Multisector collaboration to support community action

Introduction

The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) and the Resourceful Communities Partnership (RCP) are working together on research to better **understand the role of multisector collaboration in supporting community action and wellbeing**.

The project responds to interest across the RCP in determining not just *what* makes collaboration effective, but *how* it can be developed and enhanced in specific contexts. Existing research tells us much about what good collaboration looks like, but much less about how to initiate and sustain collaboration where these ideal 'ingredients' are absent or harder to come by. We therefore focused this project on identifying **tangible actions** to develop collaboration, suited to different collaboration contexts and aims.

The project involves two phases:

1) a review of evidence published since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic[1] on how multisector collaboration influences community action from (a) practice-based case studies across Wales; (b) UK-based grey literature (e.g., practice-based reports and blogs); and (c) academic literature; accompanied by a state-of-the-art summary of pre-pandemic evidence by Leeds Beckett University.

2) a workshop to engage with key findings from the evidence review and explore what they might mean in different contexts across Wales.
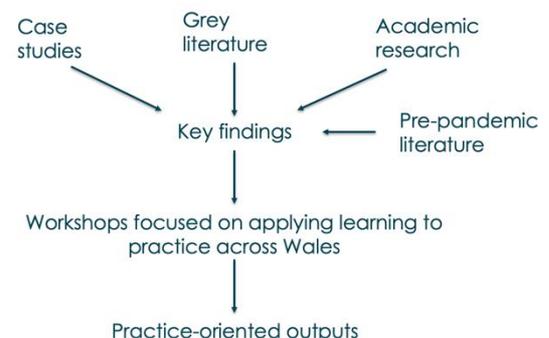
The purpose of this document is to provide background for the material that we will discuss together in detail during the online workshop that you have signed up for on January 30th 2024.

The document starts by providing background to the phase one evidence review (working definitions of key terms and information on evidence sources). The following section provides a brief overview of key findings from the evidence review. This focuses on findings from the main review of practice-based case studies, grey literature and academic research (2020-2023) but includes a sub-section on the pre-pandemic evidence summary. The final section outlines how we plan to engage with phase one findings during the **workshop on 30th January** to coproduce the final output(s) (phase two). This will involve working with workshop participants to add your expertise and experience to the evidence base.

Background: sources and definitions

Sources

Figure 1: Project phases and outputs

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[1] This focus intends to capture learning from the upsurge in community action, and innovation in multisector, collaborative working during the pandemic period. However, given that much of this relied on pre-existing

infrastructures, assets and relationships, a pre-pandemic evidence summary was included to capture the wealth of existing literature on multisector collaboration that supports community action.

Figure 1 above shows the phases of the project and the evidence inputs at each stage. *Table 1* below provides additional detail on the evidence sources informing the key findings from the review of multisectoral collaboration.

Table 1: Evidence sources for 'phase one' review

	Practice-based case studies	Grey literature	Academic research	Pre-pandemic literature
Description/e.g.	Pre-written descriptions of practice	Published reports, blogs, videos	Published, peer reviewed research	Academic reviews and grey literature
Geography	Wales	UK	UK	UK
Timeframe	March 2020-Jul 2023	March 2020-Jul 2023	March 2020-Jul 2023	Jan 2013 - March 2020
Search strategy	'Call out' to RCP members and their wider networks	Sources provided by RCP members + systematic online search	Database search (Scopus + Web of Science), citation searching	Database search (6 databases), citation searching, website searching
Screening	Tells a story about what happened	Relevance to topic	Relevance to topic Journal articles only	Relevance to topic Academic reviews and grey literature only
Sources excluded	None	43 of 101 at full text	Database: 451 of 640 at abstract; 152 of 189 at full text Citation: 9 of 19 at full text	Database: 581 of 641 at abstract; 51 of 60 at full text Citation and web search: 40 of 68 at full text
Sources included	95	58	47 (37 database; 10 other sources)	37 (9 database; 28 other sources)

Definitions

In discussion with the project Steering Group we have developed the following definitions for key terms used in the review.

By **'multisector collaboration'** we mean collaboration between public and community or voluntary sectors (e.g., public services and/or local and national government, *with* community, voluntary and third sector organisations or groups).

By **'community action'** we mean any activities, formal or informal, aimed at supporting the wellbeing of individuals and communities and undertaken by groups based on shared geography (e.g., neighbourhoods) or shared interest (e.g., hobbies, identities or life experiences).

By '**wellbeing'** we mean how people feel emotionally and physically. This can describe experience at an individual level (e.g., self-worth, sense of purpose), but also a community level (e.g., experiences of social cohesion, support networks/ services, or environmental

quality). Improving how people feel emotionally and physically is both a driver and outcome of much of the activity explored in this research. However, we recognise that many do not explicitly use the term 'wellbeing', and that the ways in which emotional and physical experience are understood and supported may vary significantly.

