

MINUTES OF THE WALES COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday 6th October 2020
Online via Teams

Attendees:**Committee Members:**

Adrian Webb	Wales Committee Chair
Rona Aldrich	Wales Committee Member
Sian Callaghan	Wales Committee Member
Nicola Russell-Brooks	Wales Committee Member
Helen Wilkinson	Wales Committee Member
Fadhili Maghiya	Wales Committee Member

Staff:

Dawn Austwick	Chief Executive Officer
John Rose	Wales Director
Ruth Bates	Head of Communications
Andrew Owen	Head of Funding
Rob Roffe	Head of Knowledge and Learning
Awel Jones	Governance Officer (Minutes)
Amy Wilson	Funding Officer (Item 2&3 only)
Jemma Nurse	Funding Manager (Item 6 only)

External:

Chris Johnes	Building Communities Trust (Item 2 only)
Graham Benfield	Building Communities Trust (Item 2 only)
Scott McGregor	Building Communities Trust (Item 2 only)

1. Chair's welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. No apologies were received.

- 1.1 The Committee confirmed that the previous meeting minutes (WBM 20/20) were an accurate reflection of the previous meeting. There were no outstanding matters.
- 1.2 The Helping End Homelessness review recommendation (WBM 20/19) were agreed by written correspondence.
- 1.3 AW declared a non-disqualifying interest in relation to Item 6 as Chair of Tai Calon Community Housing in Blaenau Gwent.

2. Building Communities Trust Update (WBM 20/21)

2.1 CJ provided Committee with a thorough presentation which gave an update on the annual progress on the Invest Local Trust and progress made since the endowment of £16.51m to Building Communities Trustee Ltd (BCT). CJ firstly focused on the effects of Covid-19 on the programme highlighting local area responses and challenges, the role of BCT during lockdown, learning and next steps in the current circumstances.

2.2 CJ invited questions from Committee on BCT's response to Covid, and the following points were raised:

- How are the Invest Local communities ensuring they are inclusive for older people and those who are digitally excluded? CJ indicated this was largely through socially distanced doorstep meetings, telephone and deliveries of food and medicine to those shielding.
- What degree of partnership working taking place with Digital Communities Wales and reflections on national partnerships. CJ reflected that BCT were engaging with wider stakeholders and that locally the digitally excluded were getting support from younger volunteers.
- How foodbanks have operated during these times. CJ reported a mixture of approaches including purchasing food during the initial crisis as well as working with Fare Share and more returning now to the more common donor model.
- How to make best use of the evidence they've compiled to share with decision makers. CJ indicated BCT currently developing a manifesto to influence decision makers.
- Structures that are in place to mitigate employment risks.

2.3 CJ presented the second part of his presentation which focused on what is being learned from Invest Local, the environment in which they work, progress to date and the difference between Invest Local and traditional grants.

2.4 Committee discussed the following:

- The time needed to develop trust in communities who historically have seen regeneration initiatives come and go.
- The extent of entrepreneurial work is being identified from communities, CJ reflected that most communities were largely focused on addressing poverty and improving local wellbeing.
- Challenges on succession planning as they rely on small groups of people.
- The intergenerational aspect of succession planning and roles of young people.

2.5 Committee thanked CJ and GB for the presentation.

3. Building Communities Trust reflections

3.1 JR invited any further reflections from Committee on the BCT model and noted that as we look at our portfolio review it would be worth considering the role that models like this might have in the future.

3.2 Committee noted the vacuum the Trust is filling around influencing the policy agenda and recognising that the learning has a validity at a national level, especially with virtual meetings etc. which allows more communities to participate.

3.3 Committee felt that the presentation was positive and recognised the progress that has been made.

3.4 Regarding the issues BCT were having around trust, Committee acknowledged that this has developed, and they expressed interest in seeing what consultation has been done with stakeholders regarding trust issues with communities as there is learning to come from this. **Action - Circulate forthcoming BCT report to Committee.**

3.5 RB highlighted the statistic that was provided that with every £1 that was spent they raised a further £5 from other funders and noted that this can be a powerful message to use with stakeholders.

3.6 AW thanked Amy Wilson for the paper and requested that we reflect our appreciation and how impressed Committee are with the progress that's been made with BCT.

4. Chief Executive Update

4.1 AW welcomed DA to the meeting and noted that this is her last Wales Committee meeting as she is due to leave the Fund in December.

4.2 DA provided Committee with an update on the current position of the Fund by firstly acknowledging the work of the staff across the Fund over the past 6 months. DA went on to discuss the current unstable environment across the UK due to the pandemic as well as political and economic issues. She emphasised how positively the Fund has responded to these challenging times and DA noted the opportunities that have risen with new ways of working being identified through approaches such as The Emerging Futures Fund.

