

Wales thematic priorities: collecting a broader set of public opinion for Wales' future funding priorities

Common goals for a more equal society

Summary findings report
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October 2018



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This report is divided in to 5 main sections, with the third section providing an analysis of the key dialogue findings.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Common goals for a more equal society. A summary findings report on Wales thematic priorities for the Big Lottery Fund Wales

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1. At a glance



This qualitative study was designed and delivered by Hopkins Van Mil (HVM), specialists in creating safe, independent and productive spaces for people to share their views. We facilitate engagement so that voices are heard, learning is shared and understanding achieved.

Purpose of this study

The Big Lottery Fund commissioned HVM to assist with involving the public in deciding upon future thematic priorities for 2019 - 2021 using qualitative methods. The specific study deliverables are:

- Identify an appropriate method with a representative cross-section of members of the public, selected to ensure a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives from Big Lottery Fund Wales' three regions
- Develop a mechanism to support participants in taking a bigger than 'self' approach to what matters most in their community
- Create and present a summary report of findings which breaks down the key priorities for each regional activity

HVM designed and delivered focus groups in 3 locations: 10 members of the public were recruited to take part in Wrexham, 10 in Neath and 8 in Cardiff.

Methodology

What

- 3 hour extended focus groups in three geographic locations
- Groups facilitated by an HVM Director and scribed/ transcribed by HVM Research Support

When

- 6-9pm
- Wrexham 27th September (North Wales), Neath, 28th September (Mid and West Wales), Cardiff 29th September (South East and Central Wales)

Who

- A broad demographic of participants
- Urban/ rural participants selected from a 30 mile radius of the locations
- English selected by all participants as their working language

How

- Participants were recruited via HVM's specialist fieldwork agency against a recruitment specification agreed by the Project Team.
- The focus groups were delivered via a mixed methodology process plan ensuring results which could be analysed by and across the three locations.



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2. Feedback from participants



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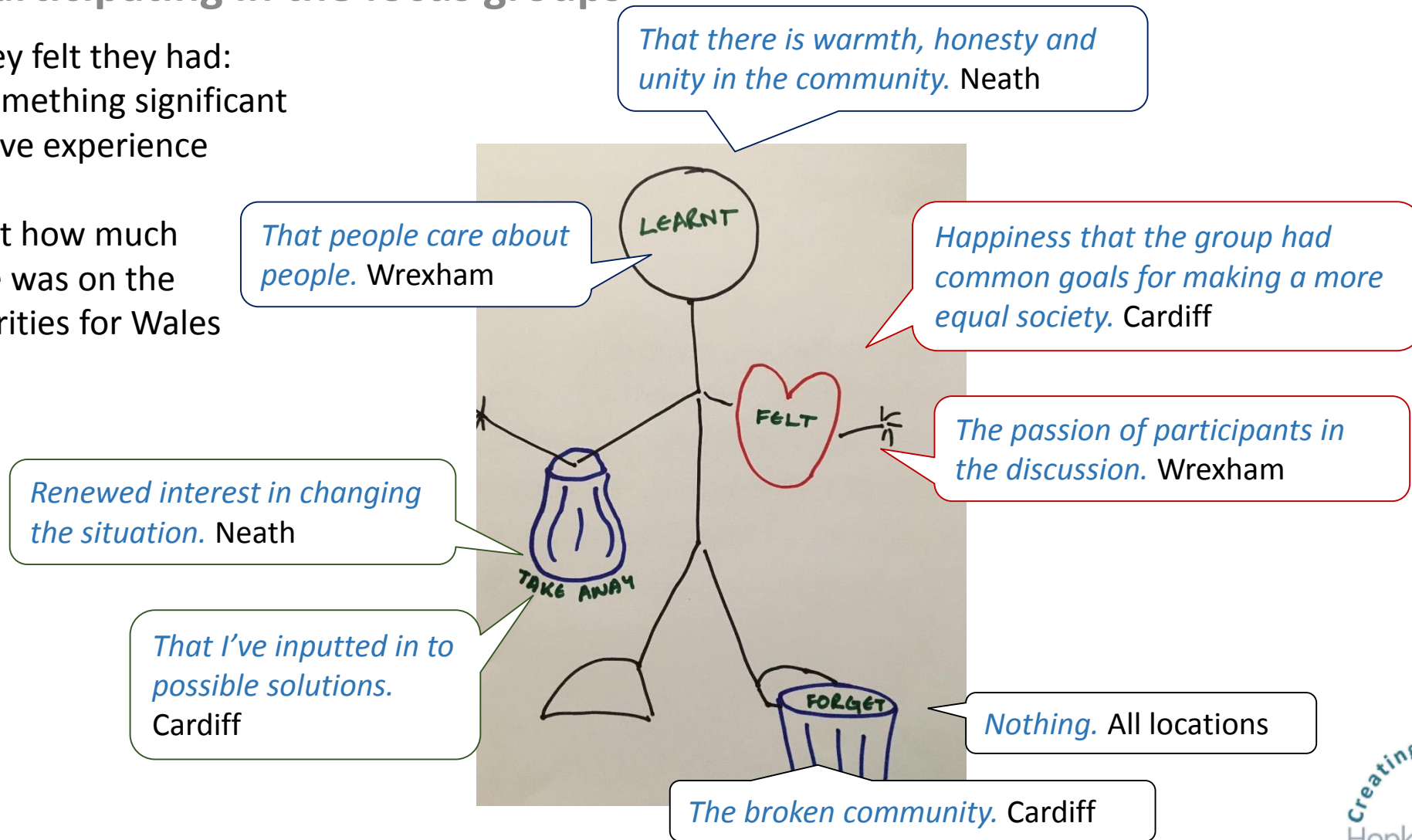
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At the end of each focus group participants were asked to feedback on the experience of being part of the discussion.