Overview of key evidence review findings

The following summarises key findings from our review of the practice-based case studies, grey literature and academic research (March 2020-July 2023). First, we briefly outline **what** cross-sector collaboration that supports community action and ultimately wellbeing might look like. We then focus on **how** effective collaboration might be achieved in different contexts and **why** (with what aims and outcomes). Finally, we outline a set of possible **actions** for developing 'the how and why' of collaboration from across the literature and case studies.

The 'what'

The sources reviewed provided extensive detail on **what** effective community-public sector collaboration looks like (effectiveness defined as the ability to help community action address wellbeing challenges, from the perspective of those involved). We have categorised 'the what' into **features** of effective community-public sector collaboration (e.g., trust, respect, ownership, mutuality, shared goals) and **factors** supporting effective community-public sector collaboration (e.g., social capital and connections, capacity and resources, digital and physical infrastructures).

The features and factors identified are often presented as 'enablers' or 'ingredients' of effective collaboration. They provide a valuable overview of general contributors and characteristics, but the use of often vague and decontextualised terms can make it difficult to determine **how** these might relate to or be

achieved in different contexts, particularly those where certain 'ingredients' may be missing or difficult to find and there are barriers to collaboration. For example, what 'trust' means or how it is experienced might depend on where we are geographically, who we are working with, and with what goals. Likewise, approaches to building trust might depend on whether past relationships exist, how robust they are, the wider networks surrounding them, and the resources and infrastructures available to sustain them. We therefore focused our analysis on '**how**' questions: how the features of effective multisectoral collaboration and the factors enabling it might apply to, and be developed within, different contexts. This also highlighted the importance of establishing **'why'** collaboration was being pursued, rather than seeing collaboration as a goal in itself.

Figure 2: Features and Factors of effective collaboration
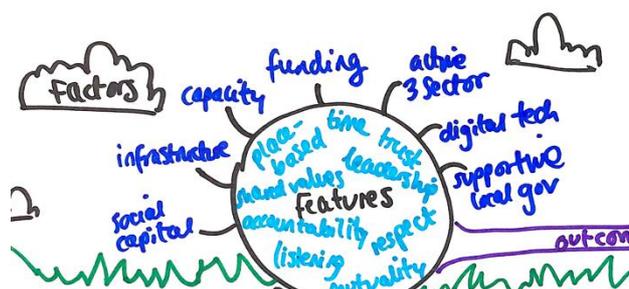
The 'how'

When extracting data from the sources, we searched for evidence of tangible **actions** that were (or could be) taken in specific contexts to achieve or develop the features of effective collaboration above (e.g., trust) and the factors enabling it (e.g., financial resource). *Figure 3* below shows how the features of and factors influencing effective multisectoral collaboration are underpinned by different actions and driven by shared aims and outcomes (relating to both process and wellbeing). All of these actions and functions are context dependent. We organised these actions into three categories: **activities for shared purpose, governance arrangements, and financial mechanisms**. *Table 2* below defines these three categories

and summarises different types of actions associated with each. During the January workshop, we will explore these in detail, providing examples from the data of what they might look like in practice, and discussing with you whether they reflect your experience or not.

These actions in *Table 2* – 'the how' of effective multisector collaboration – were the main focus of our analysis. They were not at the forefront of academic and grey literatures like 'the what', but more hidden in the details. They were described more often in case studies, highlighting the importance of collecting further practice perspectives through the workshop. Crucially, the evidence reviewed lacked detail on who and what these actions worked for: how they relate to different **functions** (aims and outcomes) of collaboration, and to different **contexts**. This might mean different scales (local to national), geographies (rural to urban), timeframes (immediate to longer-term), and actors (e.g., community groups, public service practitioners, funders).

> A key aim of workshopping these findings is to develop a shared understanding of how different actions supporting multisector collaboration suit different aims and contexts.

The 'why'

Paying attention to the specific actions behind more general 'ingredients' of multisectoral collaboration also revealed the importance of the **functions** (or 'the why') of collaboration. The **aims** or drivers of the actions taken tended to be either expressed as 'process aims' (e.g., collaboration for integrated service provision, or for citizen engagement in local authority decision making) or 'wellbeing aims' – what collaborations ultimately aimed to achieve for wellbeing (e.g., improving youth mental health or environmental quality). Similarly, the **outcomes** of the actions taken (what they actually achieved) tended to be described in terms of 'process outcomes' (how collaboration was improved and community action supported) and 'wellbeing outcomes' (what, ultimately, this

collaboration meant for wellbeing). Effective multisector collaborations tended to emerge where collaboration was not considered the goal in itself (e.g., because an internal or external policy or funding opportunity called for it), but a means to achieve a specific, shared wellbeing outcome (e.g., addressing youth loneliness in a city).

