

Wales: Discussion with Anna Nicholl, Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, and Jessica Blair, Electoral Reform Society Cymru

Purpose of the meeting:

- Understand the challenges and success of the programme to date to be able to develop a dream statement that can act as a focus for future dialogue
- Identify any projects/activities beyond those that are already listed on the wiki

Dialogue

- Anna, Director of Strategy and Sector Development, has overall responsibility for overseeing the Open Government Pioneers project work in Wales. Up to April 2018, this work was supported by an Open Government Officer (2 days per week), managed by WCVA.
- Scottish Government approached Welsh colleagues and a roundtable with the government and third sector, led by Doreen Grove, was organised to explore Open Government – Wales keen to be involved although there had been no previous background.
- Jessica, Director of ERS Cymru, was not involved in the set up but ERS is a lead partner in the Open Government Pioneers project in Wales. ERS were involved from the beginning, including developing the bid.
- Open Government a key interest for ERS

How does the Open Government Network work in Wales?

- Engagement with Welsh government is via Chief Digital Officer and civil servants
- Less political engagement at a Ministerial level
- Less push from civil society – different history of relationships between the third sector and government. There is a unique statutory commitment for Welsh Government to engage with the third sector through a Third Sector Scheme.
- Open Government has less resonance as civil society has been less involved in OG – playing catch up with Scotland and Northern Ireland
- Nature of funding for third sector – often project-based or government funded (which can put some constraint on challenging the status quo) as well as practical challenges about capacity and resources
- WCVA Data Hub, recently launched showed that levels of funding for the sector in Wales per head is half that of other parts of the UK
- Labour has been in power for 20 years – and consequently levels of apathy towards engagement from the public
- Not sufficient organisations to push back
- Example of the Brexit Continuity Bill – rushed through the Assembly and would have given significant powers to the Executive
- There is rhetoric about the importance of open government and its place in a devolved system but concept remains relatively new to Wales – lack of precedent

Reflections on the Reimagine Democracy conference (15 March)

- Lively and topical – challenge to draw out the relevance to other parts of the UK

Aims and objectives

- Ambitious – challenge to raise political awareness and identify clear progress
- Conflict (or tension) between open government and SDGs
- Not easy to demonstrate impact on legislation?
- Example of the Future Generations Act – Sustainable Development principles for all public organisations
- Complex piece of legislation with eight core principles, including Involvement
- Role of Future Generations Commissioner and the place of wellbeing principles that local authorities have a legal duty to report on – but little history of challenge to actual delivery
- Open Government is relevant to Wales – how to overcome deficit and articulate a stronger contribution to public life
- Vital to ensure people feel engaged
- Enable groups and individuals to engage with government – would we get there?
- Plan to be published in June – likely to have commitments which strengthen engagement and representation with involvement of both government and civil society
- Good equality work – Diverse Cymru (BAME representation, disability and equal opportunities), Youth Cymru (voluntary groups working with young people) and Interlink

Mapping and linking to other projects and activities

- Good connections to explore

Shaping a dream statement

- Strengthening engagement between civil society and government and tackling the democratic deficit
- Example of Equalities Budget Advisory Group which meets with Finance Minister
- Potential to link with the legacy of OGP
- Important for Wales to be doing this work

Dream statement: *Open Government Pioneers develops more robust engagement between government and society so that there is transparency and accountability about the delivery of the SDGs*