Response to participating in the focus groups

Participants said they felt they had:

- Accomplished something significant
- Had a very positive experience
- Been listened to
- Been surprised at how much agreement there was on the themes and priorities for Wales



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3. A picture of Wales



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Participants were asked to identify the elements of the area that were good and not so good. They were also asked to create a visual story of their area.

The picture of Wales presented by participants



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4. Summary findings



In Wrexham there was a focus on the loss of a vibrant town community; on the isolation of older people; a view that homelessness is increasing; and on a hope that steps are being taken to make improvements

Wrexham: key points made about community

Wrexham was famous for the Beast Market. Now there are only about 12 stalls.
Wrexham

The closure of shops/ moving the shops to out of town retail parks makes people feel the heart of their town is being lost

A strong sense that the elderly community is growing and that they need to be cared for and supported, because loneliness and ill health are serious problems

Elderly people being lonely is something everyone should worry about - it's very sad.
Wrexham

Olly Murs played here just in the last three years, it never used to be like that here.
Wrexham

Wrexham is a town that is trying to improve by, for example, becoming a cultural hub for music, gigs, new restaurants & bars

People who are homeless were understood to need help and support, but participants felt that their presence also makes the area less pleasant for the wider community

Participants in Neath reflected on their industrial past and rich heritage; they expressed a serious concern for the homeless; a feeling that the community is under pressure; and a sense that there should be a greater awareness of joint responsibilities

Neath: key points made about community

We have a lot of history in this town but we don't do much of a job of celebrating it, in fact a lot of it is bulldozed over. Neath

A strong sense of the mining and industrial heritage of Neath and the Valleys, and a fear that this might be lost to future generations

The community spirit is resilient but under strain. Neath

Participants said that the community has reached rock bottom, with a sense that health, social care and public services were much better in the past

I think things can't sink much lower than they have. Neath

Participants expressed concern for the homeless. They felt that more could be done to provide for their basic needs including food, warmth and healthcare

We haven't got to supply [homeless people] with homes but in the big cities, people go round and make sure they've got blankets and sandwiches and tea. Neath

They spoke of a need to raise awareness both of what is available for communities, and people's own responsibility for making change happen

If you change things and stop them being dirty and neglected, then people have pride in them and it cheers them all up. Neath

