

Podcast: From Firefighting to Future Focus

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Alex Swift: Welcome. This is the Audit Wales Podcast. I'm joined by Kelly Huxley-Roberts and Rachel Marshall from Lloyds Bank Foundation, Bethan Webber from Cwmpas and Joe Rossiter from the Institute of Welsh Affairs. This podcast is about where money in Wales goes and the role that the third sector as well as the public sector play in responding to local needs.

To give some context, what are each of you doing in your roles around the issue of keeping money in communities and a need to safeguard assets like local charities or social enterprises?

RACHEL MARSHALL: Hello, I'm Rachel Marshall, I'm the funding manager for Wales for Lloyds Bank Foundation. Something that we are doing is really focusing on small and vital local charities and investing unrestricted funding into those organisations. So, we give charities the flexibility to spend that money how they wish and we really trust them as locally-based organisations to understand the needs in their community and know how to spend that money best. As well as that we provide wraparound development support to help them become more sustainable and stronger organisations, and we think that is really important as well.

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: Hi all, my name is Kelly. I work as the policy and partnerships manager for Lloyds Bank Foundation, so, I work with Rachel. My role is more focused on policy and partnership as the title would suggest. So, really, that means that my work is a bit more focused on strengthening relationships with diverse partners and trying to shape important conversations a bit more upstream, including at a national level at times. So, it's bridging that gap from the hyper-local really rooted work that the charity partners actually do, and then working with them to use that insight and experience to strengthen relationships and conversations on important issues.

We've been working in Wales coming up to 40 years, so, really, we have a bit of a responsibility to actually do something with all of that data and insight as well, So, that is where my role comes about, it's actually, let's do a bit more with what we have in Wales, all those relationships, all that data and advocate for the people, advocate the small and local charities that do amazing work.

JOE ROSSITER: Hi, I'm Joe Rossiter and I am the co-director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, or the IWA, which is Wales's leading independent think tank, we are independent on non-partisan, which I think is important in this space as well. As a think tank, we kind of zoom out on the more system-economic elements of this conversation really. Over the last decade, we've been at the forefront of lots of research on the foundational economy, those foundational services that really matter to people's liveability really and on community assets and community enterprises in their role in lifting up communities across Wales as well.

BETHAN WEBBER: Good morning everybody, I'm Bethan Webber, and I'm the chief exec of Cwmpas. Cwmpas is an economic development agency and we believe that the economy needs to work differently in Wales and beyond so that we have a more regenerative and less extractive model of wealth redistribution so that people and planet are more at the centre of the economy.

The way in which we are progressing and trying to move towards that is slowly but surely I hope through a range of different areas. We promote and provide support for a range of different business models, from social enterprises to more democratic models like employee ownership, and co-operatives; we are a co-op ourselves and have a really strong foundation in the cooperative movement, and community wealth-building and community shares programmes. We also work with a range of other bodies providing advice, guidance and support, local authorities, for example in the space of social value and innovation. Again, just centring on the role of communities and social and more democratic business models.

ALEX SWIFT: Thank you all. A big part of this is around procurement. In your view, what role can procurement play in promoting well-being and what approaches can local authorities take to shift from purely focusing on economically advantageous tender to focusing on what is advantageous for communities overall?

RACHEL MARSHALL: Something that the charities that we work with in Wales tell us is that they are being really crippled by the amount of administration that comes alongside the contracts that they are working on. So, it would definitely

help promote well-being if they could remove some of the red tape around the process in terms of procurement. Once a contract has been won by a small and local organisation then have appropriate monitoring requirements, so, proportionate to the amount of funding that the organisations are getting and help build that trust with the local providers. They're on the ground, they are small and local organisations, they really understand the community. The value that they bring to the community needs to be understood by commissioners.

We saw during the pandemic that small and local organisations were agile and flexible and were able to adapt and change what they did really quickly to adapt to local needs. Research that we produced at Lloyds Bank Foundation really highlighted it; not only did they show up, but they have stuck around in communities, so, they're not transporting in from other places, they are locally-based organisations, and that really needs to be valued within the commissioning process.

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: Yes, as Rachel said, the role in the sector, whether it is social enterprise or charities, it is absolutely vital with facing such big social challenges. Some of those enterprises and charities are really rooted in communities and have their route to overcoming some of those challenges in ways that other bodies can't. I think procurement processes tie people up in bureaucracy which makes it difficult for some organisations, particularly the smaller ones to apply for in the first place or to engage with those processes. Actually, also, they focus on the wrong things and we welcome the Social Partnerships Act and obviously the intention that it has set, but there are still examples even where guidance and sort of procurement ethos has shifted within statutory bodies, there are still examples where when you filter down to those making some of the smaller decisions in the procurement process.

