Partners for progress

The voluntary sector's manifesto for Senedd 2026

WCVA
CGGC





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Cover: No Fit State Circus offer circus and creative activities for the local community, giving volunteers the opportunity to develop unique skills and improve their wellbeing

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Left: Snowdonia Society exploring opportunities for developing skills and creating jobs that support nature recovery

We are urging the next Welsh Government to introduce a Voluntary Sector Partnership (Wales) Act – building on and accelerating existing commitments to unlock fairer funding, embed collaboration and empower the sector to thrive.

This manifesto represents the collective voice of Wales' voluntary sector, born of engagement with, and insight from, volunteers, partners, stakeholders and networks.

It sets out a clear call: the next Welsh Government must work in equal partnership with the voluntary sector to build a better Wales.

WHO WE ARE

We are the beating heart of communities in Wales.

Voluntary organisations are powerful. There are more than 46,000 groups in Wales and a third of our adult population volunteer. From food banks to youth clubs, mental health support to climate action, community transport to domestic abuse services, employability to end-of-life care – we are everywhere people need us.

We are not an ‘add-on’ – we are essential. A primary ingredient in ensuring Wales thrives.

We are clear: no government can deliver a more prosperous, fairer, healthier and bilingual Wales without us. We always have been – and continue to be – ready to work side-by-side with public bodies on a local, regional and national basis.

We facilitate. We collaborate. We lead. We deliver.

It is time to re-focus and re-energise our work with government. We are here to shape solutions and the next Senedd term is an opportunity to mark a new chapter – one where the voluntary sector is engaged early, funded fairly and empowered fully.

OUR OFFER TO WALES

Connection with communities

Voluntary organisations are rooted in the communities we serve. We are born of local need, shaped by lived experience and trusted by the people we support. This makes us uniquely placed to bridge the gap between public institutions and community members.

Embedded social value

Social value is not an ‘add-on’ – it is our purpose and in our DNA. It is written into our governing documents, monitored by trustees and delivered in every action we take. We exist to improve lives, strengthen communities and create a fairer Wales.

Innovation and adaptability

We are well-versed in creative problem-solving, service design and engagement, bringing fresh ideas and agile approaches to long-standing challenges.

Expertise and insight

We are in constant dialogue with service users, building a deep knowledge of social issues. Our expertise helps decision-makers tackle complex challenges, co-create effective policies, and deliver better outcomes.

Support for public services

From prevention and rehabilitation to community transport, patient discharge, employability, childcare – and more – we provide essential support that complements and relieves pressure on public services.

Specialist services

Many voluntary organisations are the sole providers of specialist support. From peer support groups for rare diseases to domestic violence shelters and social welfare charities, we provide invaluable support to our service users and have a huge social impact.

OUR BOUNDARIES

Wales' voluntary sector is indispensable – but it is under strain.

We cannot provide our services for free

Our services may be free or low-cost to the public, but they are not free to run. Volunteers need support. Helplines need answering. Services need funding. Even unpaid work comes with costs.

There are challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, trustees and volunteers

Charities are often unable to keep up with wages in other sectors and many are forced to only offer short-term contracts. Additionally, trustees and volunteers are harder to find and keep, while the cost-of-living crisis forces people to prioritise paid work. The sector's work and volunteer-force are stretched thin.

Public contracts don't cover the true cost of delivery

Many charities deliver specialist services for government, but contracts and grants often fall short. Inflation, overheads and fair wages must be built into funding – we cannot keep plugging gaps with dwindling reserves or donations.

Demand is soaring

Demand for support is growing and needs are becoming more complex. Without timely, preventative action, pressure on public services will intensify. Voluntary organisations are already delivering early interventions across health, social care and well-being, and other areas. With the right support, we can help people sooner, reduce crisis demand and improve long-term outcomes.

We are ready to help – but we need our seat at the table

We are not just service providers – we are equal and strategic partners. Early, regular and ongoing dialogue with government and the public sector is essential if we are to tackle Wales' biggest challenges together.

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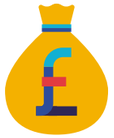
Below: Splott Community Volunteers manage the STAR Centre - a bustling hub for local residents, which hosts many activities, including a weekly Breakfast Club



OUR CENTRAL ASK

We are calling on the next Welsh Government to introduce legislation via a Voluntary Sector Partnership (Wales) Act – building on and accelerating work on how the voluntary sector is funded, engaged and empowered.

The Act aims to create the conditions for the sector to thrive by embedding fair funding, strengthening volunteering and formalising partnership standards with Welsh Government, local authority and health partners.



Fair funding duty

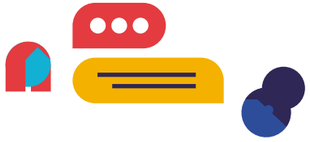


Volunteering duty



Communities duty

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP (WALES) ACT



Partnership duty



Oversight duty

A Voluntary Sector Partnership (Wales) Act helps us tackle some of Wales' biggest challenges – together

Reducing inequality

Voluntary organisations are rooted in communities and trusted by those most affected by inequality. With the right legal, policy and financial backing, we can help target the root causes and not just the symptoms of inequality.

Promoting health and well-being

The voluntary sector is a vital part of the response to:

- → **improving health and wellbeing outcomes**
- → **providing early-stage support at a point that prevents escalation**
- → **reducing pressures in health, well-being and social care services**

Building cohesive communities

Voluntary organisations play a crucial role in developing a sense of belonging, connection and resilience.
From anti-racism to promoting Cymraeg and safeguarding and advancing human rights, we will continue working to reduce isolation, challenge discrimination and create spaces where everyone feels seen, heard, safe and valued.



