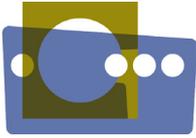


Community
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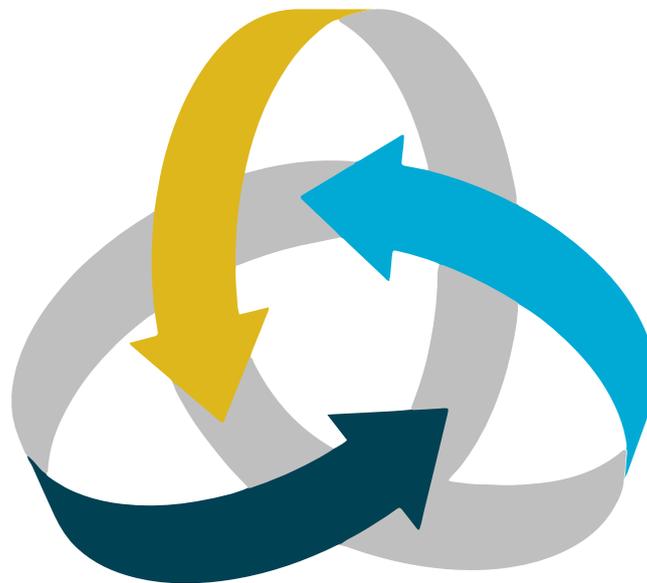


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Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

Representation of Community and Voluntary Sector in Community Planning

A Resource Paper by Community Places for Community Planning Partners



A report by Community Places
September 2020



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

Acknowledgements

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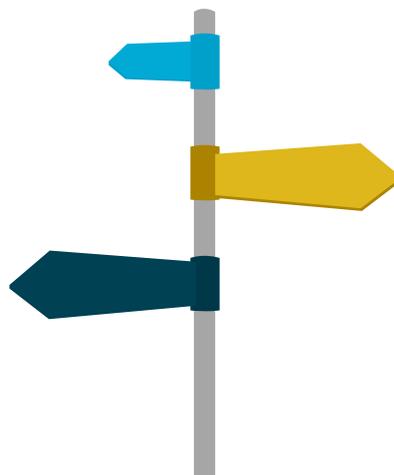
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Appendices

- (i) COVID Community Responses Survey (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Panel)



1. Introduction

The Carnegie UK Trust's [Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland](#) project provides support to enable Community Planning Partnerships to implement a local wellbeing outcomes approach. A core element of the Trust's support focuses on co-production, and the Trust commissioned [Community Places](#) to deliver a support package for the three Community Planning Partnerships.

Purpose of the paper

This paper was prepared by Community Places as a resource for all who are interested in or responsible for how Community and Voluntary groups (the CVS) can be represented in Community Planning Partnership structures. It outlines a range of models which are used across the five jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland. Work on the paper was prompted by needs and issues articulated within the Community Planning environment in Northern Ireland during the first year (2019) of the co-production support package. It was completed during the COVID crisis lockdown period and presented to an online workshop of Community Planning partners in August 2020 – five months into the crisis.

Community Planning Partners' Workshop

The online workshop on 25 August 2020 involved partners from across the Community Planning spectrum and the whole region. It began with a short presentation of the findings of the report (which had been circulated in advance). This was followed by three inputs from participants on their experience of CVS representation in Community Planning. Participants then shared and discussed their learning from community-based responses to the pandemic and how communities and Community Planning partners can strengthen relationships. The lessons learned from the workshop are presented in Section 8.



2. CVS Models in Northern Ireland

Antrim and Newtownabbey

Seven DEA Place Shaping Fora were established in 2016. Each Forum is chaired by a local Councillor, and facilitated by a senior council officer and is to include representation from locally based organisations. The role of the Fora includes consulting with the community and identifying projects for council funding. Each Forum will identify priorities for their DEA and through discussion will make recommendations which will be referred to the Community Planning Partnership for action. Their fit within the wider structure is shown below.



Ards and North Down

A Third Sector Community Planning Forum was established in December 2017 as the mechanism for sectoral involvement in the Strategic Big Plan Community Planning Partnership Board (represented by its Chairperson) and its Big Plan Priority Workstreams (see diagram below). The Forum meets three times per year and its members are involved in implementation of some aspects of the Community Plan Delivery Plans.



Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

A Community and Voluntary Sector CVS Panel was established in 2018 with the following roles:

- to ensure the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise sectors are represented on the Community Planning Partnership.
- to promote ongoing community engagement.
- to articulate a voice for the sectors.
- to support the development of cross-sectoral relationships and partnership working.

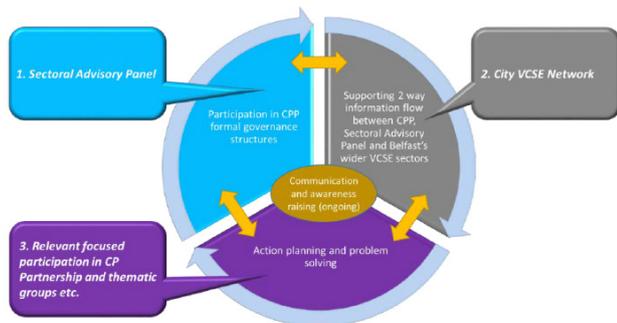
Membership of the Panel is open to one person per organisation and there are currently approximately 65 members. The Panel has two delegates on the Community Planning Strategic Partnership and others on the Thematic Action Planning Teams. The Panel recently undertook a survey of the sector on emergency food and other support provided during lockdown in the borough to inform the Partnership's Covid-19 recovery plans.