4.3 JR reflected on the work of Building Communities Trust and asked DA how this compares to similar work elsewhere in the UK. DA noted that she was impressed with the work of BCT and the advantages of working at a smaller scale in comparison to Big Local. DA noted the different models across the UK and the need to compare these.

4.4 DA highlighted that our insight work has increased throughout the UK and our new Funding Strategy Director, Emma Ackerman will also help with the knowledge & learning work.

5. Portfolio Update

5.1 AO provided the funding overview from July to September and compared the grants made to 'business as usual' funding and the response to Covid-19. It was noted that since July the demand has decreased for emergency response funding and the volume of enquiries and submissions for 'business as usual' funding has increased. We will continue to monitor this monthly as the Pandemic continues. AO focused on the impact of the pandemic on grants budgets which were well ahead of forecast expenditure, highlighting pressure on People & Places funding as 67% of our budget has already been allocated which will impact on what we will be available during the next 6 months. There has been an increase in interest to Supporting Great Ideas applications which will be presented to Committee over the coming months. AO noted the need to be flexible with the budget as we continue to respond to the Pandemic.

5.2 RB presented the work from our Communications team and focused on our stakeholder engagement. We continue to send AM & MSs personalised updates of what has been funded in their constituencies. RB highlighted that grant holders were contacting their MSs which has been effective as they're able to put in their own words the difference National Lottery money has made to them.

5.3 RB looked at Media and digital highlights and the announcements of the 2 large grants made from the Climate Action Fund which received good coverage. We also used the International Youth day to introduce our Youth Panel which has been important to involve young people in our funding and increased engagement on social media. With pupils returning to schools we have also provided tips to support schools in accessing our funding.

5.4 RR provided an update from our Knowledge & Learning work and highlighted the review of our regional working and noted that the Helping End Homelessness review has been completed and minor amends made prior to relaunch.

5.5 To help support the development of the Young People's Programme ProMo Cymru and the Ministry of Life were awarded the contract to support our young people's panel with their peer research work.

5.6 RR noted that our research into sustaining and maintaining Community Assets has now been completed, although it was stressed that this was conducted prior to the Pandemic. Through our planned dissemination and engagement work we will also take the opportunity to explore how facilities have adapted during the Pandemic. As well as engaging with grant holders and stakeholders, we are working with colleagues across the UK to consolidate our shared learning, starting with a staff seminar on Community Assets later this month.

5.7 RR provided a brief update on the external environment with links of Welsh Government announcements provided to Committee on the presentation slides. It was noted that much of what has been announced responds to the Pandemic, particularly in terms of supporting the third sector.

5.8 JR went through the priorities for the coming quarter (outlined on the last slide of the presentation).

6. Micro-grants Pilot in Wales

6.1 JN provided Committee with presentation slides noting our intentions with the Micro-grants pilot in Wales. The below points were highlighted:

- The pilot will be based in Blaenau Gwent first as we receive low numbers of applications from that area.
- Micro-grants will be used to build relationships and understanding of the area.
- Learning has been gathered from similar pilots in Northern Ireland.
- The approach is to start small with conversations, simple forms and providing as much support as possible. We will target new groups who haven't applied to us before. The grants will be small, with a maximum value of £300 with a quick turnaround. The decision making will be made through the South East and Central team who meet weekly. The launch will hopefully be late October with the scheme running until March.
- It will be difficult to spread the word with no face to face contact however we are working with our Communications team to get messaging out through social media.
- We hope to be working with un-constituted groups using pre-paid cards and managing risk through person verification checks.

6.2 Committee queried how we will be evaluating this. JN noted that this will be done internally and qualitative feedback from applicants will be important for this.

6.3 AW highlighted the opportunity to spread the word through housing associations as they are aware of many informal community activities.

7. The Impact of Brexit and COVID-19 on the third sector in Wales (WBM 20/22)

7.1 RR introduced the paper which invites Committee to consider the impact of both COVID-19 and Brexit on the Third Sector in Wales and summarised the recommendations which include:

- Adopting three new funding priorities that transcend P&P & NLA4A focussed on adapting to changed circumstances, organisational resilience, and supporting communities adversely affected by COVID-19
- Using NLA4A as the primary route for ongoing COVID-19 crisis response, while opening it up to applications that also look beyond the current crisis
- Including organisational development as an eligible project cost within people in places, supporting applicants and grant holders with the tools that we have already put in place to do so, like the ‘online strengths checker’.
- Amending the Supporting Great Ideas aims with a new focus on helping organisations to work in new ways, thereby strengthening civic infrastructure, with an initial focus on digital capability.