It is the value of the Welsh pound as well, isn't it? Having that redistributed model of wealth where investing in a different way, in the businesses that are around, can have such a high impact. We saw a really good example of that in the Transport for Wales uniform contract going to social enterprise ELITE, up in the Welsh Valleys. So, there are some good examples as well as bad but it is not just the procurement processes themselves, but actually also statutory bodies highlighting where supply chains aren't there. Often, the procurement process may be there and the culture might be right, but actually, we still lack some of the supply chain businesses in Wales. Again, how can we work together to identify those and really strengthen the supply chains closer to home?

JOE ROSSITER: There is something here around acknowledging the increasing value of vital services that a community and small organisations are playing at the moment as well, and what is the long-term view of what should be services that are within the public sector and which aren't. There are so many examples where these small charities and social enterprises are making up for what you would expect to be basic services that the public sector should be able to deliver. Whether that is, I guess the best example of that is how food bank proliferation across Wales and the rest of the UK has skyrocketed, is that the way that we want our economy to work? I note that the Trussell Trust very much explicitly state that they don't really want to exist in the medium term and that public services should form that baseline of what is a liveable life and basic well-being.

Beyond that, I think that we have learned quite a bit around procurement more broadly from the process of going from EU funding mechanisms to post-EU funding mechanisms and that the replacement funds, whether that is shared prosperity or levelling up; I guess it's a level up from what we are talking about, but there is a lot of learning in how you embed good practice when you are commissioning lots of different services at all different levels. The two things that really strike me in that is that; what do organisations need? They need an adequate level of funding for the services that they are being asked to provide and they also need long-term certainty to build sustainability into their organisation.

Zooming out from a broader perspective, we all see the value of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, we see all of the aspirations and all of the ways that it is meant to be mainstreamed across the public sector. We see in procurement decisions now, that it is not really being seen in what we're viewing. I'm hopeful that the Social Partnership and Public Procurements Act may indicate a shift, but it won't indicate a shift unless there is a system like political and policy overview of whether it is working or not. I guess the proof is, does it lead to better services being delivered and a bit more of a stronger architecture of organisations orientated around those kinds of well-being-aligned missions as well?

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: You asked, Alex, about the move to the most advantageous tender. Basically, they take out the word economically, haven't they, from previous policy and legislation, where it said most economically advantageous. Now they have removed that word and it is a broader interpretation of what advantageous could mean.

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I suppose that is where we're at now, this is literally a live conversation, isn't it, where I think it is really important at this point to make sure we are having diverse voices at the table in terms of building understanding about what does that mean. I think in particular, if we are thinking about what services are for, they don't exist, just to exist, they exist to help people. So, those people who are actually using services, who are actually delivering them, they are the people with the lived experience and expertise whose opinion should really be forming judgment calls on, is this a valuable or advantageous piece of work that is going on? So, I think that is a big thing, actually bringing people together, bringing in that lived experience, trying to build a bit more common understanding of what does a commissioner mean by most advantageous; what does a service user mean by most advantageous; what does a civil servant mean by most advantageous? Whoever we are talking about, what do these different people understand by that term?

BETHAN WEBBER: Going back to Joe's point about services and who provides them. Yes, the foodbank example obviously has its nuances. But there are areas where I think services are moving into the sector and probably for the better of the service. However, there is not that clarity around why, it is almost like the sector is picking things up where the investment isn't there. That is not the right way, the services need to be invested in regardless of where the best place in our ecosystem is to deliver them.

I think one example would be the care side of things where we can see massive opportunity for co-operatives and social enterprises to take on and the removing profit from the care agenda speaks to that as well. However, the Audit Wales Report, An Opportunity Missed, kind of flags that most local authorities are not complying with Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being Act, which puts a duty on them to ensure that they are looking at different models such as social enterprise for care. So, there are areas where I think it is probably for the better outcomes for people if a different sector picks up the responsibility for delivering services but it has to be done for the right reasons, with clarity and investment.