Belfast

In July 2019 the City Council began public consultation on a possible model for the representation of groups from the community, voluntary and social enterprise sectors. In January 2020, groups were invited to submit nominations for membership of a Sectoral Advisory Panel. Fifteen of those nominated were selected and the Panel membership was announced in July 2020. The selection criteria included sectoral balance with a view to including representatives from a broad range of interest groups working on different issues. Section 75 categories were also taken into account. The Panel have agreed their delegates to the Community Planning Partnership structures and the Panel Chairperson will report to the Partnership.

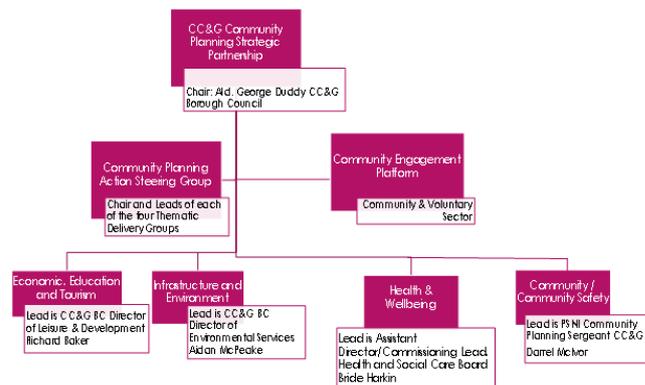
1. A 'Sectoral Advisory Panel' – enabling sectoral participation in Community Planning Partnership structures; and
2. A Belfast VCSE sectors citywide network - promoting 2 way information flow, through online (website platform and email updates), social media and a programme of Sectoral engagement events.
3. Strengthened sectoral participation in action planning work, and relevant working groups convened by Partners taking forward Belfast Agenda priorities.



Causeway Coast and Glens

In September 2018 the Community Planning Partnership issued an open invitation to all groups in the area to join a new Community Engagement Platform - the first time to convene a borough wide grouping of this kind in the new Council area. In March 2019 the Platform nominated its two Co-Chairs as representatives to the Partnership Board. 'Speed Networking and Sharing' events were organised by the Platform in January and June 2019 to enable all groups to meet each other and the Community Planning Partners. In September 2019 the Platform meeting focused on community development support for groups, and more recently in January 2020 an event was held to allow groups to meet and interact with a wider range of statutory agencies including government department representatives.

Community Planning in Causeway Coast and Glens



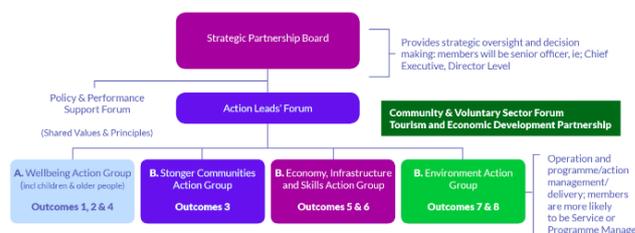
Derry and Strabane

Eight Local Community Growth Partnership Boards have been formally established – one in each of the Council’s 7 DEAs and one in Strabane Town. In Derry City and Strabane, the Boards were formed by building on and extending the area and membership of the five existing Neighbourhood Partnership Boards to include sector representatives, Councillors and statutory representatives. The membership of each of the three rural Boards is composed of up to ten community group representatives (two per ward) plus Councillors and statutory representatives. The eight Local Partnership Boards oversee the delivery of the Local Area Growth Plans (which are aligned to the Strategic Growth Plan for the whole council area). The community group representatives were identified through an independent open call nomination and selection process in September 2018. The Chairs of the eight Local Boards sit on the Strategic Growth Partnership Board and are also involved in the thematic Outcome Delivery Groups for the implementation of the Strategic Growth Plan. The North West Community Network is also represented on the Strategic Growth Partnership.



Fermanagh and Omagh

A nomination and election by postal ballot process was used to establish a Community and Voluntary Sector Forum in 2016. All CVS groups were entitled to nominate and to vote during the election process. The Forum nominates representatives to the Community Planning Board and its three Theme Groups. There are 20 members of the Forum and its Terms of Reference includes co-designing an annual CVS Convention to discuss progress on the Community Plan.



Lisburn and Castlereagh

The Community Planning Partnership is committed to developing a mechanism which would see the community and voluntary sector represented in Partnership structures. The Partnership has begun the process of identifying community sector representatives from each DEA. It is considering a number of options which will be discussed and agreed with the CVS over the next months.

