The Future of Support for Community Led action in Pembrokeshire

Report on the Multi- Agency Meeting held on 18th June 2020

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1. Background

1.1 This report is the first of two summarising the presentations and discussions in two online ninety-minute meetings held on 18th and 30th June on the future of support for community led action in Pembrokeshire. The meeting on 18th June was attended by representatives of third sector support and public sector organisations.

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 concentrate on current and post COVID19 support for new and established community groups with a research and development programme of mentorship and shared learning. It is intended that the outcomes of both meetings will feed into the Project's implementation plan and will also be of use to community groups and organisations across all sectors which are involved in rebuilding communities after COVID19.

2. The Programme

2.1 The meeting on 18th June started with presentations from the perspective of a community, Solva Care; a third sector support organisation, PAVS; and the public sector, Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) and the National Health Service in Pembrokeshire. The presenters were asked to talk about the effects of COVID19 on the population and to say how that knowledge will inform their work.

2.2 The presentations were followed by breakout groups to discuss ideas for how we can, with quick wins, sustain and harness the energy so evident in communities under COVID19 and the factors that would help or hinder that aim.

2.3 This report presents a summary of the content of the presentations and discussions. The ideas and solutions do not necessarily represent a consensus reached at the meeting although it was noted that there was a considerable level of agreement on some fundamental principles for how to go forward in partnership.

3. What do we know about the effects of COVID19?

3.1 COVID19 has had a devastating effect on the lives of people by impacting on the determinants of health and wellbeing. Some of these negative effects are likely to be felt for a long time to come. The restrictions placed on people, coupled with the disruptions of routines and lack of social contact has had a profound effect on mental health. Out of a population of 125,00 in the county, some 5,000 people

were asked to shield, in effect confining them to their homes most of the time. Groups have reported an increase in domestic violence. Unpaid carers, and people with dementia and learning difficulties have struggled to cope. Businesses have suffered and many job losses are on the horizon – adding to an increase in poverty. There is widespread fear of the future among all sectors of society. Third sector organisations are already experiencing a loss of income and uncertainty about the future.

3.2 This far reaching disaster has, however, also led to much that we can celebrate, the so called 'silver lining' in bleak times. 100 new community groups have come into being as members of the Pembrokeshire Community Support Network (PCSN). People have adapted to working from home resulting in fewer cars on the road which has benefited the environment. A strengthened community spirit has seen individuals and new groups emerging and mobilising quickly to support and protect those in need.

> *'Change comes from within. Solutions for health and wellbeing need to stem from the individual within their community - enabling decision making, informed choices and respecting these'*
>
> *Elaine Lorton NHS County Director and presenter*

3.3 The number of people offering to volunteer has increased dramatically. Community groups have worked tirelessly and creatively, sharing their ideas though the Pembrokeshire Hub and PCSN to the benefit of others. There are a staggering 1,000 groups in existence, in Pembrokeshire, all working on local solutions to problems and getting the very best out of the many assets that the County has to offer. Capitalising on the growth in partnership working and without the impediment of bureaucracy, it is evident that much has been achieved in a short space of time.

3.4 Alongside the new groups those already in existence have been able to adapt and change quickly to suit the new circumstances created by the crisis.

> *'We have taken a broad approach to wellbeing, locally, that encompasses individual, social, environmental and economic solutions. We think that this will help us to rebuild the strength and resilience of our community. Others may find this useful as we go forward with 'Together for Change'*
>
> *Sue Denman, Solva Care Trustee and presenter*

3.5 Also, on the positive side, our services, delivered by the third and statutory sectors, have coped well in the face of severe pressure. Alongside dealing strategically with the threats posed by COVID19 they have also managed to keep some routine services going.

4. Discussion

4.1 The importance of action at community level

4.1.1 All groups emphasised the important contribution of communities to wellbeing, which has become even more apparent during the pandemic. Local knowledge, the emergence of leaders and an increase in volunteering have enabled many community groups to tailor support in an efficient and effective way. The support provided has been spontaneous, energetic and compassionate. Digital technologies have enabled efficient communication at the local level and county wide resources have worked well in sharing and signposting information.