I think on the other points really around procurement decisions and I think just highlighting through various different forums that I am in, the risks to the sector. So, the sector is such a vital part of delivery in the times that we are in. We're living in a permacrisis, where those grounded organisations in communities can play such a strong role in keeping quality of life for people in amongst all of the challenges; poverty being high up there. But some of the recent procurement decisions, or not necessarily procurement decisions, but budgetary decisions made. We're in a financial time that is unprecedented, in my career anyway.

We've seen some decisions in the draft budget before Christmas that really knocked the sector.

I think thankfully, certainly, in our experience, the final budget was better than the draft, but it highlighted the risks and the lack of awareness in public procurers, of the impact of sudden change. So, a 50% cut in the budget a day before the announcement of the budget; luckily, that decision was reversed and I think some others were as well. The impact that has on the core of an organisation, not just the service where you can redesign it and make it smaller and scale it down, but actually the impact of that on a core budget and the viability of the sector.

One of my biggest fears I suppose is that the climate we're in, if these decisions are taken without that full understanding, will decimate some of the key organisations that are really providing valuable services and support within communities. I think having that understanding of the risks and then the understanding of the impact of those decisions in a more rounded way on organisations is really fundamental as well.

ALEX SWIFT: Another important point in this discussion, is the need to move away from firefighting, which is in simple terms defined as a short-term solution to long-term issues. What are some potential ways of securing the long-term future of the charitable and third sector in Wales whilst saving the public sector money?

JOE ROSSITER: I just wanted to come in, in terms of some of the problems of firefighting. I think we, as an organisation that doesn't deliver frontline services but instead, looks at the systems and the economic system behind frontline services and people's experiences of life in Wales, is that actually, there is a need to provide funding for vital services that are needed. There is a great deal of hardship and acute need in communities across Wales. Some of these problems, I guess, end up being sticking plaster solutions to what are increasingly gaping wounds in communities. Ultimately, sometimes, there is a need to look away from the firefighting approach and say, okay, what we're looking at is actually something that is a bit more of a systems-wide approach and change.

I think it is really important that organisations; I guess I would say this, organisations like the IWA and those that are thinking on a systems level have a longer-term funding settlement that enables a bit of autonomy around suggesting some radical solutions to how we can transform the way that this whole ecosystem works. I think that is pretty vital to think about when we're thinking about going against the firefighting approach. It's understanding why we are stuck in this whole firefighting cycle really.

I guess some of the things that I would think of as alternatives to firefighting would be funders I guess in this as key whether that is the public sector, whether it's organisations like Lloyds Bank Foundation, for example, is that only the long-term trust placed in organisations. You can't be constantly having one or two years of stability with your funding settlement and have any kind of security as an organisation and that really downplays the role of these organisations and where they are set up.

Actually, giving organisations long-term commitments and security and trust, means that the organisation delivers more because they've got organisational learning, they are more resilient, and they keep members of staff. They're able to invest in making their services better and being really clear on what their mission is in the communities that they serve and being really explicit on what you're expecting on the role of these small community organisations is vital to; Speaking to what Bethan said, is what their role is in an environment in which the public sector has faced 15 years of cuts which means that community organisations are trying to step in to tackle that acute need.

I think that trust is really important, and us, as the IWA, we've had good experiences and bad experiences with funders, but the ones that I come back to and think, yes, that was a really positive relationship, are those that trusted us. They gave us core costs so that we could do what we felt were in the needs of, in our space, Wales. But for other organisations, it would be a distinct need in their communities as well. So, those are some of the ways I would look at that, firefighting.

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: If I could jump in on that as well. Just going back to some earlier remarks about the Social Partnership and Procurement Act and various other seemingly progressive bits of legislation in Wales, like the fact the socioeconomic duty is being enacted. The Well-being of Future Generations Act everyone talks about and the focus is on the well-being economy. That is a big one, all of these things are coalescing. I think a point here around firefighting and the role that procurement can play, and how money moves and all this, is the fair work element of the Procurement Act that is a really big element. It should extend to delivery partners and that seems such an obvious point to make but actually, it might be that simple, actually, pay people properly; pay people for the work they're doing.

I know the third sector is a tricky one because it is a voluntary sector. Sometimes people say voluntary sector, thinking that everything happens on goodwill, but all of these things cost money. Managing people costs money, providing adequate

support and well-being stuff costs money, time is money. There are all sorts of aspects, putting in bids, doing the admin of that; all sorts of coordination costs, whatever. Then the actual delivery, then the actual materials you might need, there is so much. Then you add in minimum wage increases which it is a good thing people are offered a decent wage but people have to pay for that, charities and businesses need to pay for that. So, factoring in uplifts proportionate to the work and having that flexibility for people to adapt the budget when needed, to be part of that. I think the fair work element is a really key part of preventing this constant kind of firefighting.