Mid and East Antrim

A Community Panel was initiated in 2016. It drew largely on existing community networks including: the four Ballymena Community Clusters; the two Rural Community Networks; the Carrickfergus Community Forum; and the Larne Community Development Project. Delegates from these organisations form the Panel which is designed to represent the community voice and provides 12 community representatives and six elected members the opportunity to input into all parts of the Community Planning Partnership structure. They supplement the work of local community activity in relation to Community Planning objectives.



Mid-Ulster

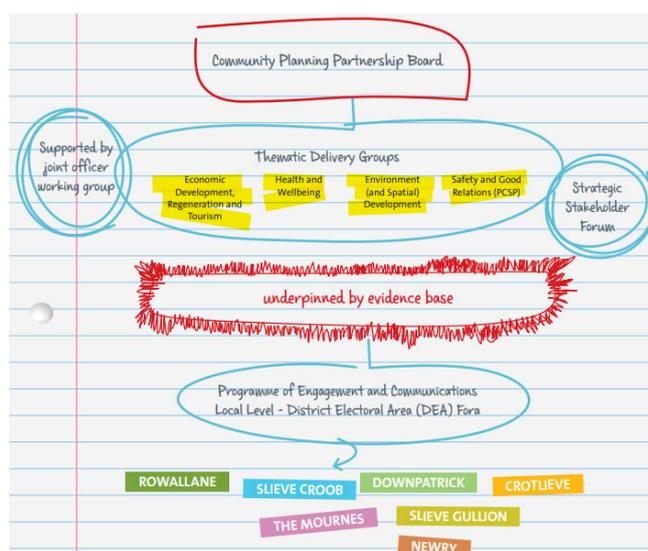
The first meeting of the Mid-Ulster Community Panel was in March 2017. The Panel consists of ten people elected by postal ballot by community and voluntary groups in the area (with all groups entitled to nominate and to vote). The Panel nominates two to each of the five Community Planning Thematic Action Groups and one to the Partnership Board. The Panel and Council organise a Community Planning Convention annually. It is open to all groups and focuses on progress made on delivering the Plan.



Newry, Mourne and Down

Newry, Mourne and Down Council introduced a DEA Forum model during 2016. The DEA Fora membership is comprised of Councillors (who chair each Forum) and community sector representatives. Statutory organisation representatives can be called to Forum meetings to discuss specific local issues. The sector's representatives were identified through a nomination and selection process overseen by Sector Matters. Nominations had to be supported by an umbrella/network of groups. Each DEA Forum has an Action Plan and dedicated Council DEA Co-ordinator.

The Strategic Stakeholders' Forum (SSF) is an independent body composed of the larger voluntary organisations who work across a number of communities and areas and were invited to participate. It is represented on the Community Planning Partnership Board by its two Co-Chairs and on Thematic Groups by nominees appointed by the Forum.



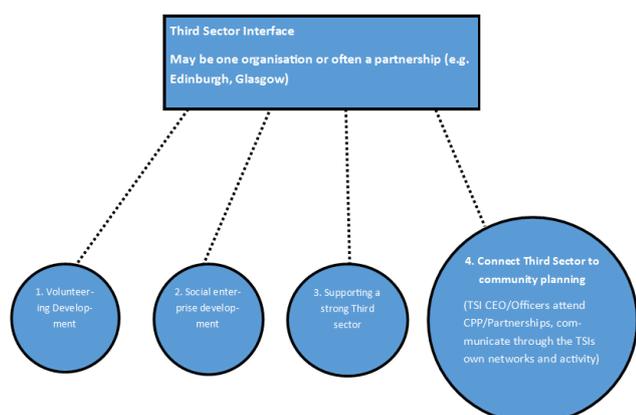
3. CVS Engagement in Scotland

At both the national and local government levels there is a spectrum of processes and opportunities for community engagement in Scotland. In the context of formal CVS representation in Community Planning at local government level, there are two mechanisms which are commonly used:

- Local community representation in the development and delivery of local Community Plans; and
- Involvement of the CVS in the governance structures for council-wide strategic Community Plans.

In 2008 a Third Sector Interface (TSI) model was initiated with the aim of providing a clear and focused process for CVS participation in governance structures. In each council area a TSI structure was established – with 10 of the 32 being partnerships of existing organisations. The role of each TSI is to support and develop the capacity of community and voluntary groups to participate in and influence Community Planning.

The typical model is illustrated below (with thanks to Belfast City Council).



Dundee TSI

In Dundee the TSI facilitates a **Third Sector Forum**. The Forum is facilitated by Dundee Third Sector Interface - connecting the wider Third Sector in Dundee to the Community Planning Partnership.

The Forum aims to:

- provide a coherent, collective voice for the Third Sector and strengthen engagement between the Third Sector and Community Planning Partners.
- increase the Third Sector's input in key areas of public policy in the city and impact on the delivery of public services.
- increase awareness of the impact which the work of the Third Sector has on the people of Dundee.

Membership of the Forum is open to all community and voluntary groups with workshops and conferences being held to discuss Community Planning issues. A TSI representative is a member of the Community Planning Partnership Board and the TSI facilitates the participation of the appropriate CVS organisations in other elements of the Partnership structure. These organisations will usually be involved in other TSI supported forums (Health and Wellbeing; Age Sector; Youth; Mental Health etc).