In Cardiff participants concentrated on the loss of industry and the need to find a new identity; they expressed a mistrust of the political system; a concern for the homeless and the need to address the open use of illegal drugs

Cardiff: key points made about community

There's a big hole in our identities around what we were and what we could be again. Cardiff

Participants discussed the loss of identity they feel in a post-industrial community, with the hope that light engineering and technology might help to fill this gap

The Cardiff discussion began with a description of a loss of public services and a perceived disconnect between politicians and the needs of their constituents

Politicians don't seem to properly represent what residents want. Once they're elected they change from a normal person in to a politician. Cardiff

Homeless people are also part of the community. Cardiff

The group spoke of what they saw as a rapid increase in both homelessness and drug taking. They felt that things which would have been shocking previously are now normalised

Recreational drugs have become normal. Cardiff

A discussion of young people learning life skills, led to a broader conversation on the need for greater support for adults who had been failed by the education system and need equitable access to life-long learning

Focus group participants were asked to think generally about what should be funded to make the biggest difference to communities in their area. Gradually they were asked to become more selective and prioritise to come up with a focused list.

Priorities in Wrexham

Participants spoke of a lack of awareness of existing community facilities and stressed the importance of making sure the community knows what is available to them. They prioritised community transportation as they feared that lack of public transport was a real barrier to people participating in activities.

Most people agreed that they prioritised the themes as they did firstly because of their immediate family needs, but then also considered the challenges faced by others.

I did youth provision because I think that's one of the biggest worries in the world today. It would cut down on crime and have an impact going forward on their lives. Wrexham



Community hubs. Places for inter-generational learning, older people and provision for young people



Community transportation



Health and wellbeing



Skills and training



Parks and the outdoors

My main focus when I came here was parks and things for kids, because I've got a daughter, but I do care about the elderly.
Wrexham



Focus group participants were asked to think generally about what should be funded to make the biggest difference to communities in their area. Gradually they were asked to become more selective and prioritise to come up with a focused list.

Priorities in Neath

Participants felt that there was a lack of provision for both young and old and that places to interact inter-generationally are very important. They proposed an umbrella organisation to bring the strands of community action together. The majority of the group strongly prioritised community support for the homeless.

The Neath group felt a shared sense of responsibility for working with others to improve their current situation, which they see as desperate. They were inspired by their discussions to see what change was possible. They felt that a situation has become normalised which should be shocking.

I think the one that ties it all together is somewhere for generations to interact, because that's going to make all that happen in some kind of way. Neath



Places to interact with peers and for generations to look after each other



An umbrella organisation: to co-ordinate action in response to needs & take responsibility for community improvement



Community support for the homeless

I'm fortunate to have a home, not to take drugs. This isn't the norm, we've got to get this under control. Neath



Environmental upkeep: removing debris from the canal to make it a safe, pleasant community space

The canal by the old river bridge is a litter of discarded plastic bottles, carpet, rugs and mattresses. If that was improved people would want to walk past there. Neath

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Priorities in Cardiff

In Cardiff participants felt there should be specific community spaces to address specific community needs including life skills training for young people; places to discuss how, and take steps to improve the community. They also thought support for the homeless was important, in part to provide those without a home with dignity and a better quality of life, and in part as a route to address drug abuse.

Participants in Cardiff were also strongly in favour of routes to self-empowerment, including life-long learning opportunities. They saw this as a way of addressing the current hole in the national identity left by the loss of the mining industry.



Practical community spaces to discussion issues/ make improvements, providing mental health and wellbeing activities for the community



Communal spaces for youth engagement providing education on life skills



Activities as a route to self-empowerment: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; show him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'.