Just think, if we want to have this well-being economy and all of this progressive stuff at a super-high level, which is great. Well, actually, people need paying, they need to be able to justify doing that activity that day, so, that they can live.

BETHAN WEBBER: Yes, pay people and give them some security. I absolutely echo everything that has been said so far. I think beyond that, a couple of points really, we are not an add-on as a sector. We should be seen as the go-to sector really and the potential to leverage the sector for greater impact is huge. We are still seen as a tick box in many ways to fulfil the requirements of certain legislation if people actually follow the duties that are on them.

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I think to leverage the potential for greater impact, handing over some autonomy, that trust. A lot of the work that we do in the third sector and in the social enterprise sector is based on relationships locally. It is the reason why it works; it is the reason why we can have a greater impact in communities because there is trust, we're closer to people, and there is passion. Often the reason people stick with it is because they are so passionate, they often bring lived experience. They have great insight into what people need, they can see the potential as well as the challenges within communities in ways that others can't. We're not trusted on that basis, and the relationship between the funder and the organisation often doesn't quite mimic the relationship that you have on the ground, which is fundamental really as human beings.

Zooming out a bit, moving to a preventative investment system or approach is really needed. We need to be looking at how to redefine the way we work with communities, how we redefine the economy for greater prosperity locally, and I think be a bit more innovative and risk-taking in that approach as well. I don't think in the conversations that I have generally with the public sector that people really know where to start. There are such systemic problems, the foodbank, for

example, is a good one. I think in many of the services that we see, people are not getting the outcomes that they want despite huge amounts of investment in health and care, even in education to an extent. We kind of need to redefine the way we're doing things, and to do that, we've got to be really brave. I don't necessarily see that bravery coming through at the moment if I'm honest.

RACHEL MARSHALL: I completely agree with everything everybody has said. We see that ourselves in the charities that we support. We as a foundation completely agree with what Joe has said. Our research within the sector, as has been said that the sector needs unrestricted funding and longer-term funding. We had a blip during Covid where we had to make short-term grants because we had to be agile the same as the charity sector delivering the services had to be agile. We have now gone back to a three-year grant cycle. So, three years of security and our funding are now completely unrestricted. So, it even goes beyond core funding, so, if the organisations we fund want to put it into their reserves to create some financial security for the future, then they are able to do that with our funding as well.

To the point that Bethan made in terms of the prevention work, that is something else that we see quite frequently as well, contracts are for the firefighting or the point of crisis that somebody presents with. But the charities we support have the solutions at their fingertips to that longer-term work. Their hands have been tied and they can't do the prevention work that they know needs to happen within their communities to prevent people falling through the cracks in future.

We are also, as well as providing funding, we are also trying to take more of a systemic approach though. We are working in six communities, one in Wales, one in Merthyr Tydfil and five in England, trying to address some of those systemic issues and look at how communities can do things differently with the resources that they've got available, so, trying to do more with less.

In Merthyr, they focused on children and young people's mental health as a particular focus on that work. We're almost coming to the mid-point; we are almost 5 years into a 10-year programme in terms of exploring that. So, we are trying to take a longer-term approach in terms of coming up with solutions.

ALEX SWIFT: Thank you all. A lot of this has to do with the social function that the third sector can play. In what ways have crises, like the cost-of-living crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic affected your work and that of the charitable and third sector? To add to that, how can these organisations adapt in the face of challenges?

BETHAN WEBBER: I think a lot of builds on what we have just been talking about really, I think during the pandemic, we changed because we had to. It showed the power and the potential of our ability to do things differently, both within organisations and with some funders. Funding became much more easy to access, much more quickly with far less bureaucracy around it, because the need was there to get the money out. I would argue that actually, that had a really strong approach, that could be mimicked for the longer term. I don't see that the need for urgent support is any less in communities, the impact of the pandemic still continues to roll, and we're still dealing with the fallout socially and economically.

I think there is strong potential to continue to build on what we learned about the way we can do things differently there and that applies both to funders as well as organisations where we pivoted services, we adapted technologically, far more quickly. Let's make no mistake about it; I agree with Kelly's point around how we slow things down a bit. Because I think we have to otherwise the sector is going to burn out for a start.