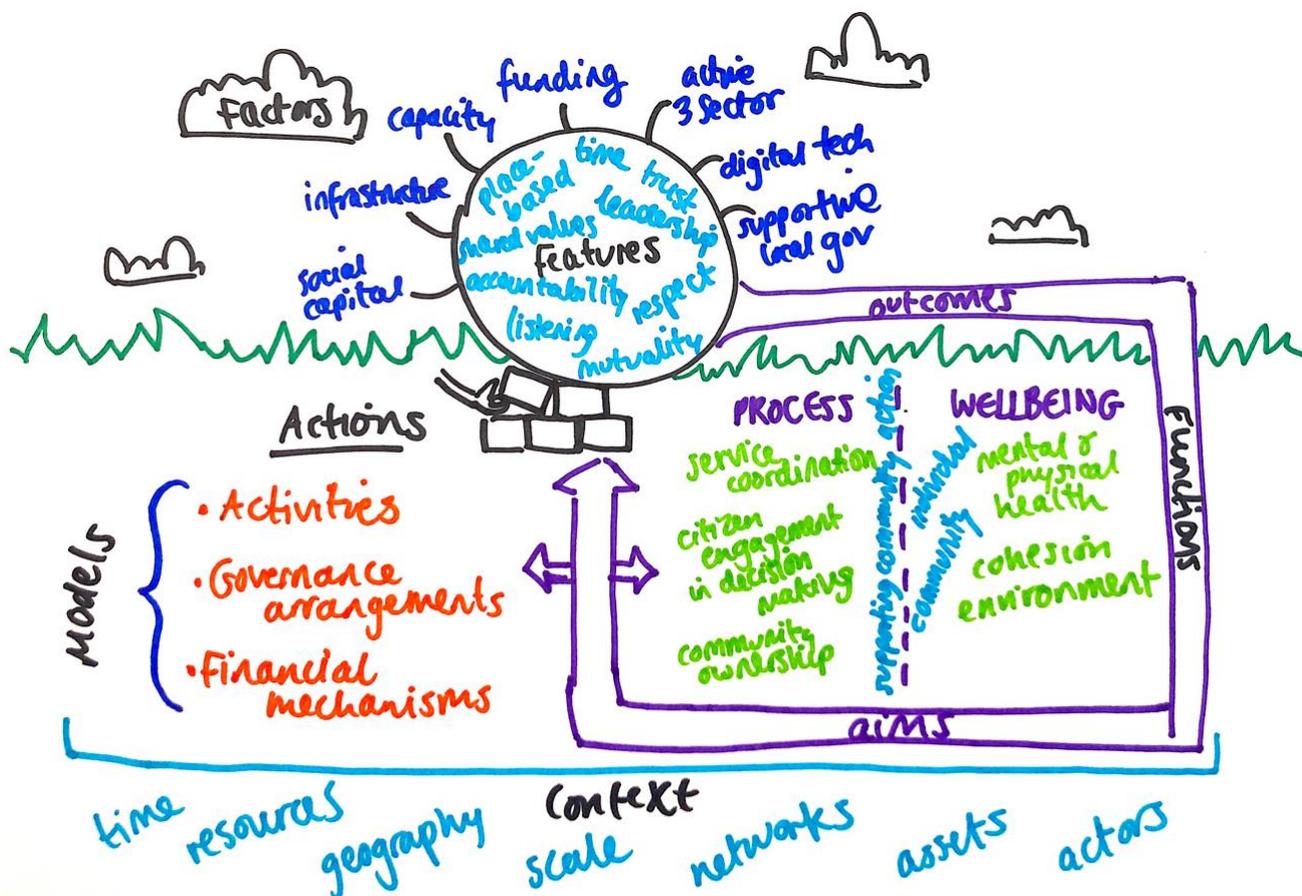Figure 3: Actions and Functions underpinning effective collaboration

Table 2: Actions taken to develop multisector collaboration that supports community action