Support for the homeless and action to prevent drug abuse



Funding and equitable access to life-long learning opportunities

If you don't find the right path (as a young person) you go down the wrong path. Cardiff

Self-empowerment is the basis of what everyone should have. Personal autonomy is really important. Cardiff



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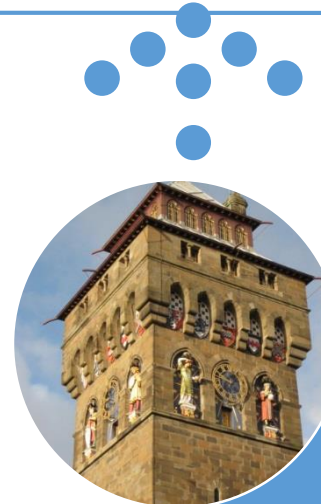
Perceptions of the extent to which each region of Wales is affected by funding cuts and the age of austerity were strongly expressed in each location

Perceptions of how funding is allocated

HVM ran the focus groups in the following location order:

- Wrexham (North Wales)
- Neath (Mid and West Wales)
- Cardiff (South East and Central Wales)

This gave us an interesting perspective on how each community perceives that others are funded and supported. The community in North Wales felt all the funding was being allocated in the South. Those in the south felt they were not being well-funded or supported.



Unfortunately the Government is not supporting us enough to improve the education of our children. Cardiff



All the funding goes to Cardiff. Neath



We feel like the poor relatives. South Wales seems to get everything and we seem to be ignored. Wrexham

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5. Wales thematic priorities



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In looking across the three geographic areas we see a picture of thematic priorities emerging for all participants, but there are some communities with specific concerns which we describe below.

Specific themes and priorities

- In both Neath and Cardiff it was felt that addressing **homelessness** and **drug prevention** are priorities. This theme was less strongly advocated by those in Wrexham.
- In Wrexham and Neath there was an agreement that **provision for the elderly**, particularly in addressing loneliness and isolation, was critical. This led to discussion in both locations about the importance of **inter-generational learning and activities** which was not mentioned by Cardiff participants.
- Neath spoke most strongly about a **community under pressure** and as a result forcefully presented a case for everyone in a community **taking responsibility** for the challenges faced by that community
- Wrexham was the only location that focused in any depth on the closure of town centre shops leading to a **loss of community**, although Neath also listed in their 'not so good things' the increase in charity, betting and phone shops in their town centre.
- In both Neath and Cardiff a lack of faith in politicians being able to achieve positive change in communities was evident.
- Cardiff was the only location that emphasised the role of the individual in becoming **self-empowered**, it was also the location that spoke strongly of a sense of hope for the future.

Wouldn't it be good if the children were teaching the older people how to [use technology]. You could set-up iPads and have tech sessions in community centres.

Wrexham

The community spirit is resilient, but under strain, that sense of community is still there, it's just under pressure.

Neath

We have a sense of hope and optimism for the future even given the uncertainty of Brexit.

