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## Perspectives on Community Power Report

*Report detailing the presentations, discussions, key messages and thematic summary of an event held on November 1st, 2022 as part of the Ideas Unlimited series.*

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## Perspectives on Community Power Report

### 1. Overview

#### 1:1 Introduction

This report covers the first of a series of events held by Together for Change, *Ideas Unlimited*. The event was held remotely via zoom on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, Appendix 1 shows the event programme. The report aims to provide an overview of the presentations delivered by guest speakers (*see, 3. Speaker's biographies*) discussions from participants, key messages and a thematic summary of the event.

#### 1:2 What is community power?

The concept of community power is based upon the notion that those best equipped to tackle the fundamental challenges facing society today such as social care and health, climate change and economic inequality are in fact, communities themselves. This is founded upon the belief that communities hold the knowledge, expertise and lived experience to truly understand the issues at hand and find practical solutions that work for them.

#### 1:3 Does it have influence?

There are countless examples of the successful impact of community power ranging from housing co-operatives and community land trusts to grass roots community allotment projects and social care initiatives. All of which, have the ability, to truly improve the quality of life for the people within their communities.

On a larger scale, there is precedent of how collective community action can force change within the political sphere. In 2019, Extinction Rebellion, (*a networked, decentralised, grassroots activist group encouraging those in power to act on climate and environmental issues*) occupied spaces across London for ten days campaigning for the government to act at once on climate change. Thousands of individuals, organisations and community groups alike attended the protests and in the following days, the UK Government declared Climate Emergency.



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Such case studies highlight the true power of communities when this is harnessed towards a common goal. The Ideas Unlimited - Perspectives on Community Power event provided an opportunity for attendees to understand the true potential of community action, with guest speakers supplying a sectoral perspective of how communities can make a positive impact. The question-and-answer portion of the event also created a space for ideas to be shared or discussed within a likeminded and experienced network acting as an immediate example of community power.

## 1:4 Can communities be empowered?

The Covid-19 pandemic illustrated the true power of communities. During which, society rose to the challenge of establishing collective support for their communities. This sense of mutual aid has outlived the pandemic and there is now an opportunity to build upon this momentum and harness the strength of communities to create positive change. We must learn to facilitate a space for **confident, inclusive, diverse, cooperative, and influential** communities to thrive outside of crisis and engage in the political process.

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## 2. Attendees

A total 31 people attended the virtual event including four speakers and two additional facilitators. Those attending included organisations such as PLANED, PAVS and Solva Care as well as local authority representatives, councillors, and individuals.



### 3. Speaker's biographies

#### **Sue Denman** *Together for Change - Chair*



*'Sue is passionate about community development and its role in equality and wellbeing. She helped to set up the thriving older people's social support Charity, Solva Care; is a Trustee of the Charity; and chairs the local Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Group. She founded Together for Change, which works in partnership with other organisations to generate and share knowledge about communities for people centred decision making.'*

*Sue has a background in public health, spanning policy, research and practice. She is Professor Emeritus of R&D Policy at the Medical School, Cardiff University.'*

#### **Joe Sarling** *Director of Research and Policy, New Local*



*'Joe leads New Local's research and policy programme and sits on the Senior Leadership Team. He joined the New Local Team in 2022. Joe is an economist with strong quantitative and qualitative research expertise and has an interest in housing, planning, and local economic growth. He is a seasoned public speaker and media interviewee – he writes and presents on a variety of subjects ranging from public policy and decentralisation to public engagement and organisational culture. His passion is to use powerful research to craft compelling narratives.'*

*Prior to joining New Local he led the research and analysis function for the government's housing agency, Homes England, and before this has held senior leadership posts at the consultancy, Lichfields, the housing association trade body, the National Housing Federation, and the charity, Shelter.'*

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**Elaine Lorton** *County Director & Commissioner - Pembrokeshire, Hywel Dda University Health Board*



*'After qualifying with a Masters Degree in Geography from Oxford University, Elaine worked across the third sector, education and then moved into the NHS in 2001. Elaine moved to Wales in February 2012 to take up the challenge of working with Primary Care to drive up quality and bring care closer to home. After 6 years in that role, she took up the exciting opportunity to work in Pembrokeshire as County Director with the remit of working across the system to facilitate primary, community and social care integration.*

