good ideas in this sphere. NRW believes that support through the Innovation Fund for third sector organisations to partner with public sector organisations on such approaches would yield valuable benefits in terms of developing learning and new approaches for both sectors.

c) NRW considers that there is scope to foster third sector utilisation of features on NRW's own estate with the goal of generating economic benefits for local communities, principally creation of enterprises and associated local jobs. Support to third sector bodies from the Innovation Fund could be a valuable catalyst to develop activities of this kind. NRW would welcome discussion to further explore this approach around the application of the CAN-model mentioned in paragraph (a) above.

Q9/Q10/Q11. We believe there is scope to improve the ways in which the TSPC network works. A quick informal survey amongst some of the third sector organisations we have supported in the past indicates that there is low awareness of the existence of their relevant network and of the TSPC. This suggests that more work needs to be done to ensure workstreams are effective in communicating with their constituent organisations and that they, and the TSPC as a whole adequately represent the views of a broad range of third sector organisations. The TSPC needs to be accountable to the full range of organisations represented on the 25 networks and needs to act as an effective advisor and advocate on behalf of the third sector in its dealings with Welsh Government. It also needs to play a more stronger enabling role to facilitate better engagement and involvement by a wide range of third sector organisations, not only those which have, as a result of their national or UK status, greater capacity to participate in strategic Third Sector work.

We believe it is important that there is effective dialogue between the Third Sector and relevant Ministers. Given the breadth of areas in which Third Sector organisations operate, it is important that the sector has access to a range of Ministers, across the whole of Welsh Government, depending on the issues that require discussion. Third sector delivery is a **way** of working and as such has relevance to all sectors of Government. We would support the adoption, by Welsh Government, of the principle of holding effective meetings between the Third Sector and relevant Ministers, and would suggest that the pattern of meetings and their content should be determined by need.

We feel it might be timely to review the effectiveness of other, sector specific umbrella bodies – such as WEL – and in so doing to clarify their linkages with TSPC, the networks and the infrastructure organisations and investigate the scope for more effective communication with Welsh Government through closer working.

Q12. It is important that Government sets long term outcomes for sustainable development that allows and gives Third Sector organisations the confidence to develop and sustain a range of initiatives at different scales according to their experience and capacity.

Small scale voluntary activity is a vital part of community life in all parts of Wales and it is important that Government recognises the contribution of such activity by putting in place appropriate support structures, simple grant schemes and effective resources.

Q13. We believe there may be potential to involve the Third Sector more fully in the working of Local Service Boards, Single Integrated Plans and other existing mechanisms, rather than create new structures. We

recognise the challenge of involving such a disparate sector in LSB activity but would agree with the proposal in the document that strengthening the regional dimension of the TSPC would be worth exploring in order to create an effective mechanism for greater Third Sector involvement in regional working such as LSBs and would suggest perhaps that this should be explored before establishing legal compacts between Third Sector organisations and Local Authorities as the evidence for establishing the latter is not put forward strongly in the consultation document.

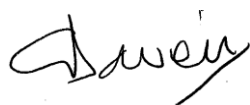
Q15: NRW believes that the proposals in consultation paper on resilience should encompass proposals to support third sector organisations to foster new enterprises deriving from the human and environmental capital within communities. (See the answer to Q7 above on the application of the CAN-model in this sphere).

As well as economic resilience, NRW also believes that communities need support to achieve enhanced public awareness of the value of the environmental resources on their doorstep. Third sector organisations have a valuable role in this.

NRW also believes that awareness of resilience among communities needs to extend to environmental resilience, including flood risks and climate change. Awareness of what the above elements mean at *community* level is vital for societal behaviour change and locally-rooted economic growth. And the evolution of truly resilient and sustainable communities depends on these foundations.

If you require further information on any of the points raised please contact Elinor Gwynn on 01248 38 7301 or via email at elinor.gwynn@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



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