7.2 AW thanked RR and the team for the paper and invited comments from Committee.

7.3 Committee queried if we have given sufficient consideration to the future unemployment issues ahead of us. JR noted that there is a need to wait to see what employment programmes and support come out mainstream providers such as DWP and Welsh Government.

7.4 Committee highlighted the need to retain flexibility in our approach to understand changing circumstances.

7.5 In regard to recommendation 5.19 Committee queried if we have an idea of what organisations will be looking for regarding organisational development. RR noted that this approach will let organisations identify their own needs. Committee highlighted the need to strengthen business planning and the potential challenges that will occur due to organisational re-structure and job losses. Committee agreed that we shouldn’t be prescriptive but to be supportive as organisations may not always be able to identify their own issues.

7.6 JR added that it is likely that we will see applications coming through the Supporting Great Ideas programme for capacity support which we will consider on an individual basis. JR also noted that we will be building colleagues skills on this as part of our grant-making skills training.

7.7 AW highlighted that we shouldn’t over-estimate the ability of organisations to understand what their problems are and suggested that it might be useful to have a list of people that can provide support to organisations.

7.8 Committee agreed to all recommendations as summarised above (7.1) and outlined in the paper (WBM 20/22) in para 5.6 and sections 5.14, 5.19, 5.22 and 5.23.

8. Wales: Delivering People in the Lead

8.1 JR presented the annual report of the Wales portfolio on Delivering People in the Lead in Wales with was presented to the Board on the 29th September 2020, and referred to the questions for consideration to Board which JR will get back to Committee with written feedback.

8.2 JR provided verbal feedback from Board on the first questions which asked ‘*Given the progress demonstrated in this report, what do the Board consider to be the strengths and areas for development to ensure that the Wales portfolio contributes effectively to our ambitions set out in the Strategic Framework and Corporate Plan?*’ and noted that Board were very complementary and highlighted particular strengths which were

stakeholder engagement, youth voice and participation, work on cold spots and the levels of customer service. There was also positive feedback on our levels of political engagement and digital communications and how embedded we are in Welsh Communities. Areas for us to consider in our portfolio review were opportunities with dormant accounts, how the Wales Director work will be covered as JR covers the Interim CEO position, community assets and linking to a general UK work. They also questioned how influential are we with public affairs work and if we were sufficiently innovative.

9. Forward Work Plan (WBM 20/24)

9.1 JR presented the emerging forward work programme for Wales Committee which invites Committee to make suggestions regarding future topics for discussion and agenda items.

9.2 JR noted that initially we planned a strategy day for November to discuss the portfolio review, however this would be premature, therefore, there is an opportunity to repurpose the day or delay this until next year. JR welcomed Committee's thoughts. Committee suggested to wait until early next year for the strategy day, with a caveat of any radical change to current circumstances.

10. Feedback from Corporate meetings

10.1 SC noted that the previous UK Committee meeting focused on putting policies and procedures in place following changes to the team. JR added that at delegated decision making, the Emerging Futures Fund awarded 5 grants in Wales, the Climate Action Fund awarded a further grant to a Welsh organisation. Also, the UK portfolio will relaunch their responsive strand, Growing Great Ideas, early next year with a focus on systemic change and a partnership driven approach.

10.2 DA provided an update on the previous Audit & Risk Committee due to AW absence. DA noted a deep dive on information Governance and Insurance, and a look at where we are with our data and information.

10.3 AW & DA updated Committee on developments from UK Board including:

- Our Head of Young People and Youth Voice, Joanne Rich has built up a Young people's Advisory Group and the Board have agreed having a Young Person as an observer.
- As noted in the CEO report AW highlighted that we are ahead of spend despite Covid noting the tremendous effort from the Fund.
- The IKEA funded programme was noted, which is a small grants programme to encourage community activity via the UK Portfolio.
- The Danny Kruger report on community issues.
- Income and the uncertainty of the impact of a potential recession.
- The Annual People report and the progress of HR processes, and the annual equality and diversity and inclusion report.
- The Environmental Action Plan, and the importance on focusing on the bio-diversity crisis as well as climate change. JR added that at a Wales perspective we are focusing on piloting a more requirements-based approach on capital grants, and the second round of Climate top ups has just been launched and the 30 organisations have been agreed who will work with our partners Severn Wye and Renew Wales to look at how they will take action on improving environmental performance. Northern Ireland are looking at replicating this approach.

11. Any Other Business.

11.1 AW once again thanked DA for her time at the Fund.

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