4.1.2 Community resilience needs to be built from grassroots up and community groups are best placed to decide on their priorities and how to work on them. The pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses in our systems and the areas in urgent need of investment. Success will, however, depend on a collaborative and partnership approach between organisations, including the private sector, and with communities taking a key role in decision making as they are best placed to know the needs of their populations. The sustainability of community groups during this transitional period must be addressed as energies wane, financial pressures mount and volunteer numbers drop as people return to work. Gaps in community provision in the County need to be addressed bearing in mind that communities differ greatly in their priorities, assets and capacities to get involved in organised community action. Regarding the economy we should continue to focus on local wealth building, shortening supply chains and the circular economy approach.

4.2 Ideas and solutions

To go forward with confidence and in unity, we need action on six broad areas:

- Underpinning values and principles
- Knowledge to inform the way forward
- A voice for communities
- Keeping our volunteers and encourage volunteering
- Good communication that can be accessed by all
- Remove barriers to change

We need:

Underpinning values and principles

4.2.1 mutual respect and trust between our respective organisations to pave the way for an agreed vision and frameworks which include social and green solutions

4.2.2 transparency and a common understanding of the roles and working relationships between organisations

4.2.3 embedding coproduction and a community focus in the planning process

4.2.4   a 'can do' attitude in what we can attempt to do together with flexibility and simple solutions if we are to continue to engage

4.2.5   empowered communities, actively engaged in problem solving and the decisions that affect them.

> *'The strength of community action is not to shift power in its entirety , but to share power, and the feedback and contributions at this event are testament to this willingness to work more collaboratively with our communities'*
>
> *Iwan Thomas CE of PLANED and meeting Chair*

Knowledge to inform the way forward

4.2.6   add to the numbers we already have with some detail on the community led groups and organisations in existence now, their experiences and needs for the future

4.2.7   a view on what has worked well and what hasn't in community led activities and associated structures

4.2.8   identification of gaps in provision highlighting inequalities to be addressed as a priority in future plans

4.2.9   better knowledge of the roles and relationships between organisations in the interests of transparency and coordination

4.2.10 identification of factors that help or hinder the sustainability of community endeavours by looking back, and forwards too.

> *'PCC must deliver statutory services but beyond that we have scope to deliver solutions through coproduction with communities'*
>
> *Ian Westley CE of PCC and presenter*

A voice for communities

4.2.11 acceptance that one size does not fit all and look for ways of incentivising communities to start and continue engagement and actions

4.2.12 solutions on how to encourage leadership at the local level, and provide support for those leaders

4.2.13 consideration of local political structures which are so important but vary enormously in effectiveness yet should be the bedrock of local democratic processes and engagement. Develop an understanding of the relationship between Town and Community Councils and County Councillors and look for ways that the former can be strengthened for local benefit and the latter across all wards as champions and supporters

4.2.14 Citizens' Assemblies, an idea that was strongly supported in the meeting

4.2.15 input and representation by young people on forums that will determine their futures.

Keeping our volunteers and encourage volunteering

4.2.16 a way of showing our appreciation of volunteers

4.2.17 regular involvement of volunteers so that they are less likely to drift away. A central system of deploying them could be one option in this respect

4.2.18 schemes in workplaces that support volunteering

Good communication that can be accessed by all

4.2.19 access for all to digital technologies without which inequalities are compounded. Review and address gaps in services, quality and learning

4.2.20 retention of PCSN and the Pembrokeshire Hub that are so effective in sharing ideas and signposting

4.2.21 develop the present meeting into a forum since currently it fills a gap in providing information and a process for agreeing a joint strategy for the future.

Remove barriers to change

4.2.22 review the funding of community groups as a matter of urgency. Identify core running costs and look for innovative ways that these costs can be met by a mix of public sector funding, grants and match funding

4.2.23 oppose and reject grant schemes that foster competition and prevent collaboration between third sector organisations and groups

4.2.24 support new and struggling groups to enable a manageable role post COVID19 and meet their support needs

4.2.25 devolve responsibility and reduce bureaucracy to free up innovation and rapid action.

> '*We have worked well together in a time of crisis. So, we either need to create a permanent state of crisis or preferably find something more positive we can get behind- creating active , connected and resourceful communities and a strong local well-being economy for Pembrokeshire*'
>
> *Sue Leonard CO of PAVS and presenter*

Thanks to all who attended, and the Presenters, Chairs and Scribes: Iwan Thomas, Sue Leonard, Ian Westley, Elaine Lorton, Mollie Roach, Barbara Bale, Lena Dixon, Amanda Stone, Alison Bullock, Cris Tomos, Caroline White, Jessie Buchanan and Sue Denman.

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