



# Recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic: Delivering and financing public services

## Introduction

This paper was written in August 2020. It is one of a series of six briefings commissioned by the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition to inform and challenge the Welsh Government's strategy for reconstruction and recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The briefings focused on topics selected by Ministers. They built on [our work to support earlier roundtable discussions convened by the Minister](#). They helped to frame and inform the work of an [Expert Group](#)<sup>1</sup> which met with the Minister between July and September 2020. We wrote up the Group's conclusions which informed Cabinet discussions about the Welsh Government's priorities for tackling the economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

This paper focuses on delivering and financing public services. It considers the evidence for models of public service delivery and options for long term financing, focusing on social care and public transport, as well as suggestions for improving evidence use in policymaking.

## Key messages

- Partnership working and co-production are not always the best solution for

public services, but some key tips and learning from responses to the pandemic – notably place-based approaches with local support – can guide future initiatives in this area.

- Several procurement checklists and experiments already exist, and the Welsh Government could help raise standards by implementing or supporting implementation of these principles, as well as focusing on sustainable and place-based approaches.
- The Coronavirus pandemic has stressed the importance of evidence in policy and practice. Welsh Government must continue mobilising, supporting, and coordinating evidence generation and use, across partners, policy, and geographical areas.
- For services such as social care, funded models of provision should be explored. Value for money of private funding options such as the Mutual Investment Model have not been evidenced but provide an off-balance sheet option if capital borrowing limits are not raised.
- There are significant challenges in providing financially sustainable, fair, and

<sup>1</sup> The Expert Group comprised four standing members: Torsten Bell (Chief Executive of the Resolution Foundation), Rebecca Heaton (UK climate change committee), Paul Johnson (Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies) and Miatta Fahnbulleh (Chief Executive of the New Economics Foundation).

high-quality social care and public transport services in Wales. Flexible, place-based services with the autonomy and resources to respond to changes in demand are needed.

- Prioritisation of hygiene and social distancing measures on public transport to minimise infection risk coupled with clear public messaging could reduce fears around the safety of bus and rail services and increase usage.

## Building on recent experiences of partnership working and co-production

Partnership working and co-production have been mobilised in Wales during the crisis. However, there is scant evidence that either tool 'works' in improving outcomes and the transaction costs can be high (What Works Scotland, 2015; Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018). The institutional context for partnership working in Wales is complex and inefficient, although there have been examples of recent good practice between levels of government. Effective partnership working and co-production require:

- Empowering current partnerships rather than creating new ones (Centre for Public Impact, 2020);
- Clarity and security of funding structures, role definition, incentives, processes, and outcomes (European Commission, 2018; Steen and Brandsen, 2020);
- Space for negotiation and debate between partners on an equal footing (What Works Scotland, 2015; McMullin, 2019; Turnhout, Metze, Wyborn, Klenk and Louder, 2020);
- Models and structures that are fit for purpose: different local and topic areas across Wales will require different structures and strong local leadership (Durose; Needham; Mangan and Rees,

2017; Greater Manchester Combined Authority, 2020); and

- Active engagement with third sector organisations, who are best placed to co-produce with communities as they understand their specific needs (McMullin, 2019). Co-production could empower communities to help themselves, emulating recent examples in responding to the pandemic (Wallace, White and Davidson, 2020).

## The Coronavirus pandemic has further illustrated the central role that evidence can play in policy and practice

The Welsh Government could support partnership working and co-production by:

- Deploying a partnership checklist, with partners having to reflect on their function, obligations, responsibilities and restrictions before collaborating (OECD, 2006);
- Continuing to work closely with councils and other partners to ensure a co-ordinated, local and effective response to the Coronavirus pandemic and devolving power locally (Christensen and Laegreid, 2020 for Norwegian examples);
- Learning from initiatives such as Welsh City Deals (UK Parliament, 2019) and examples of volunteering and involving communities through the crisis; and
- Supporting councils acting as social care hubs drawing together community and third sector resources and other new informal partnerships (Talbot, 2020) and accelerate flexible, community-based working (Welsh NHS Confederation, 2020; Bolton, 2015).

