



*Together for Change*

**The Future of Support for Community Led action in Pembrokeshire**  
**Report on the Together for Change Meeting for Community Groups**  
**held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

Jessie Buchanan Researcher, Sue Denman Trustee , Solva Care

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 This report summarises the presentations and discussions from the online meeting attended by 20 community groups, on 30<sup>th</sup> June, on the future of support for community led action in Pembrokeshire.
- 1.2 The meeting was organised by Solva Care, Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and PLANED, partners in the *Together for Change* Project. The Project will provide support for emerging and more established community groups with a programme of mentorship and shared learning in Pembrokeshire. The outcomes of the meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> June, together with those from the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> June for public and third sector intermediary organisations, will help shape the strategy of the *Together for Change* Partnership in the County.

## **2. The Programme**

- 2.1 The meeting began with presentations from the coordinators of four community initiatives in Pembrokeshire. The initiatives were chosen on the basis of the differences between them: how long they had been in existence; which organisations were involved and whether led by a paid worker or volunteer. The presenters were asked to cover how they got started; what they did and what they learned along the way.
- 2.2 The presentations were followed by discussions in small breakout groups. The discussions centred on the answers to two questions: first, what would be helpful for you to keep going? and second, how can the *Together for Change* Project work with you?

## **3. The Presentations**

- 3.1 **Sophie Jenkins, Coordinator of the Brynberian Community Centre**  
Sophie took up her post as Coordinator in January 2020, her role being to promote the use of the Centre. This included a heritage focus and running inclusive intergenerational activities in collaboration with various local sub-groups. Under lockdown all social activities were put on hold and replaced with virtual activities, which included supper clubs, cafes, quizzes and even balderdash. Volunteers were recruited to provide support with, for example, shopping. The Centre is now

successfully used as a collection Hub for local producers which has speeded up deliveries for the community. It is hoped that this service will continue following the lifting of restrictions.

*'Due to COVID19 these activities as 'normal' have had to be put on hold. We began adapting our community support by collaborating with PCC's Hello Neighbour Scheme with our County Councillor Cris Tomos'*

*Sophie Jenkins, Coordinator Brynberian Community Centre*

### **3.2 Lindsay O'Sullivan, Coordinator of Pembrokeshire Next Door**

Lindsay set up Pembrokeshire Next Door single handed at the start of the pandemic. The aim of the project is to organise support for day to day living under lockdown. The support provided includes shopping, dog walking, picking up prescriptions, and telephone calls. Publicity through social media and the press led to many volunteers coming forward to help. As the initiative grew, to make the work more manageable, coordinators were allocated to geographical areas. Close collaborations were forged with other organisations, namely PAVS, the Pembrokeshire Hub, Pembrokeshire Community Support Network (PCSN) and the NHS. It is Lindsay's intention to continue the project after COVID19 as a health and wellbeing project.

### **3.3 Rose Seymour, Engagement Support Officer in Newport**

Rose was recruited by PAVS on behalf of the Newport Community Forum. She took up her post only a few weeks before lockdown. In 2018, the Newport Community Forum conducted a needs and assets survey, the results of which are being used to inform future activities in the community. Adapting to COVID19 has meant that Rose's role has had to change significantly. She is now a coordinator of volunteers in Newport, providing over 60 people with guidance on safe working and PPE. The excellent support networks that already existed within the community meant that voluntary demand was less than anticipated and Rose has focused instead on innovative ways to engage with the community and maintain connections between people.

*'This support feels as important as ever to help strengthen the services provided in the community and help them adapt to an ever changing world'*

*Rose Seymour, Engagement Support Officer, Newport*

### **3.4 Lena Dixon, Coordinator of Solva Care**

Solva Care began five years ago in response to the need for home-based support by older people in the community of Solva. Informal discussions were followed by a survey to assess needs and the opinion of people in the village on starting the initiative and employing a coordinator. Lena's role is to recruit and train volunteers to provide personally tailored support for older people so that they can stay living in their homes in the community. Solva Care continues to evolve and has extended

activities in prevention to younger adults. A stable group of volunteers coupled with a long standing organisational structure have meant that Solva Care could adapt quickly to lockdown, with more volunteers coming forward to help and support.

- 3.5 The initiatives are very different but their Coordinators all face similar challenges under COVID19, challenges which they addressed with enthusiasm, commitment and compassion. Volunteering was central to their concerns; recruiting, supporting and retaining them in a changing landscape of policy, pressure and risk. All the Coordinators are adaptable and strikingly innovative. Similarly, all wanted to continue their initiatives, retaining the best in building community spirit whilst keeping people safe and well. What was palpable from these presentations was the absolute dedication and hard work of the Coordinators, and their capabilities as leaders. These qualities were evident in all the 'frontline' community leaders present at the meeting.

