

Our ref AN/00

Date 15/04/17

Mike Hedges AC/AM
Cadeirydd/ Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff

Dear Mike Hedges AM

Petition: P-05-705 Planning decisions taking due regard of the impact on, or closure of, local community groups and voluntary organisations.

Thank you for your letter seeking WCVA's views on the scale of the issues raised by the above petition. In developing this response, we have consulted colleagues in County Voluntary Councils (CVCs).

Access to affordable spaces where community and voluntary groups can meet and undertake activities is hugely important and a foundation for many groups.

We are aware of examples where developments which are subject to planning have impacted negatively on voluntary groups.

Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) has recently supported groups in relation to two developments which have threatened voluntary and community activity. PAVS is supporting two community groups in their efforts to negotiate continued use of a church hall in light of new development plans for the church.

PAVS is also working to support Transition Bro Gwaun, a community project in Abergwaun, Fishguard that uses surplus waste from supermarkets to produce food in a community café. Their future is now threatened by a new road development. Despite having been offered alternative premises, the costs of refurbishment are proving prohibitive. PAVS is now working with the project to secure funds for new premises, but it is difficult.

Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS) has been contacted by Friends of Stepping Stones about their concerns in light of redevelopment plans. The charity exists to provide additional funding for the Stepping Stones Children's Centre to maximise the services it provides for disabled children and their families in Swansea. The charity understands that the building where the Centre is currently based is being sold and may be redeveloped. Trustees are concerned that the future location of the Centre will put at risk the ongoing success of the project.

However, it is not clear from the level of enquiries and requests for support received by WCVA and CVCs that this is a large scale issue for groups across Wales.



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Rhyl ac Aberystwyth



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There are some examples where the system has supported new community buildings or where local authorities are increasing engagement with community groups. Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) is aware that the Scout Hut in Llandrindod Wells was closed as part of the Tesco development, but also that it was replaced by a new youth centre constructed as part of Tesco's community benefit payment related to the development.

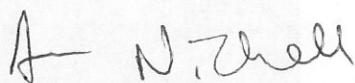
In Conwy, Community and Voluntary Support Conwy (CVSC) has developed positive relationships with Conwy Council planning team and are now sent any planning applications that may affect children and their play. The CVC is also working with planning officers to support improved consultation in relation to other areas of voluntary and community activity, such as youth provision and youth clubs. Early engagement with voluntary and community and access to information supports good decision making and there may be opportunities for more local authorities to work with CVCs to support this engagement.

There are a number of factors that can result in the loss of community buildings and community facilities. Reduced funding and withdrawal of funding can lead to buildings previously being used by community and voluntary groups no longer being viable. Many public bodies are struggling to maintain assets that have previously been important resources for the community. Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) recently ran a successful Community Asset Transfer pilot. The findings suggest that there are cost effective ways of empowering more third sector organisations to manage community assets previously managed by public bodies.

In summary, voluntary and community activity is sometimes negatively affected by developments which require planning permission. However, we do not have evidence to suggest that this affects third sector organisations on a significant scale across Wales.

I hope this supports the Committee in its considerations. Please do contact me at anicholl@wcva.org.uk or on the number above if you would like to any further information.

Yours sincerely



Anna Nicholl
Director of Strategy and Sector Development