## Evidence use in policymaking

The role of evidence in partnership working is crucial in helping to make decisions in a complex environment involving multiple stakeholders. The Coronavirus pandemic has further illustrated the central role that evidence can play in policy and practice (Shepherd, 2020). Ultimately, evidence is only going to inform what are political judgements and decisions, with Ministers being held accountable. The four most important issues here are a need for:

1. **The availability of evidence relevant to Wales.** This could be addressed by better collection and use of data, with Welsh Government resourcing a service supporting public services in analysing and using their own data for tailored services (Bright; Ganesh; Seidelin and Vogl, 2019), and continued links with the What Works Network and other relationships to bring evidence into Wales.
2. **An effective network to generate and share evidence of what works** especially between national and local and intra-local government. Active brokering, with one-to-one contact works best, where decision-makers are able to discuss issues, help formulate questions, and are involved in evidence gathering/generation (i.e. co-production), so that solutions are fitted to the topic (Dobbins; Hannah; Ciliska; Cameron; Mercer; O'Mara; DeCorby and Robeson, 2009).
3. **Increased investment in improving the knowledge of civil servants and ministers about the policymaking process and how to use evidence** (e.g. Alliance for Useful Evidence masterclasses for Welsh Government). The aim is ultimately to improve how the government and public sector acquire,

assimilate, transform, and exploit existing knowledge.

4. **Closer relationships between universities and society.** Increasing the collaboration between universities and policy and practice could simultaneously support universities' revenue streams and improve the flow of knowledge so that solutions can be informed by the best available evidence. This includes generating evidence on whether policies have achieved their outcomes and how to reform them if necessary (Tasnim, 2020).



## Improving the use of procurement and financing in the Welsh public sector

Procurement amounts to £6.3 billion annually in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020) and there are multiple reviews and toolkits aiming to improve its efficiency (Bell, 2019), with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act being a recent example (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

Some successful local procurement initiatives could be adopted in Wales such as the Preston Model in England (Price, 2020) which aims to increase local economic and social benefits through local procurement strategies. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) could be supported to compete for bids by improving information and communication (What Works Local Economic Growth, 2019). Manchester City Council created a network of local suppliers to

understand its supply chain, with the purpose of improving the outcome of procurement beyond the good or service being delivered, resulting in a 15.5% increase in spend with Manchester suppliers between 2008-9 and 2014-5 (Jackson, 2016).

Effective public procurement needs clarity of purpose, streamlined strategies, improved sharing of knowledge, support of the procurement profession (especially in local government) and more commitment to collaboration (National Audit Office, 2013; Bell, 2019; Cully, 2019; National Council of Voluntary Organisations, 2020). These changes require strong leadership at both local and national levels, and sharing of existing good practice (Johnson, 2019).

## The increased role of government in public services in the response to the Coronavirus pandemic provides an opportunity to change models of provision for the better

### Financing public services

The Mutual Investment Model (MIM) evolved from the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to finance capital projects. However, the PFI model has been criticised for offering poor value for money and being based on a flawed value assessment (NAO, 2018). The value for money of the MIM remains to be seen, but estimated costs of MIM financing suggest it will be 1.9-2.8 times the cost of the asset (Scottish Government, 2019). While the MIM has introduced greater control and flexibility for the Welsh Government over PFI, there is still potential for high premiums to be charged. Although performance-based payment is in place, poor service or asset delivery, or changes in service demand over the lifecycle of the project

could end up being more costly to remedy in the long-term. It is therefore crucial that any public-private partnership includes sufficient room for flexibility and oversight by the Welsh Government, and balances risks between the public and private sectors to ensure assets and services are fit for purpose.



While sources of capital investment need to be identified, pressing financing demands are for day-to-day spending on improving services such as social care and public transport. Unless borrowing limits for day-to-day spending are increased, Wales may need to explore taxation options which pool risk across society to fund such services. Options to consider include:

- Income tax raises: Wales could utilise new tax raising powers to introduce a social care tax, but revenue raised is likely to be modest (Ifan and Poole, 2018) and may not be viable if tax revenue falls due to a recession (Bottery; Varrow; Thorlby and Wellings, 2018).
- A mandatory social care fund would be more expensive to set up than pay as you go funding models, but fairer across generations: It would need to be implemented quickly to meet the

anticipated increase in demand over the next decade. Sound investment could also provide greater funding in the long-term and provide a source of investment for low-risk Welsh infrastructure projects which would return a profit to the fund (Holtham, 2018).