North Ayrshire TSI

The TSI is a partnership between the Ayrshire Community Trust and Arran Community and Voluntary Service. The TSI:

- supports voluntary organisations, both local and national, who deliver services at a local level.

- supports volunteers and promotes volunteering.
- supports and helps develop social enterprise.
- is the connection between the Community Planning Partnership and the Third Sector and facilitates communication and understanding between the two.

The TSI is represented on the Community Planning Partnership Board.

Six Locality Partnerships (together covering the whole of North Ayrshire) are responsible for identifying and addressing local priorities. In addition to the TSI representation, the Chair of the local Community Council is also on the Locality Partnership. These Councils are established by law across Scotland and are elected by public vote.

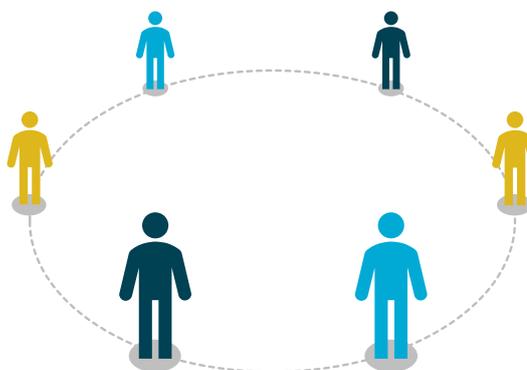
East Ayrshire TSI

The TSI in East Ayrshire is a partnership of the Council for Voluntary Organisations (CVO) and the Volunteer Centre. Its staff represent the CVS on a number of partnerships including Community Planning. The TSI also supports and facilitates the Third Sector Forum which is the key structure for collaboration within the sector and for communication with local government and public sector bodies. Membership of the Forum is open to all community and voluntary groups and its aims are to:

- Provide a coherent, collective voice for the Third Sector and strengthen engagement between the Third Sector and Community Planning Partners;

- Create a place and structure for strategic dialogue with Third Sector agencies and other partners in East Ayrshire;
- Increase the Third Sector’s input in key areas of public policy in East Ayrshire and impact on the delivery of public services; and
- Identify and highlight support needs of Third Sector organisations to the Third Sector Interface East Ayrshire in order to ensure effective and appropriate support and representation.

The involvement of communities across East Ayrshire is underpinned strategically by ‘A Framework for Community Engagement’ and the ‘Charter for Involvement’.



4. CVS Engagement in Republic of Ireland

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established by the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 following a Government commissioned report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government. The main role of PPNs is to facilitate participation and representation of community groups in the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sectors on decision-making bodies including Local Community Development Committees and Strategic Policy Committees. They have been established in each of the 31 local authorities (city and county councils) in Ireland and operate under a number of administrative structures, with 19 hosted by the Local Authority and the rest either hosted by another community organisation or operating as new independent bodies.

The Local Government Act requires that all local authority committees on which communities are represented must source those community representatives through the PPN. The procedure followed is:

- The PPN convenes a meeting for the purpose of appointing the required representative(s) and invites all groups which are a member of the PPN.
- Those who turn up to the meeting appoint a representative from amongst those at the meeting. The groups who attend the meeting become the Linkage Group for that representative, who reports back to them and keeps them in touch with news from the body they have been appointed to.

Funding for PPNs is provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Local Authorities. In 2018 the Department provided the bulk of the core funding for PPNs

(typically 50,000 euros) with most also receiving funding (typically 30,000 euros) from their own local authority to support their work (though up to 70,000 euros in one case). In some cases, Local Authorities have made membership of the PPN an eligibility requirement for groups accessing grants.

By the end of 2018 over 14,800 community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental organisations were members of a PPN, with over 900 PPN representatives elected to 370 committees on issues such as strategic policy, local community development, joint policing etc.

Local authorities and PPNs work together collaboratively to support communities and build the capacity of member organisations to engage meaningfully on issues that concern them. PPNs also have a role in the development and education of their member groups, sharing information, promoting best practice and facilitating networking. Building real engagement at local level is seen as a developmental process that requires intensive work and investment. In recognition of their key role, PPNs received an increase in resources in 2018 to fund the post of Support Worker.

Each PPN is in the process of developing a Vision for Community Wellbeing which will set out the PPN priorities under the following themes:

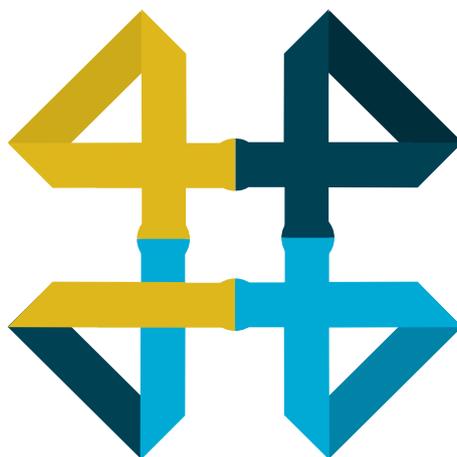


Monaghan PPN

The Monaghan PPN is a good example of the PPNs in practice (www.ppnmonaghan.ie). Its membership is open to all community and voluntary groups with an address in Co Monaghan which meet the following criteria:

- in operation for at least 6 months;
- have a set of rules, usually a Constitution, which lays out the purpose of the group and how it will carry out its business;
- have a Chair; and
- meet a minimum of once a year.