Actually, the pace of change around isn't going to slow any time soon and we can see accelerating tech advancement in a way that is unprecedented and even the biggest experts can't keep up with each other. The climate crisis is accelerating and the impacts of that are continuing to roll. We've got political uncertainty and financial instability, so, there is a whole range of things we're having to deal with at pace and I think it still demands almost the response that we put in place collectively during the pandemic.

RACHEL MARSHALL: Yes, I would agree with everything Bethan said there, there were a couple of points in particular. What we are seeing within the sector at the minute with the small charities we are working with is that people are almost slipping back into their old habits or the bureaucracy is creeping back in. There are much more stringent monitoring requirements and we're feeling that sort of shift in power that we had during Covid where the trust was passed over to local organisations just to get on and do what they knew they needed to do best has been lost slightly. So, we are slightly concerned about that.

We are starting to see some of those well-being impacts so; we're getting a lot of leadership changes within the small organisations that we work with both within the staff team but also within the trustee boards of small charities. So, people who have been through Covid initially and then the cost-of-living crisis who are burning out and commissioners who haven't got any more money in the coffers to

play uplifts on their contracts so that they can meet those minimum wage heavier burdens in terms of the minimum wage requirements.

We are seeing some real creativity and innovation as well. With the cost-of-living crisis, there is one of the small charities that we are working with that had no more income, and couldn't increase the salary in terms of trying to retain the really good staff that they've got. So, they decided from both an income point of view and also a well-being point of view to put everybody on an 80% contract hours. So, the staff are maintaining their salaries, but they're getting a day off a week which they can obviously spend with their families or take up a second job if they need to in terms of their own family expenditure. So, we are seeing some real creativity in terms of how small organisations are adapting to the cost-of-living crisis at the minute.

JOE ROSSITER: I just wanted to highlight some new research from the Building Communities Trust Wales that spoke to exactly some of these challenges. I think above what everyone else has also said, you've seen community organisations understandably suffer from mission creep, whereby more complex needs are coming to them because the public sector isn't delivering them. They have basically been mobilised during this moment. As Bethan said, there are so many good stories of what the third and community sector did during the pandemic but now, we are not in that position. I think there is something around the positive side of how quickly the third sector was able to mobilise during that moment of crisis. During that pandemic period, how much did we hear we need to build back better? It feels like, okay, that moment of optimism amongst the really grand challenge has completely disappeared.

For example, the one I come back to is homelessness. Homelessness in Wales was pretty much eradicated supposedly, if you believe the stats, which you know, you have to. What has happened? We've come back and people are living on the streets and people are in precarious housing. So, I think there is a moment to look back and think actually, how can we orientate government and therefore organisations underpinning government at a community level; what is your role in facilitating tackling grand challenges that Wales is facing which is across the board? The economy is not working for people, people are in sub-standard housing, and we are not prepared for a climate crisis. All these different challenges; why are government not set up to tackle these grand challenges and bring in those that are at the frontline of service delivery to inform on what communities need to tackle grand challenges such as homelessness?

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So, I think there is something to be said of the fact that that was a moment to look to a more ambitious policy agenda and a more ambitious future for the third sector as well. So, there is that really negative picture, which is understandable, but there is also a positive picture underplaying that and I feel that we might have breezed past because we're too busy getting back out of the house and getting back to business as usual. But maybe, there is a moment to look back and think maybe we should have analysed what we did well there, and what we can build on when we are not in a crisis moment, although I would argue we're in several crisis moments now anyway.

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: One thing I wanted to pick up was that on the original question Alex. You were saying how during times of crisis, different sectors adapt and moving forward, what challenges and how different sectors should adapt again moving forward, and Bethan, you mentioned AI as well. I think there are a few things coming up, but one thing that I keep hearing about is everybody talking about lived experience, and I think that is key to the solutions: very much key. That is what we saw with the level of adaptability and responsiveness that was shown in times of Covid. Actually, there is a dormant power that is always there in communities, and when push comes to shove, if all governments disappear, people would still do stuff, wouldn't they?

I think there is a power there and lived experience there and that is natural authority. And actually, that experience, that dormant power that is inherent to people, inherent to communities, whatever systems, and words we layer over it, there is a power there and an authority with it. So, I think lived experience does matter and we do need to channel that more effectively. I think that should not be extractive.

ALEX SWIFT: Okay, thank you all. Just to finish off, to end on a question that is deliberately open to interpretation. What is one thing you would like to see change in approaches to procurement and community development by local authorities?