*As a Health Foundation Leadership Fellow, a member of the Q initiative and a Bevan Exemplar, Elaine has a relentless focus on quality improvement, growing a culture of mutual respect and understanding, developing networks and constant learning. She has been a coach and mentor for the last 15 years and is a strong advocate for developing a coaching ethos across the system.'*

**Sue Leonard** *Chief Officer, PAVS*



*'Sue is Chief Officer of Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS), a position she has held since 2008, and has worked in the voluntary and community sector for 18 years. Prior to that, Sue worked for 14 years in the adult and community learning sector, holding various lecturer and management roles in Pembrokeshire College and Learning Pembrokeshire. Sue also has some experience of the private sector, having spent time in leadership roles within Pembrokeshire Chamber of Commerce and Merlin Network, a "trading arm" established by the College.*

*She represents the third sector on a number of local and regional strategic and service planning partnerships across a range of policy areas, including health & wellbeing.'*

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## 4. Key messages

### 4:1 Joe Sarling, New Local

*'Welcome to the permacrisis. A state of ongoing disruption to political, economic and social life from which there is no foreseeable exit'* Adam Lent, New Local

Joe Sarling of New Local, provided an overview of the current system and the political climate. The UK has witnessed immense turbulence with the term permacrisis being named word of the year by Collins Dictionary. This has resulted in constant firefighting by central government with high levels of poverty across the country. Central governments are devoid of ideas and disconnected from society at a local level, there is a potential for communities to fill this gap, providing plans and strategies to support one another long into the future.

The collective power of communities is unlimited, Joe believes energy needs to be focused upon three shared goals:

Firstly, defending public services and their funding. The UK public services have been under threat for some time but are currently at risk of being subject to further funding cuts. Communities must work together to defend the services that support them.

Secondly, policies and strategies need to be more focused upon prevention and planning rather than fire fighting the current crises without thinking further ahead. This is an area that community groups and organisations may have the ability to meet the demands of. Planning for the future will put communities in an advantageous position to tackle challenges.

Thirdly, there is perceived to be significant disconnection between central government and community needs. This is an area which must be addressed to bridge the gap between the two to create policies which meet the needs of the community. Central politicians are believed to be too far removed to truly understand the challenges facing society. Research conducted by New Local suggests communities are more likely to trust local groups, to understand their challenges. Therefore, groups and organisations can use this trust to build

partnership and advise central government of the important issues. This is confirmed by the evidence that communities want to be involved, but not through activism, via a structured framework in which they feel heard and valued.

Overall, communities must be part of the consultation when looking for solutions to the big challenges facing society including climate change, low growth economy, aging population and inequality. It is vital that we learn to unlock community insight and share their knowledge into the political sphere.

4:2 Elaine Lorton

*“The world is different now”*

Elain Lorton of Hywel Dda Health board discussed the importance of adapting the model of healthcare provided in Pembrokeshire. The world has changed; therefore, the way healthcare is delivered must too. ‘A Healthier Mid and West Wales’ and ‘Pembrokeshire Integrated Plan 2022 – 2025’ provide an insight into the planned shift to a social model of healthcare with place-based wellbeing that is preventative and proactive.

This requires an integrated approach to priorities which include early intervention, building resourceful communities, commitment to carers, improved support of mental wellbeing at all ages, a connected Pembrokeshire Hub as well as ensuring health and wellbeing is valued through community activities and initiatives. To achieve this, it will be necessary to: firstly, build meaningful relationships with individuals and communities. Followed by working in partnership with different agencies which will diversify expertise and improve the approach. Finally, it will be necessary to ensure solutions are based upon the individual or community. It will take time to understand what truly matters to individuals and communities alike due to localised variation therefore solutions must be flexible. Overall, there is an awareness that this will take time and resources to implement but the shift is fundamental.





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## 4:3 Sue Leonard

*“Focus on what’s strong, not what’s wrong”*

Sue Leonard discussed the multitude of assets the county of Pembrokeshire has, some of which, are yet to be fully tapped in to. To fully embrace community power, we must find ways to utilise such assets ranging from the tangible buildings and spaces to intangible skills, ideas and experiences of those within the county. Many individuals may have the lived experience and talents to help improve community wellbeing but often, they may not be asked to participate. Specifically, within the current climate in which we are dealing with additional strain on the public sector which cannot solve such challenges alone.