- A 'Secretariat' is formed by the membership and functions as a Board. The 12 members are drawn from each of the local authority districts, the three sectoral colleges (community, social inclusion and environmental) and thematic networks (for youth, older people, disability, community safety, arts).
- The Secretariat manages staff and over sees operations and activities. It reports to the 'Full Plenary' which meets four times per year and is open to all members.
- It is the ultimate decision-making body for determining priorities and identifying and discussing issues.



5. CVS Representation in England

There is no strategic framework for CVS representation and community engagement across England. The Health Service enables engagement in improving services, while the Localism Act 2011 introduced a new 'neighbourhood planning' process. It provides a mechanism for approved community organisations to develop plans which can shape the spatial development of their areas. It does not establish a right for the community and voluntary sector to participate in or contribute to the decision making of local authorities. However, some local authorities have established processes and mechanisms for CVS representation in strategic services planning.

Manchester

The Voluntary Sector Assembly provides a forum for community leaders across Manchester to come together to understand and address the challenges facing the communities in the city. This involves a range of approaches including working at a strategic level with public sector agencies, building relationships with other sectors, lobbying, and collaboration between organisations. The Assembly seeks:

- To bring together leaders in local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations to debate local social and economic issues facing the city.
- To maintain an overview of the development of the local sector.
- To champion the contribution of the CVS sector to Manchester in meeting the needs of diverse local communities.

- To increase recognition of the sector's contribution to the local economy in delivering employment, training, volunteering and many other opportunities.
- To stimulate partnership working between organisations and with other sectors.
- To support and encourage leaders and leadership within the sector.

The Assembly is supported by MACC (Manchester Alliance for Community Care www.macc.org.uk) which hosts and facilitates the quarterly meetings through its Policy and Influence Team. Representatives of the Assembly (who in some cases are MACC staff) represent the CVS on over 20 strategic partnerships to influence local policy and decisions, raise issues of concern, promote the impact of the work of the voluntary, community and faith sector in Manchester, and to gather information to share with sector colleagues. In 2013 MACC successfully bid for a single tender issued by the Council for the provision of support, representation, engagement, policy and capacity building for the CVS in the city.

Newcastle

Newcastle Council facilitates community engagement through two primary mechanisms: Community References Groups (CRGs) and a Community Panel.

The CRGs are considered an important part of the Council's community engagement framework. CRGs are established as reference groups for specific projects to help the Council gain information from, and share information with, the community.

The Council describes CRGs as an effective way to involve key stakeholders and the community in specific projects or activities and as providing opportunities to align service delivery and operations with the needs and expectations of the community.

The CRGs broadly aim to:

- Provide a forum for members to discuss issues of community interest;
- Draw on local knowledge and enhance community voice in decision-making processes and outcomes; and
- Build community understanding of the Council's core business functions and specific projects and activities.

The CRGs can include local community and voluntary groups. However, there is no ongoing formal process for CVS representation.

The Community panel is promoted as 'Newcastle Voice' and described as the City of Newcastle's community reference panel. It's one of the tools the Council uses to engage with the community to better understand issues and opinions on a variety of topics to help inform decision-making. Over 2,500 community members (which includes members of the public) have signed up to Newcastle Voice to provide feedback regarding projects, events and initiatives in Newcastle. Members are invited to have their say on policies, programmes and projects through:

- Online tools;
- Surveys;
- Community workshops, information sessions or focus groups; and
- Quick polls.

Bristol

Voscur is the support and development agency for Bristol's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE www.voscur.org). It works to support VCSE organisations to increase their impact (capacity building) and to inform and help design effective services (influencing and VCSE participation).

Within the health services sector Voscur supports a network of Advocates who attend key strategic health sector bodies in a voluntary capacity. It also facilitates 'Voscur Sector Leaders' with a view to ensuring that the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector is involved in strategic and operational decision making on a broad range of issues. Voscur Sector Leader roles are voluntary – they are appointed as representatives based on the specific expertise and experience that they bring to the role.

6. CVS Representation in Wales

At a national level the Welsh Government and CVS formally interact through the framework of the Third Sector Scheme (introduced by the 2006 Government of Wales Act) which sets out how the Government and the voluntary sector should communicate and work together. The aims of the Scheme are to achieve:

- Stronger, more resilient, communities – the way most people make a voluntary contribution to the vibrancy and regeneration of their communities, provide care and help build people’s confidence and skills; and the opportunities the Third Sector creates for employment and local enterprise.
- Better policy – the knowledge and expertise the Third Sector offers through its front-line experience to help shape policies, procedures and services.
- Better public services – the innovative and transforming role the Third Sector can play in making public services reach more people and become more sensitive to their needs.