Cardiff



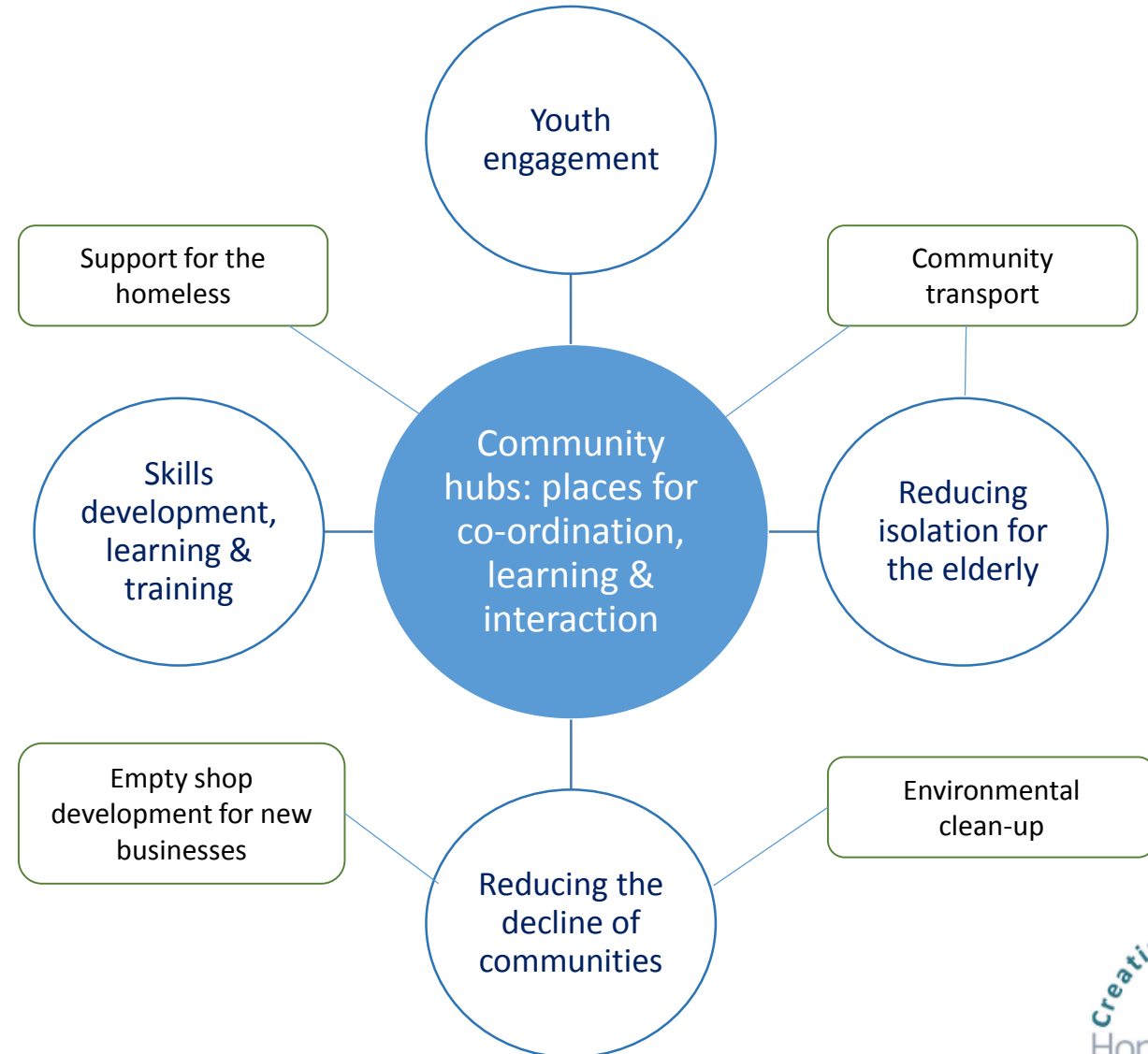
There are strong themes that are shared across all three locations. Central to each of them are community hubs

The thematic priorities for Wales

Each location agreed that funding for these activities only makes sense if:

- Their existence is communicated effectively and widely to the broader community
- They are run by people drawn from the community with passion and commitment
- There is effective transportation provision

There was agreement with current Big Lottery Fund Wales requirements that the community should be involved from the beginning of any new development.



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In conducting this study HVM notes that:

- There is a lot more common ground than difference in the discussions held across the locations that took part in this study.
- When discussing what was good and not so good in their communities participants identified that they had become immune to some very serious social challenges, that the shocking had become normal to most people and that thinking about Big Lottery Fund in Wales funding had opened their eyes to these challenges.
- These are communities anxious for positive change and participants identified that they have a part to play in a process of transformation.
- Funding for multi-purpose community hubs was expected by participants to have wider impacts on a broad range of challenges, creating more resilient and empowered communities.
- Participants welcomed the opportunity to influence Big Lottery Fund's thematic priorities. They appreciated being brought together with people from their community to discuss these issues. They said,

We arrived as strangers but now we are a little community. Neath

Positive stuff happens when you share common goals. Wrexham

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HVM thanks all the participants in the focus groups for their engagement in these discussions and their genuine commitment to their communities.

Thanks to the Big Lottery Fund Wales Observers who came to each of the focus group sessions and to Ruth Bates and Rob Roffe for their support in the design of the sessions.

HVM commends Big Lottery Fund in Wales for being true to People in the Lead and engaging members of the public at this stage in the planning for the thematic priorities

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