*“People are living their lives on lists”*

Communities across the county are living their lives on lists, for housing, for an NHS dentist, for a care assessment, for a care package – an endless list of waiting. There must be a focus upon working differently to unlock the resources of communities and working together to find solutions to the challenges plaguing the county.

Community infrastructure and a shared commitment from all PSB members is essential in empowering communities. The catalyst for change will be based upon three points:

Firstly, establishing trust within communities so residents feel listened to and engaged in the process. Secondly, ensuring there is equality throughout as everyone must work together on an equal footing regardless of background, experience or skillset. Thirdly, partnership working is vital. Partnership and collaborative working will improve efficiency through knowledge sharing and improve the reach of organisations. With a shared long-term vision and funding, removing bureaucracy and complexity to create a framework for effective participation of community members.

## 4:4 The big questions

The big questions coming from the speaker’s presentations centred upon two topics: firstly, how to tap into the resourcefulness of communities to improve the wellbeing of society?;

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secondly, how can communities effectively interact with democracy to remove the sense of disconnection and ensure policies and strategies are a true reflection of the needs of communities?

## 5. Thematic summary of discussion

### 5:1 Disconnection

A significant theme coming from the discussions was based upon the belief that central government and in turn, the Welsh Government are far too detached from communities. They lack insight and clarity on what is important to communities. Whilst the policy of devolved nations tends to be far more aligned with their communities' needs, there is still a long way to go.

For example, whilst the Wellbeing of Future Generations of Wales Act (2015) can be seen to be a vital and pioneering Act, it was felt that it lacks a real community perspective. Despite communities being mentioned in a traditional sense, in terms of infrastructure, the Act does not consider the collective importance of communities, it is more individualistic.

Furthermore, it was speculated that there is a lack of acceptance and celebration of community power within national policy which could be seen to be a barrier to community empowerment. Specifically, as community empowerment must be woven through plans and strategies moving forward, forging a framework for engagement is needed.

### 5:2 Hope

The sense of hope throughout the event suggested that solutions are available. The strength of partnership working in Pembrokeshire at a strategic level is an example of the willingness to devolve power towards communities, in turn, promoting community power. Partnership working also reflects an understanding of the collective responsibility to challenge unhelpful structures and practices hindering community action. Fostering a mindset of collaborative working across agencies and organisations will promote relationship building and trust within the community along with more effective working. Trust is a fundamental element of

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community empowerment which must be built upon to unlock the strength of communities and direct it towards effective problem solving. This will also promote long term planning as opposed to the firefighting the UK has been experiencing.

## 6. Key Conclusions

The County of Pembrokeshire is immensely resourceful with a diverse wealth of assets which are not truly being tapped in to. Whilst Covid-19 highlighted the true power of communities, we must learn to harness this strength into associative action, enabling communities to thrive not simply survive through crisis. Individuals need be engaged in decision making and creating change, lived experience is vital to successful development.

The key to unlocking community empowerment is collaboration. Communities must feel valued and heard within the political system. The existing partnerships within the county provide an excellent springboard to further empower communities and should be used to help foster a wellbeing economy that puts place-based communities at the heart of solutions.



## 7. Resources

### 7:1 Websites

1. Community Movement Cymru ([www.bct.wales/community-movement-cymru](http://www.bct.wales/community-movement-cymru))
2. Local Trust ([localtrust.org.uk](http://localtrust.org.uk))
3. One Voice Wales (Home - One Voice Wales)
4. People's Health Trust ([www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk](http://www.peopleshealthtrust.org.uk))
5. Pembrokeshire Association of voluntary services (PAVS) ([www.pavscovid19.org.uk](http://www.pavscovid19.org.uk))
6. Planed ([www.planed.org.uk](http://www.planed.org.uk))
7. Together for Change ([www.tfcpenbrokeshire.org](http://www.tfcpenbrokeshire.org))
8. What is Community Power? - New Local ([www.newlocal.org.uk/research/community-power/](http://www.newlocal.org.uk/research/community-power/))