#### **4. Communities and COVID19**

- 4.1 As to be expected, COVID19 dominated the discourse in the meeting. The impact of the pandemic on health and wellbeing has been enormous. It has undoubtedly accentuated and brought into sharp focus the many problems that are endemic in our society - loneliness and isolation, gaps in our services, and food supplies and chains that are unsustainable, to just name a few. We can only speculate on the long-term effects of COVID19 and in particular on mental health. People may need to be 'deconditioned' in that after so many months of being told what to do, leading to disempowerment and heightened risk awareness, they may need to be supported to live with some semblance of normality again.
- 4.2 Yet much has come out of this disaster that is a cause for celebration and reassurance. The speed with which communities and their leaders have responded, the new ways of communicating which have been embraced and trust built between agencies, all have been impressive. The morale of communities has been boosted by all the spontaneous and sympathetic community action.
- 4.3 Community initiatives are, however, at a crossroads. Tiredness and uncertainty about the future has set in. As lockdown is lifted and visitors are expected to flock to our County, our people are understandably frightened and harder to motivate whether they are a supporter or the supported.
- 4.4 The role of the coordinator is crucial, and payment for the role is seen as being advantageous, in the main. The local knowledge of coordinators is extensive and clearly central to the success of initiatives. The provision of support for them is important and PAVS, PCSN and the Pembrokeshire Hub were singled out as being important currently in this respect.
- 4.5 Being a new project, created in response to COVID 19 or around that time, conferred advantages in being freed from onerous bureaucracies that all too often delay spontaneous action and sap energies. New projects, however, face the challenge of laying the foundations for their sustainability and more established community organisations can help in that respect.

## 5. The importance of action at community level

- 5.1 Community led action has a primary role in creating sustainable communities and is a vital contributor to the long-term health and wellbeing of our population. COVID19 has highlighted the knowledge and importance of local leaders and voluntary groups in tailoring support quickly and efficiently. The pandemic has shown just how powerful and united a community can be in the face of adversity. For many groups, the ability to adapt and innovate, without lengthy bureaucratic processes has contributed to the enthusiasm and energy generated at this time. As resources become depleted, economic concerns rise, and volunteer numbers begin to wane, it is vital to consider the sustainability of community groups, particularly in the short term if cases of COVID19 begin to rise again.
- 5.2 We need to address, as a matter of urgency, the long-term concerns about sufficient levels and spread of community led action in Pembrokeshire. Whilst recognising that communities differ in their ambitions, assets and capacity, there is a clear willingness and enthusiasm to 'keep things going' beyond the pandemic and rebuild the strength and resilience of communities. Funding will be a key factor in succeeding with this imperative.

*'Pembrokeshire Next Door will not go away after COVID19, we will carry on and continue with the amazing support that we have given to the community of Pembrokeshire and anyone that feels in the future that need help'*

*Lindsay O'Sullivan, Volunteer Coordinator Pembrokeshire Next Door*

### 5.3 Addressing the challenges ahead – ideas and proposals

In order to address the challenges ahead, action is needed in six broad areas:

- Generate knowledge, and understand communities and their assets
- Establish good communication that can be accessed by all
- Support coordination and strong leadership
- Provide support and training for volunteers
- Give communities a voice
- A legacy of good initiatives

We need to :

*Generate knowledge, and understand communities and their assets*

5.3.1 engage community researchers to research the needs of communities and what is working well. Share best practice

5.3.2 identify assets and resources within communities whilst recognising that people are the greatest asset

- 5.3.3 identify innovative ways to bring people together in communities that do not have physical assets, for example a pop-up community shop or land for horticulture
- 5.3.4 use a variety of methods for engagement, telephone, online or by post

*Establish good communication that can be accessed by all*

- 5.3.5 enable networks and forums to come together to share information and practical resources such as toolkits
- 5.3.6 improve digital literacy and broadband access across the county to reduce social exclusion
- 5.3.7 retain PCSN and Pembrokeshire Hub as effective central resources
- 5.3.8 ensure that communication and information is bilingual

*'We have learnt that nothing stays the same – and it shouldn't. Almost every time we talk to new people or attend events, you get ideas or thoughts of how to finetune or develop what you are doing'*

*Lena Dixon, Volunteer Coordinator Solva Care*

*Support coordination and strong leadership*

- 5.3.9 recruit paid coordinators, where deemed appropriate and workable by communities
- 5.3.10 find ways of encouraging leadership at the local level and provide support for those leaders

*Provide support and training for volunteers*

- 5.3.11 maintain the interest of volunteers and acknowledge the immense effort and contribution they have made during the pandemic
- 5.3.12 provide information on how to remain safe, to reduce worry and strain during the transition period of lockdown
- 5.3.13 understand that volunteers are not employees and recognise that volunteers may want to do different things, that there is no uniform model
- 5.3.14 provide both short and long-term support for volunteers. This could include: practical training for volunteers; how to support and engage volunteers; opportunities to share experiences and how to avoid 'burnout'

*Give communities a voice*

- 5.3.15 activate and provide incentives for good working relationships with Community and Town Councils
- 5.3.16 emphasise and publicise the role of Community Councillors and engage the younger members of the community in the local political process
- 5.3.17 support wellbeing for all generations in a community
- 5.3.18 develop relationships between larger organisations and local communities

5.3.19 establish collaboration and partnership with the public sector

*A legacy of good initiatives*

5.3.20 celebrate the many good ideas and innovations that have taken place across the county during the COVID19 pandemic with a lasting record

5.3.21 recognise that the needs of communities may change, and encourage innovation and adaptation

5.3.22 gather stories, for example, using the Most Significant Change technique

## 6. The way forward – The Future of Support for Community Led action in Pembrokeshire

6.1 Similar solutions have been identified to the same question by the attendees at the meetings held on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June. This is very encouraging for working towards consensus on the way forward in the provision of support for community led action in our County. The solutions in the two meetings can be split into three clearly definable areas for further work in partnership: knowledge to inform the way forward; developing a joint vision and strategy; and practical support for community groups and organisations to build community strength and resilience.

*'Public sector organisations have quite rightly recognised our important role and want to work with us and support us to continue, so that there is a legacy left behind from the energy that has been sparked by the crisis'*

*Sue Denman, Trustee of Solva Care and meeting Chair*

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