

# Age Alliance Wales

## Improving partnerships between national and voluntary third sector organisations

November 2016



The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) comes into force on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016 and requires local authorities to work with partners, including the third sector to deliver preventative services. Age Alliance Wales (AAW), is an alliance of 21 national voluntary organisations with a wealth of experience and expertise in delivering preventative services to older people.<sup>1</sup> AAW is currently working with members to ensure they are well positioned to play an active role in the design, planning and delivery of services to older people.

AAW members believe that in order to achieve a stronger and more united third sector, there is a need to broker an open dialogue with Community Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the wider third sector. Improved partnerships will reduce the unnecessary duplication of services, lead to a better use of resources and support local authorities and health boards to create a seamless service with the needs of the older person placed firmly at the centre of all decisions.

In a bid to broker an open and honest dialogue between national and local third sector organisations, AAW has been meeting with Directors from CVCs across Wales. Key points from these discussions are detailed in this report. We also asked AAW members to input their own experiences of working with CVCs.

### Recommendations

AAW believes that between national, regional and local sectors should engage in an ongoing dialogue in order to;

1. identify and commit to common goals, values and aspirations based on the principle that the individual should be at the centre of all discussions relating to the development and delivery of services;
2. agree a framework for engagement and improved communication and accountability;
3. identify areas of shared interest and an agreement that, by working together, the voice and influence of the third sector can be enhanced and made more effective;
4. build stronger mechanisms for communication and information sharing across national, regional and local sectors;
5. agree how best to co ordinate third sector discussions with public services so that they are inclusive of the whole sector;

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<sup>1</sup> Age Alliance Wales (2016) *Preventative Services*. Available online @ <http://www.agealliancewales.org.uk/preventative-services>

6. harness and strengthen the citizen voice to inform the commissioning and delivery of services;
7. find agreement that any voluntary sector roles on regional partnership boards have strong governance arrangements to ensure accountability and value to the whole of the sector;
8. engage in an honest open dialogue in order to address sensitive issues such as the perceived CVC conflict of interest as infrastructure agency and service provider.

### **The Challenge**

The need for AAW to start a productive dialogue with CVCs became clear at an AAW event held in 2015, which brought together representatives from national and local third sector organisations, local authorities, local health boards and CVCs. At the event, delegates were asked to discuss the following question;

*How can you ensure that national organisations working with older people and Age Alliance Wales are involved in local service planning discussions so that older people in your area benefit from national and local third sector expertise?*

The main points from the discussions are detailed in a report<sup>2</sup> which gave a clear picture of the challenges and barriers faced by national organisations seeking to become more involved in local service planning and delivery. These are summarised below:

1. Due to the diverse nature of the third sector, which encompasses national organisations operating across Wales and other organisations operating at a local level, developing effective mechanisms for sharing information poses a significant challenge;
2. the lack of shared knowledge between national and local organisations can lead to a duplication of services and make it difficult to develop support services for older people that are both cost effective and responsive to individual need;
3. national organisations are aware that regional partnership boards and local service boards automatically invite the director of their local CVC to act as representative of the third sector. To evidence this, AAW contacted regional partnership boards across Wales asking who they had selected to represent the third sector. Five boards responded and stated that the two available third sector spaces had been allocated to the directors of their local CVCs. However all five also responded that they were currently reviewing their membership and were

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<sup>2</sup> Age Alliance Wales (2015) Networking Event Report. Available online <http://www.agealliancewales.org.uk/briefings-publications>

working towards addressing any gaps. At the time of writing this report, 6 out of 7 regional partnership boards had either advertised for or elected a national third sector rep to the board.

### **Discussions between CVCs and AAW organisations**

To continue the discussions started at the AAW event, representatives of AAW met with the Directors of CVCs from across Wales<sup>3</sup>.

Although the meetings provided a forum to explore the current state of relationships between national and local third sector organisations, they also provided an opportunity to share common goals, values and aspirations. All but one CVC stated they are committed to developing stronger links with AAW in order to create a stronger and more united third sector. One director felt the Alliance of Alliances is an effective means for engagement between CVCs and AAW organisations.

There is considerable agreement on the need to ensure that the older person is at the centre of all discussions relating to the development and delivery of services.

The majority CVCs agreed that they would appreciate closer links with the strategic and policy work of Age Alliance Wales and its members, particularly in the light of changes in structural policy support and capacity at the WCVA. Although CVCs work with national organisations at a local level, the strategic and policy expertise of national organisations is not easily accessible and therefore is not currently always available to inform the work of regional partnership boards.

For national organisations, ensuring effective representation at a regional and local level poses a significant challenge. Although AAW has managed to secure a space on the majority of regional partnership boards, communicating information and opportunities for collaboration to the wider third sector remains a challenge. In addition, AAW believes that all voluntary sector roles should have strong governance arrangements to ensure accountability and value to the whole of the sector. AAW and CVCs have started to share information via the AAW secretariat, however mechanisms for sharing information, decision making and capacity building within the third sector must be improved.