### 7:2 Literature

1. Adam Lent et al - A Community Powered NHS (A-Community-Powered-NHS.pdf ([newlocal.org.uk](http://newlocal.org.uk)))
2. Adam Lent et al - The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved (The Community Paradigm: Why public services need radical change and how it can be achieved - New Local)
3. Dan Boucher – The Big Society in a small country ([bigsocietyinasmallcountry-10-copy.pdf](http://bigsocietyinasmallcountry-10-copy.pdf) ([iwa.wales](http://iwa.wales)))
4. Deirdre Shaw et al - Scaling Up Community Action for Tackling Climate Change
5. Dean Spade – Mutual aid Building Solidarity during this crisis (and the next)
6. Emma O'Dwyer et al – Rehearsing post-Covid-19 citizenship: Social representations of UK Covid-19 mutual aid (Rehearsing post-Covid-19 citizenship: Social representations of UK Covid-19 mutual aid - PMC ([nih.gov](http://nih.gov)))
7. Guanlan Mao et al - How participation in Covid-19 mutual aid groups affects subjective well-being and how political identity moderates these effects (How

- participation in Covid-19 mutual aid groups affects subjective well-being and how political identity moderates these effects - PMC (nih.gov))
8. Institute of Welsh Affairs - Our Land: Communities and Land Use (Our Land: Communities and Land Use - Institute of Welsh Affairs (iwa.wales))
  9. Institute of Welsh Affairs - Re-energising Wales: Factors influencing local and community engagement in renewable energy in Wales (Re-energising Wales: A plan for Wales' renewable energy future. Essential actions to re-energise Wales by 2035 - Institute of Welsh Affairs (iwa.wales))
  10. Institute of Welsh Affairs - Engaging Wales' disengaged youth (Microsoft Word - NEETs publication.doc (iwa.wales))
  11. Institute of Welsh Affairs – Growing Wales' civil society (Growing Wales' Civil Society – Institute of Welsh Affairs (iwa.wales))
  12. Jay Walljasper et al - The great neighbourhood book : a do-it-yourself guide to placemaking
  13. Joe Starling - Community Calling: People want more influence (Community Calling – People want more influence, and policy makers need better local intelligence - New Local)
  14. Kris Southby et al - OP59 Together through tough times: A qualitative study into factors supporting community resilience to poor mental health in disadvantaged communities in the UK
  15. Liz Richardson - DIY Community Action: Neighbourhood problems and community self-help
  16. Nils Carstensen et al - 'Let communities do their work': the role of mutual aid and self-help groups in the Covid-19 pandemic response ('Let communities do their work': the role of mutual aid and self-help groups in the Covid-19 pandemic response - PMC (nih.gov))
  17. Rosie Meade et al – Politics, power and community development



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## 7:3 Podcasts

1. Davie Philip - Creating your own sustainable community (The Happy Pear Podcast: Creating your own Sustainable Community with Davie Philip on Apple Podcasts)
2. Dr Ragan Chatterjee - The healing power of community (Feel Better, Live More with Dr Ragan Chatterjee: #226 The Healing Power of Community on Apple Podcasts)
3. Dr Ragan Chatterjee - The power of community with The Happy Pear (The Power of Community with The Happy Pear | Feel Better Live More Podcast - YouTube)
4. Katie Jones - on the power of community side projects and knowing your worth (Creative Boom: Katie Jones on the power of community, side projects and knowing your worth on Apple Podcasts)
5. Rob Hopkins - The future of communities in practice (Rob Hopkins and The Future of Communities in Practice - The Happy Pear Podcast | Acast)
6. Rob Hopkins - What if energy generation was in the community hands? (From What If to What Next: 57 - What if energy generation was in community hands? on Apple Podcasts)
7. The community power podcast - Local Trust (The community power podcast - Local Trust)



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Appendix 1 – Event programme

## Syniadau Diderfyn : Ideas Unlimited

### Session #1 Perspectives on Community Power

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November 4:30 – 6:00

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8543630380>

The first event in our **Ideas Unlimited** programme will explore the subject of Community Power - What is it? Does it make a difference? Can communities be empowered and, if so, how?

Our three speakers will share from their perspective on, how communities can build power and make a positive difference to people's lives.

- 4:30 Introduction **Sue Denman** – Together for Change (Chair)
- 4:35 **Joe Sarling** - New Local
- 4:55 **Elaine Lorton** - Hywel Dda Health Board
- 5:15 **Sue Leonard** - Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services
- 5:35 Q & A
- 6:00 Close

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