Activities for shared purpose: Activities supporting multisector collaboration by developing shared aims/ understanding	Governance arrangements: Roles, responsibilities, processes and structures developed to support multisector collaboration	Financial mechanisms: Approaches to funding work/ initiatives in ways that support multisector collaboration
Information gathering (research, listening exercises, engagement events)	**Liaison/coordination roles and referral pathways** (e.g., in/across LAs, 3rd Sector, public services)	**Grant funding** (flexible, long term, participatory)
Big picture, systems thinking (shared, long-term goals, redefining success)	**Responsibilities and boundaries** (mutually agreed)	**Commissioning** (collaborative/strategic/joint/place - based/ partnership/ outcomes-based)
Long term planning and macro-goals (flexible, living documents)	**Leadership and shared decision-making** (e.g., diverse, evolving, values-based steering groups)	**Community wealth building** (procurement; investment/wealth funds)
Training/ mutual learning (events, conferences, communities of practice, webinars, 'lunch and learns', training, resources)	**Policies and procedures** (e.g., formalised processes/ requirements at organisational or wider levels)	**Infrastructure/estates** (community asset transfers, land trusts, estate rationalisation)
Pooling and sharing information (online platforms, lists/directories, databases, mapping exercises)	**Regional/ national bodies or infrastructures** (creating or utilising these to coordinate/ support efforts)	**Fundraising** (Crowdfunding, Local Giving, private donations)

This pre-pandemic evidence summary covers literature on multisector collaboration to support community action and wellbeing over a longer time period and prior to the pandemic (see *Table 1*). It raises many similar themes to those outlined above. For example, features of effective collaboration and factors enabling it are a key focus of the literature. But, again, exploring 'the how' and 'the why' of effective collaboration, not just 'the what', highlighted a range of different activities for shared purpose, governance arrangements and financial mechanisms. An important addition to the findings above is the extent to which the pre-pandemic literature details different **models for multisector collaboration that supports community action and wellbeing**. These involve different sets of activities for shared purpose, governance arrangements and financial mechanisms, relevant to the collaboration aims and contexts in and for which they were designed.

Existing collaboration models provide a) frameworks that could be adopted and adapted in similar contexts elsewhere, or b) examples of how different activities for shared purpose, governance arrangements and financial mechanisms might be chosen and put together to suit specific collaboration aims and contexts. This prompted us to look back at the main (2020-2023) review data for collaboration models. While sometimes mentioned in terms of existing activities for shared purpose that had been adapted during the pandemic, sources rarely described collaboration models in detail or as a primary focus. However, they did provide more detail on the influence or outcomes of specific actions associated with different models, while the pre-pandemic literature tended to lack analysis of models' efficacy.

Finally, the pre-pandemic literature provides more detail on how relationships are built and on power dynamics, and the kinds of actions that might support these. The main (2020-2023) review adds to this the importance of shared purpose and how this underpins both effective relationships and more balanced power dynamics.

Given the strengths and limitations of different parts of the evidence-base, we plan to integrate findings from the main review of evidence (2020-2023), the pre-pandemic evidence summary, and evidence collected during the interactive workshop (January 2024) into a final project output.

The next section outlines plans for the workshop and sets some questions for your consideration in advance.

Workshop to engage with findings

The aim of the online workshop on **30th January 2024** is to focus on what the review findings might mean in practice across different contexts in Wales. Rather than a research dissemination exercise, this workshop will draw on participants' expertise and experience to interrogate, make sense of, and add to the review findings, to shape practice-oriented outputs.

The workshop will focus on the **actions** outlined in *Table 2*. These were the diverse actions identified through the evidence review (phase one) taken to develop multisector collaboration that supported community action and wellbeing. The workshop has three aims:

1) To collaboratively interpret, interrogate and add to these findings: Do these actions reflect participants' experiences or not? What is missing? What is surprising?
2) To establish a revised set of actions (adding to the review findings the expertise and experience of participants) and to explore what collaboration aims and contexts these actions might suit: how, for what and by whom, different actions might be taken (which are more/less appropriate to different collaboration aims, scales, roles, sectors, geographies, timeframes, resources, etc.).
3) To build a typology of tangible actions for developing public-community sector

collaboration, organised according to **function** (the type of collaboration sought and its overall wellbeing aims), and **context** (the time, money, infrastructures, networks or other resources available). We aim to develop practice-oriented resources that capture this learning for others beyond the workshop.

To achieve these aims we have invited a wide range of participants interested in **multisector collaboration that supports community action and wellbeing**. Bringing together people working across different sectors, scales and geographies in Wales will be important for developing a system-wide view of different actions that can be taken at different levels (e.g., within communities, in public service provision, or public sector strategic roles).

Thank you for signing up to be a part of this collaborative project by participating in the

workshop. We look forward to seeing you (virtually) at 12:30pm on 30th January for what we hope will be a useful afternoon of discussion. So that we can make the most of your valuable time and input during the workshop, we would be grateful if you could think about the questions below in advance:

1) Why are you interested in effective multisector collaboration?
2) What would you like to contribute to and gain from the workshop?
3) Do the 'actions' summarised in Table 2 reflect your experience? (have you used activities, governance arrangements or financial mechanisms that are similar or different to those listed?)
4) What collaboration aims and contexts have these 'actions' worked for (or not)?

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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