Left: National initiative Nature Together is tackling some of the most urgent conservation crises in Wales *Photo credit: Will Hawkes*

Right: Young people get the opportunity to meet sporting hero Steve Robinson as part of a diversity in sport event

Tackling the climate and nature emergency

From national policy experts to local eco and environmental groups, our sector is already driving change. With the right support, we can help Wales mitigate and adapt to the climate and nature emergency – and ensure no community is left behind.

Unlocking the potential of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

The next Senedd term is a chance to re-imagine how we work together on this ground-breaking Act to bring about better long-term outcomes. Voluntary organisations are committed partners, ready to help shift the dial and deliver sustainable, joined-up solutions that put people and planet first.

THE FIVE DUTIES

We're proposing five duties under the Voluntary Sector Partnership (Wales) Act.



Communities duty

Our communities are rich in ideas, energy and resilience, but too often they lack the tools to forge their own futures. Access to shared spaces is patchy. Community-led services are underfunded. And the systems meant to support local action are slow, unclear or inconsistent. We need a framework that enables communities to thrive and unlocks their power.

A communities duty does just that. Co-produced with the voluntary sector, it would provide clear direction, funding and guidance to support:

- → **Community assets – including a 'Community Right to Buy' and accelerated asset transfer processes**
- → **Community resilience – enabling local energy projects, and building emergency response capacity**
- → **Community cohesion – tackling disconnection and division through preventative action**
- → **Community services – ensuring equal access to well-being support across all areas and demographics**



Fair funding duty

Short-term, reactive funding cycles hold us back. They limit strategic planning, destabilise staffing and drain precious resource through constant bidding and reporting. This affects not just the voluntary sector, but our ability to work effectively with public services.

A fair funding duty changes that.

- → **It makes core, multi-year, inflation-linked funding with full-cost recovery the default**
- → **Underpinned by the revised Funding Code of Practice, it also helps put a preventative agenda front-and-centre, reducing bureaucracy, enabling retention of skilled staff and unlocking long-term, meaningful impact**



Volunteering duty

Volunteering doesn't just happen. It needs structure, support and resources. Right now, people's lives are changing as they adapt to higher living costs and other challenges. Volunteers and potential volunteers face changing barriers to participation, and organisations lack the resources and capacity to adapt in response. This makes it difficult to recruit, train and retain volunteers.

A volunteering duty changes that.

- → **It puts the New Approach to Volunteering in Wales on a statutory footing**
- → **With targeted investment aimed at reducing existing barriers, it will improve the accessibility of opportunities to volunteer. Volunteers deserve more than thanks. They deserve a system that backs them and supports the communities they serve**

Partnership duty

The voluntary sector is a trusted, independent partner – not just a stakeholder to consult. For over a decade, the Third Sector Scheme has provided a formal mechanism for engagement with Welsh Government. It has been valuable, but it is time for a refresh. The sector's insight, reach and expertise are underused – and Wales misses out as a result.

A partnership duty changes that.

- → **It refreshes the Third Sector Scheme with clear, enforceable standards for engagement, accountability and data sharing between the voluntary sector, Welsh Government, local authority and health partners**
- → **It draws on the evolving best practice across the UK's nations and ensures the sector is embedded in decision-making – early, consistently and with purpose**
- → **A partnership duty ensures we are invited to the table early, heard when we get there, and shape delivery alongside partners.**



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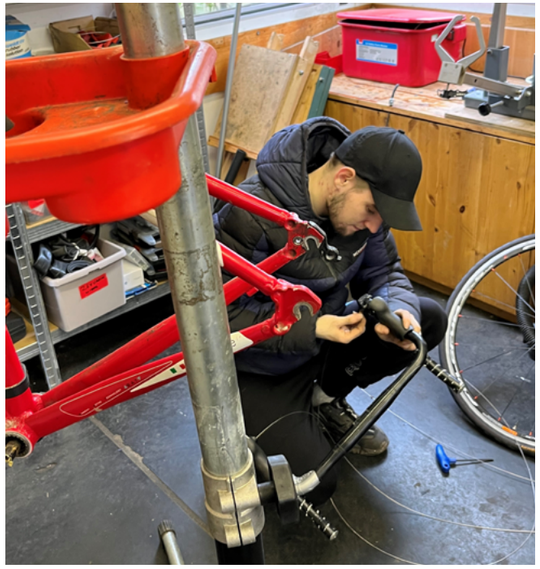
Caption: Eleeza Khan, the Chair of the Football Association of Wales Youth Council, which represents the voice of children and young people and inspires them to participate and volunteer in football

Oversight duty

Transparency and accountability are essential to building trust and to ensuring that commitments to the voluntary sector are followed through. We need to be able to track progress, identify gaps and continually improve practice.

An oversight duty does that.

- → **It would monitor compliance and recommend improvements by requiring annual public reporting on funding and performance across Welsh Government and public bodies**



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Above: Cycling4All helps young people of all abilities in Wrexham to build confidence and gain skills through lending and maintaining bikes, socialising and accessing off-road cycling

We are ready. We are willing. We are essential in tackling Wales' biggest challenges.

The onset of the 7th Senedd term is an opportunity to be bold and ambitious. That's why this manifesto calls for momentum through the introduction of a **Voluntary Sector Partnership (Wales) Act** – legislation that secures fair funding, strengthens volunteering, formalises partnership, and unlocks community power.

Let's be partners for progress, and turn ambition into action. Ewch amdani!

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