- The introduction of a funding model where contributions increase with age: In Japan, all working individuals over forty pay into a national insurance fund which provides universal care to those over sixty-five, although Japan shares similar workforce instability issues and has had to increase premiums to support an ageing population (Curry, Castle-Clarke; and Hemmings, 2018).
- A congestion levy is a potential way to encourage the use of public transport: A charge of £2 per day for non-residents has been proposed in Cardiff and would raise funding for public transport improvements. The objectives of the congestion levy must be clear to facilitate ongoing evaluation of public acceptance and achievement of targets (Liu et al., 2018) and lessons from failed proposals need to be considered (Sheriff, 2018).

## New models of social care and public transport

### Social care

The increased role of government in public services in the response to the Coronavirus pandemic provides an opportunity to change models of provision for the better. Social care is facing increasing pressures in terms of funding and market fragility caused by factors including limited capacity and poor workforce conditions. With the profile of social care increased in recent months, it is timely to increase citizen engagement and discuss the urgent need for investment in the sector and improvements to how needs are assessed and care is organised. There are risks to rebalancing, which include

exacerbating market fragility in the short-term if providers exit the market, and through increased costs associated with improved pay for workers. However, social care provision could be improved through several routes.



Delivering services close to home which focus on prevention and the needs of the individual could be a positive development. The Buutzorg model implemented in the Netherlands is a non-profit home care provider led by community nurse teams that delivers medical and other services in the home. The model has received high worker and client satisfaction ratings and there is evidence that high quality care is provided at a lower cost (Gray et al., 2015; Bennett et al., 2018). However, there are currently challenges in delivering such models in the UK including workforce shortages, initial investment limitations and payment system differences. Brexit poses further challenges to the workforce. Immigration policy and the strength of the pound relative to other European currencies will play a significant role in determining the potential loss of workers (Holmes et al., 2019). Poor working conditions is one disincentive which can be improved to reduce the number of current and future vacancies in the sector. Greater integration of health and social care is currently being sought in Wales, and while this policy has many strengths and offers opportunities to reduce care fragmentation, there are risks inherent in full NHS and social care integration. These include

a financial focus on treating health issues, rather than the prevention and care aspect.

## Clear public messaging communicating the implementation of safety and hygiene measures could help to increase bus and rail usage

### Transport

Wales is facing two current public transport challenges; concerns around infection risk limiting patronage, and longer-term issues around the value for money and fairness of service provision under current models. Car and public transport usage is increasing since lockdown easing, but concern around the safety of public transport (Gerhold, 2020; Stansbury; Spear; Pruvot; and Alport, 2020), coupled with new working patterns, mean that previous demand may not return (International Energy Agency, 2020). The swift reduction in use highlights the government's influence on travel behaviours. Clear public messaging communicating the implementation of safety and hygiene measures could help to increase bus and rail usage (Morawska; Tang; Bahnfleth; Bluysen; Boerstra; Buonanno; and Wierzbicka 2020; Greenhalgh; Schmid; Czypionka; Bassler; and Gruer 2020). A range of policy responses that have been previously proposed to improve bus and community transport services in Wales will remain relevant going forward. These include new incentives to use public transport regularly such as bulk purchase discounts and fare reductions, which must be evaluated to assess the evidence for increasing accessibility for those on low incomes. Deregulation of bus networks has not improved services as intended (Preston, 2014) and there is now an opportunity to increase partnerships between providers and local authorities, expand municipal services and develop franchises. It has been shown that

competition to run local authority planned routes has successfully increased ridership in the UK (Nash and Smith, 2020). Such changes to public transport procurement would allow the Welsh Government to ensure fair service provision across Wales and more widely work on barriers to using public transport (Begg, 2016).



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## Our other work on the Coronavirus pandemic

We have conducted a range of projects to provide policy makers and public services with independent evidence on economic and social recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic. In addition to papers prepared for the Expert Group convened by Welsh Government Ministers, we have led a comprehensive assessment of the evidence on Supporting Public Services for the UK Government's initiative on 'Rebuilding a Resilient Britain' led by

Sir Patrick Vallance; published [the conclusions reached by six expert roundtables](#) on recovery from the pandemic; published an analysis of [responses to the Welsh Government's consultation](#) on 'Our Future Wales'; and produced [a series of blogs](#) on key issues including: [loneliness in the lockdown](#), the [implications for the Welsh economy](#), the [importance of a green stimulus to aid recovery](#), and the [future of health and social care](#).

## About the Wales Centre for Public Policy

Here at the Centre, we collaborate with leading policy experts to provide ministers, the civil service and Welsh public services with high quality evidence and independent advice that helps them to improve policy decisions and outcomes.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Welsh Government, the Centre is

based at Cardiff University and a member of the UK's What Works Network.

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