KELLY HUXLEY-ROBERTS: For me, the key really is about respecting and valuing lived and learned experience. I think that really is essential, and we should be trusting communities and organisations to do what they do best. So, I think for me, that is the main point really. That translates in practice, to focus on the quality of an intervention, thinking about the longer-term value for money rather than immediate cost saving. So, I think focus on quality and respect of lived experience really.

BETHAN WEBBER: I'll come in I think it is a difficult question to answer in isolation because local authorities are part of an ecosystem, they play a very important part in ecosystems locally but they're part of a wider one. I think the points I would like to make probably apply to them as well as others. I think we've got to be really bold and brave in Wales. I think we have the potential; we have many of the elements that I can see give us the potential to really navigate a tricky period in history, undoubtedly and come out with some really positive, progressive stuff that leads the way. I think we've got to start by being really brave and bold and creating a vision of the Welsh way. We've got to stop the extractive model of inward investment and high growth that sees companies coming in and taking profit out of Wales, not just across the border to our nearest neighbours but quite far afield.

We are seeing that even in the realm of health now, where GP practices are being bought up, not just by other English companies but from America as well, where they see a viability and a commercialisation aspect to providing our healthcare. I think we have to resist some of that and look at what we do have in Wales which is a really strong community base. We have an SME sector predominately in the economy, and we have a strong foundation in the economy. I think if we flip it and really take that co-productive angle of looking at what are the aspects that we do have, what are the things that the community can bring? Share the power, and move the power out of local authorities, health boards, and governments. Even organisations like ours, an intermediary sub-national body. Give the power to people locally to determine what better looks like for them, invest in them, and allow them to define what a local well-being economy could look like.

I really think they've got to take some risk in that and do some innovative stuff, start somewhere, and see where it takes us, but I think we have such potential to define the Welsh way, and really see prosperity come through in a different way that maybe leads the way for other small nations. So, that would be my hope.

JOE ROSSITER: Yes, I would echo that. We've been a bit doom and gloomy but I guess there is that architecture and the policy is there in Wales in a way that isn't in lots of other small nations whether it's the well-being of future gens, whether it's social partnerships. It's about making them work. I think that is a positive place to be starting from, we are not on the defensive, we're actually on the offensive. I think part of that is speaking to what you were saying, Bethan, around we need to make sure that we bring communities with us when we are undertaking procurement and community development. A big part of that is a shift from seeing communities as actors, not reactors to what, whether it is local

authorities or government are doing and essentially building in their long-term vision of them as part of that vision.

Also, the inward investment. We have done lots of about making the private money that is coming into Wales work for communities, specifically on renewables, but yes, is there a way of capturing some of that wealth that is coming in here that we need to some extent in regard to driving forward net zero and making that money work to build community resilience as well. So, there is part of that that I think needs to be brought in.

RACHEL MARSHALL: I love your vision, Bethan, of a Welsh way, I think that would be absolutely awesome and that sharing of power is something that we really advocate for and that strength base rather than a deficit model approach as well. I think it needn't all be on the community and voluntary sector. I think the commissioners need to step up and do things differently as well. Often they don't communicate very well with each other, so, they're not sharing best practices, amongst commissioning teams. They sometimes hardly even talk to the local organisations so they don't know what is going on around them. If they involved them at an earlier stage in terms of better communication and understanding of what is happening, locally, they could get them involved in setting the procurement agenda at an earlier stage. So, becoming more familiar with how charities and other small organisations work.

We've got examples, for instance, within local authorities where you have maybe got a social services department that is working really well in terms of referrals into small charities but the commissioners have no idea that that charity exists and they are overlooking them in terms of opportunities. So, there does need to be more joined-up thinking within commissioning teams as well.

BETHAN WEBBER: I think just to echo Joe's point really, there is an awful lot to be positive about and I think what would be great as well as part of that vision for doing things a different way is to really capitalise upon that sense of optimism and possibility. Because we can absolutely navigate the challenging times we're in. I think a lot of the points Rachel raised probably echo beyond the local actually as well; the communicating, coming together, collaborating more, supporting each other and being kind to each other through it all. We've got a legislative framework, there is broad political consensus compared to other parts of the world although I know we're in slightly more turbulent times here in Wales. There does tend to be a more stable political environment here, and lots of the potential we're smaller, and less complex than other places. There is an awful lot we can do, just by capitalising on the good work that is already going on and

there are lots of positive examples of local authorities really pushing the boundaries and doing things differently as well.