Both local and national organisations are able to represent the voice of service users; national organisations often have expertise in the experiences and needs of people living with life limiting conditions and disabilities. Finding a way to harness and strengthen the citizen voice will inform the commissioning and delivery of services and play a key role in the development of a citizen centred health and social services.

The degree to which AAW organisations work with CVCs varies across Wales. For example, responses from Care & Repair Agencies regarding their relationships with local CVCs, showed that there are significant regional variances in how well the agencies feel represented and how closely linked they are. All stated that CVCs

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<sup>3</sup> AAW has been invited to attend a meeting of CVC Directors hosted by the WCVA

disseminate information regularly, some of which is useful, on a range of topics including local initiatives, funding and training opportunities and network meetings. The majority of agencies commented that although they receive regular updates regarding local information, CVCs would not be able to answer specific questions about the agency's themselves or the services they deliver and could therefore not be considered truly representative.

However, in one area, both Care & Repair and their local CVC felt the relationship worked well. Care & Repair stated:

*We have good relationships with both CVCs.....They know what we do and link us into relevant groups, forums, funding streams etc. They publicise our work and new service initiatives as well as any events we hold. They provide training on a variety of issues which we access when needed.*

On a more negative note, one agency commented, '*C&R doesn't work effectively with the local CVC – we attend forums, partnership events and receive information but do not really have a voice in shaping that information.*'

### **Funding the third sector**

The majority of issues around funding cited in our discussions with CVCs and in feedback from AAW members, related to the allocation of funding and the role of CVCs. AAW organisations feel that CVCs are overstepping their remit to support the development of third sector organisations by delivering services and competing for funding at a local level. One AAW member commented '*as a result of this mission drift into local service delivery, there is some reluctance from us to discuss funding ideas/opportunities with our local CVC.*'

More specifically, AAW members expressed frustration at the way in which CVCs have managed the allocation of monies from the Intermediate Care Fund (ICF). Several members noted that CVCs have seemed reluctant to share information about ICF and one shared an example where the CVC was both part of the panel determining ICF awards and an applicant to the fund. It has felt that this has led some CVCs to become reticent about sharing ICF information:

*Our local partners have in some cases not heard about local meetings or enquire about local opportunities to attend meetings relating to funding and have been told the CVC is representing the sector locally.*

However feedback was not all negative. One AAW member stated that they had used ICF monies to develop a collaborative service with their CVC and other third sector organisations which is working well. One member also stated '*in many cases we know CVCs are doing a great job and working well,*' but did agree that '*ICF is creating low level but general tension.*'

In response to the comments above, some CVCs stated that they only agree to deliver a service if not doing so means the service does not get provided. Some also agreed that before running a service, they should consider question whether they are the right organisation to lead it and whether the service could be delivered elsewhere. Some felt it was fair for a CVC to pilot a new service before putting it out to tender to the wider third sector.

### **The way forward**

The discussions to date have identified areas of shared interest between national and local organisations and an agreement that, by working together the voice and influence of the sector can be enhanced and made more effective. In addition, with public sector cuts reducing the local authority capacity to develop new partnerships and models of delivering services, the role of third sector is becoming increasingly important in ensuring the successful integration of health and social services.

A recent report by WHISC explores how relationships between local and national organisations within the third sector Wales can be improved. One of the recommendations is to;

*formulate clear governance and accountability arrangements for working at the local, regional, national levels.*<sup>4</sup>

AAW its continuing discussions with CVCs and working closely with the Alliance of Alliances to achieve the above. We aim to engage in an honest open dialogue in order to address sensitive issues such as the perceived CVC conflict of interest as infrastructure agency and service provider. The primary aim of the discussions is to agree a framework for engagement and improved communication and accountability. This will allow new models of care to emerge that support organisations to make best use of limited resources.

AAW is well positioned to broker a strategic discussion about improving services for older people and to provide the policy expertise that is valued by local organisations and CVCs. Collectively, the third sector can ensure that, when building partnerships between sectors, improving lives for older people is the principle on which all decisions are based.

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<sup>4</sup> WHISC (2016) Improving regional leadership and the relationships between local and national organisations within the within the third sector Wales. Available online @

**Age Alliance Wales is an alliance of 21 national voluntary organisations committed to working together to develop the legislative, policy and resource frameworks that will improve the lives of older people in Wales. The following organisations are members of Age Alliance Wales:**

**Action on Hearing Loss Cymru, Age Connects Wales, Age Cymru, Alzheimer's Society Wales, Arthritis Care, British Lung Foundation, British Red Cross in Wales, Care & Repair Cymru, Carers Wales, Contact the Elderly, Carers Trust, Cruse Cymru, Volunteering Matters Wales, Deafblind Cymru, Disability Wales, Learning and Work Cymru, Prime Cymru, Royal Voluntary Service, RNIB Cymru, Sense Cymru and The Stroke Association.**