The Scheme commits the Welsh Government to:

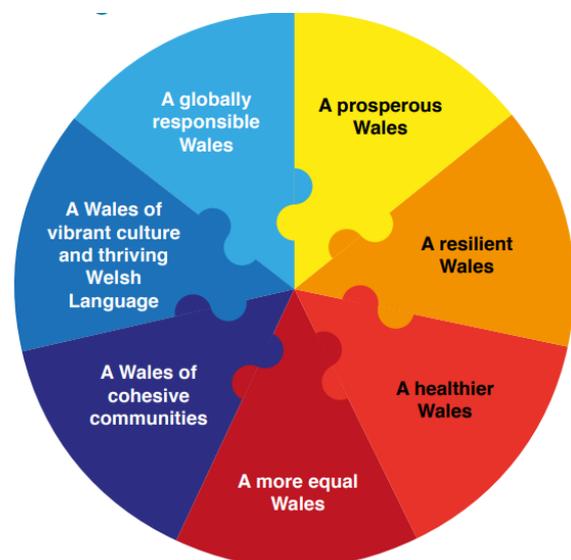
- maintain arrangements for meaningful engagement and consultation with the Third Sector;
- maintain arrangements for supporting communities and volunteers; and
- maintain arrangements for supporting structures.

In practice this includes biannual meetings between Government and the Third Sector Partnership Council and between sector representatives and each Government Minister - also biannually. (The Council is composed of

- 25 people from networks within the sector who are elected every two years). The Scheme also requires each Minister to set a Departmental scheme for supporting and promoting relevant voluntary organisations. A key element is core funding for a Voluntary Council in each of the 19 Counties Core through Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW). This support is focused around four key pillars of activity: volunteering; good governance, sustainable funding, and engagement and influencing with public service partners (see Gwent and Powys examples overleaf).

- The Wellbeing and Future Generations Act (2015) is unique to Wales and requires its public bodies to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequality and climate change. Guidance flowing from the Act emphasises the value of community engagement and underlines the 10 Engagement Principles endorsed by the Government in 2011.

- The Act established seven Wellbeing Goals which all public sector bodies are required to help deliver:



In each local authority area Wellbeing Plans have been developed and are being implemented by Public Service Partnership Boards (PSBs). The County Voluntary Councils are an integral part of the PSB governance.

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) has over 700 member groups and is the County Voluntary Council for the area (www.pavo.org.uk/). Like the other Voluntary Councils, it is responsible for supporting, developing and promoting the community infrastructure across the Powys area and for facilitating CVS representation on a number of partnership structures – including the Wellbeing Public Services Partnership Board (PSB). It does this by inviting nominations from the sector and setting up an independent panel for assessing and selecting representatives against pre-determined criteria. To encourage nominations PAVO will hold meetings with relevant organisations and networks to promote the role and opportunity. PAVO continues to support the representatives in their roles and responsibilities throughout the agreed time a representative is on a partnership.

In **Newport** there are two CVS representatives on the 16 person PSB – one from the Newport Third Sector Partnership and one from the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO). A core feature of the governance structure is a Community Engagement Group which is responsible for co-ordinating and promoting community engagement across all partners. The membership of the group includes three representatives of GAVO which is the County Voluntary Council covering Newport and three other PSB areas. Membership of GAVO is open to all community and voluntary organisations in the Gwent (www.gavo.org.uk/).



7. Overview of Models

The models being applied across the jurisdictions can be viewed as falling into six types (examples in brackets):

<p>A Directly elected</p>		<p>This is where the CVS representatives are nominated and elected by groups within the council area. The elections can be by postal ballot (Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster) or by attendance at an event (PPNs; Causeway Coast and Glens; Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon).</p>
<p>B Selection by independent body</p>		<p>In this model groups nominate one or more persons to represent the sector. The nominees are selected by an independent body following assessment against pre-determined criteria (Powys; Newry, Mourne and Down; Belfast; Derry and Strabane).</p>
<p>C Open Call</p>		<p>An open invitation to all CVS groups to join and attend at any time (for example Dundee, East Ayrshire, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon; Causeway Coast and Glens; and Belfast City Council Online Network).</p>
<p>D CVS Networks</p>		<p>Newly created (Scottish TSIs) or pre-existing CVS networks (Welsh Voluntary Councils, Welsh Voluntary Councils; Mid and East Antrim Community Development Networks) within the council area are given the responsibility for identifying representatives of the sector. The criteria and process for identifying representatives will usually be agreed with the partnership body.</p>
<p>E Task Group Workshops</p>		<p>Council or Partnership body convenes reference groups or facilitates workshops for groups interested in a specific policy area to inform decision making. The reference groups disband when the task is completed (Newcastle).</p>
<p>F Hybrid</p>		<p>In some cases, a combination of the above models has been used. For example, in Newry, Mourne and Down selection was used at DEA level, while at the Strategic Board level pre-existing council-wide CVS networks and service providers form a Strategic Stakeholders Forum which nominates delegates to the strategic structure. In both Dundee and East Ayrshire, the TSI staff often represent the CVS but also facilitate an open membership Third Sector Forum which discusses policy issues to inform the staff.</p>

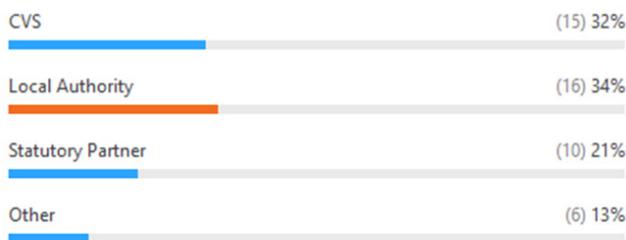
Summary of NI Models

Name		Model	Year	Operation	Chair
Antrim and Newtownabbey Place Shaping Fora		C	2016		Chaired by local Councillor
Ards and North Down Third Sector Forum		C	2017	3 meetings per annum	CVS Chair
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon CVS Panel		C	2018	3-4 meetings per annum Theme based events	CVS Chair
Belfast City Council Sector Advisory Panel		B	2020	Regular meetings	CVS Chair
VCSE Online Network		C			
Causeway Coast and Glens Community Engagement Forum		C	2019	Theme based events	CVS Chair
Derry and Strabane DEA Local Partnership Boards		B	2019	Monthly	CVS Chairs
Fermanagh and Omagh CVS Forum		A	2016		CVS Chair
Lisburn and Castlereagh		TBC	TBC	TBC	
Mid and East Antrim Community Panel		D	2016	Regular meetings	CVS Chair
Mid Ulster District Council Community Panel		A	2017	Annual Convention and regular meetings	CVS Chair
Newry, Mourne and Down DEA Fora		B	2016	Monthly meetings	Includes DEA Councillors who chair
Strategic Stakeholders' Forum		C			

8. Learning from the Workshop

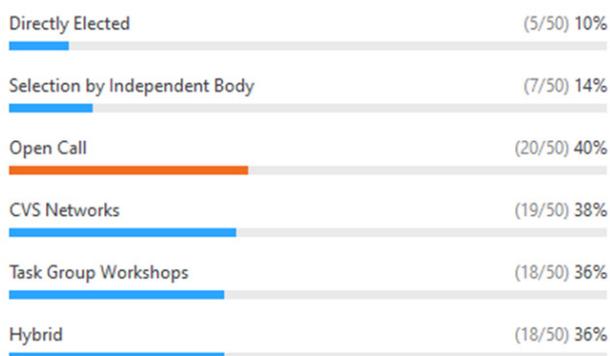
The participants in the workshop were from across the region and represented all sectors.

1. Which sector do you belong to?



Following a presentation focused on the CVS representation models (see Section 7) the participants were asked to indicate which model they are most drawn to:

1. Thinking about the community response to COVID-19, which of these models are you most drawn to? (Multiple choice)



The majority of participants were drawn to the 'Open Call' model, followed closely by 'CVS Network'; 'Task Group Workshops' and the 'Hybrid' model. Interestingly, both the 'Directly Elected' and 'Selection By Independent Body' received much less support.

In the lead-in to group discussions and to ground the workshop in operational experiences of CVS representation, four people were invited to input their reflections:

Kim Weir is a Community Planning Officer with Fermanagh and Omagh Council – a position she has held since Councils first became responsible for facilitating Community Planning. Kim explained that a CVS Forum of 20 members was established by an election process by postal ballot with all CVS groups entitled to nominate candidates and vote. The Forum represents the sector within the Community Planning governance structures - thus underlining recognition of the sector. Benefits of the Forum include: improved communications and information sharing; better co-ordination where previously there may have been competition or a lack of trust; more collective working within the sector (particularly during the COVID crisis); and better relationships between council officers and many CVS organisations. Ongoing challenges include building mutual trust and, as priorities evolve and change, finding ways of ensuring CVS representation reflects this change. The election process for Forum membership strengthened sector representation but the process by itself may arguably now be too rigid for an evolving process. One of the sector's strengths is its flexibility and responsiveness which might be better facilitated through the 'open call' model presented in the report.

Nicholas McCrickard Manager with the County Down Rural Community Network which works across Newry, Mourne and Down (NMD) and Ards and North Down. Reflecting on the Network's experience in NMD Nicholas referred to the two forms of CVS representation outlined in the report and how these facilitated CVS participation in the Community Planning

Key Learning from Break-out Discussions

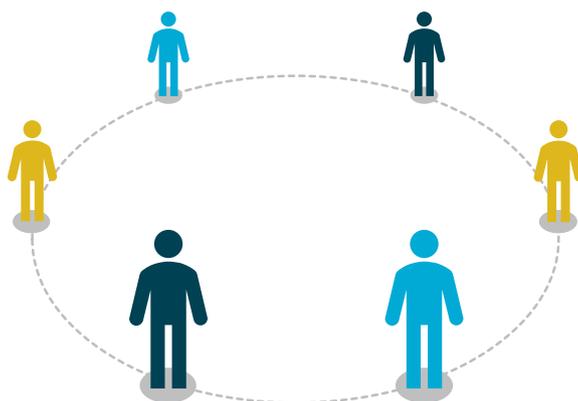
Participants were allocated to seven smaller breakout rooms and asked to discuss:

‘Reflecting on what you have learned in the past few months, please identify three lessons for how communities and Community Planning partners can strengthen relationships’.

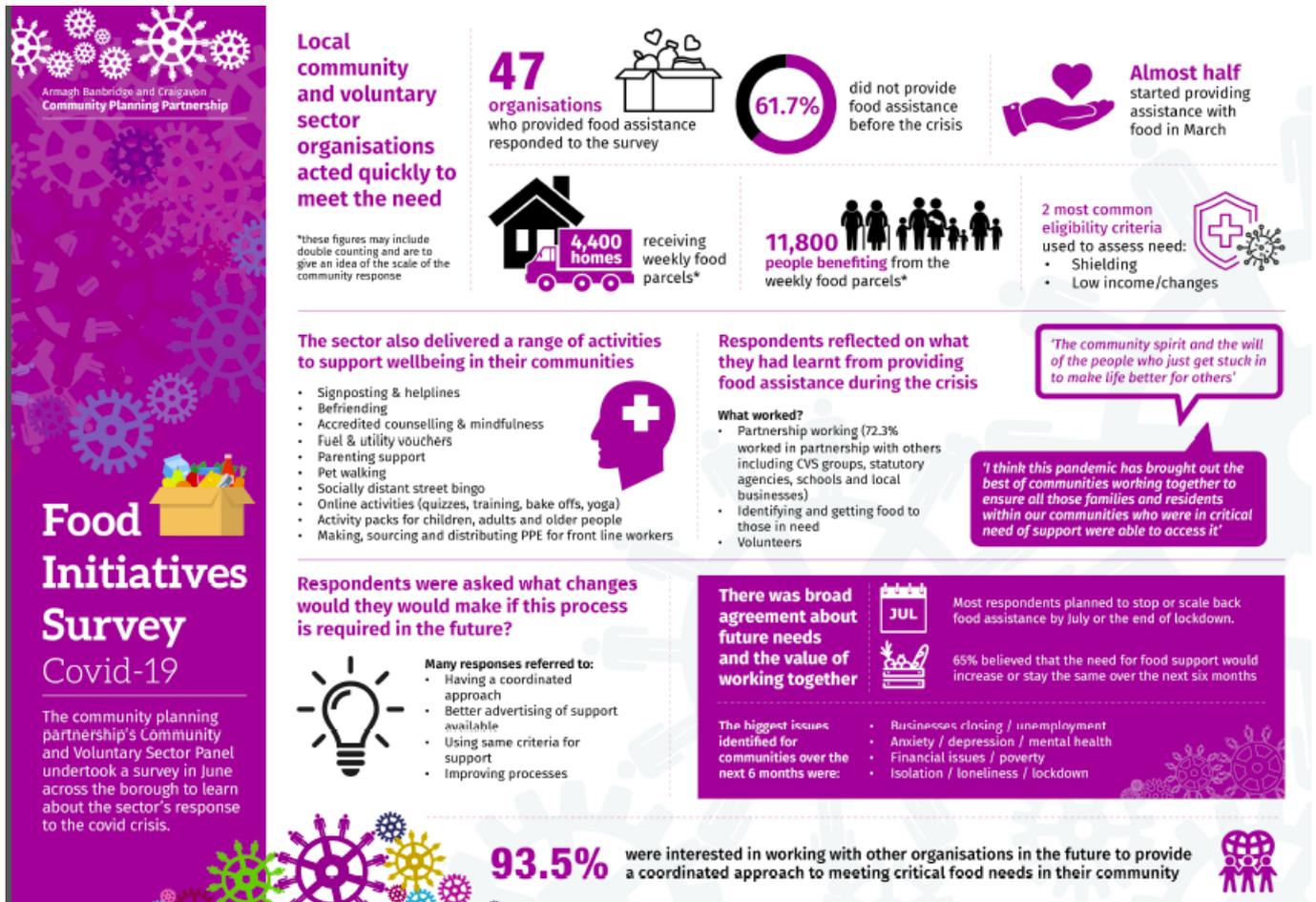
Lessons commonly cited during feedback included:

- The CVS in particular and Community Planning partners have better information on needs in local communities and this must inform priorities going forward.
- Greater recognition of the CVS and its abilities and capability is very welcome but needs to be lasting.
- The CVS should be afforded more meaningful and equal opportunities to participate in Community Planning and decision-making at a regional level.
- The CVS needs sustainable, core support to enable it to realise its full potential.

- In some cases, there may be value in assessing whether the model used for CVS representation supports the flexibility and responsiveness of the CVS and will nurture the newly realised energy in local communities.
- The COVID crisis has highlighted the urgent need to provide access to good broadband for people and communities in need (especially in rural areas).
- The crisis has demonstrated that Councils and other statutory bodies can collaborate with the CVS and take decisions quickly – this trust and responsiveness needs to endure beyond the crisis.



Appendix (i) - COVID Community Responses Survey



The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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This report was written by Community Places

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