Welsh Government plans to transform social care provision have been welcomed as landmark legislation that will position Wales at the forefront of social services delivery in the UK.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, which will see the biggest changes in social care for more than 60 years, has been granted Royal Assent by the Queen and the Act will become live in April 2016.

Announcing the Royal Assent, Deputy Minister for Social Services Gwenda Thomas said the Act would ensure ‘a strong voice and real control for people, of whatever age, enabling them to maximise their wellbeing. It will set the legal framework and infrastructure to transform services to meet changing social expectations and changing demography.’

WCVA Senior Policy Officer, and Chair of the Alliance of Alliances, Constance Adams, said the Act will change the way social services will be delivered by focusing on the outcomes necessary to promote a person’s wellbeing, as an individual, a family and as part of a community.

‘We welcome the Act, placing people’s voice and rights at the centre of their care and support,’ she added. ‘The third sector - working with people who use services, carers and families, and as service deliverers - has played a key role in helping shape this.

‘We value the Deputy Minister’s commitment to deliver legislation for Wales that will enable a transformative difference to the lives of people and their well-being.’

Describing it as one of the most complex pieces of law drafted by the Welsh Government, Children’s Commissioner for Wales Keith Towler said the Act meant that Wales was the only nation with one social care Bill. Fostering Network Wales said it was delighted that the Act was creating a new right for young people to live with their foster carer up to the age of 21.

Keith Towler told Network Wales the new law would provide greater consistency and clarity to people who used social services, their carers, local authority staff and their partner organisations, along with the courts and the judiciary.

‘This has to be one of the biggest and most complex pieces of legislation to go through the National Assembly for Wales,’ he added.

‘After a lengthy process and some very tough scrutiny, it was particularly pleasing to see the due regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in the final Bill.’

Mr Towler promised to ‘keep a close eye’ on the way in which the new safeguards put in place in terms of regulation, guidance and eligibility criteria were implemented at grassroots level.

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A report into a hyperlocal news organisation given a grant by Carnegie UK Trust has been published.

The Port Talbot Magnet is one of five hyperlocal journalism projects in the UK awarded a grant of £10,000 to deliver news in new and innovative ways through Carnegie UK Trust’s Neighbourhood News scheme.

The Port Talbot Magnet’s aim is to reach people who aren’t online across a wider area than urban Port Talbot and produce advertising revenue to lead to a self-sustaining business model. To this end it produces a quarterly print edition to go alongside its website, which has been distributed to 20,000 homes in the community who are not online.

The grant has helped seven posts at the Port Talbot Magnet, including seven journalists, a designer and three advertising reps, who are on course to sell £4,000 worth of ads in the next edition.

You can read the full Carnegie UK Report into the Port Talbot Magnet and the four other projects at www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk.

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‘We need to ensure that we provide the same offer to children and young people as we do for adults.

‘Wales is the only nation with one social care Bill. The fact that advocacy has been included on the face of the Bill is a tremendous step forward,’ he added.

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‘However, I know that the ongoing work my team and I are engaged in has proven that there’s still a long way to go to ensure that those who have a statutory entitlement to advocacy actually access independent professional advocacy services.’

But he was still more optimistic now than he had ever been. ‘And I’m convinced that through working together, we can get things right. The scrutiny of the Bill has proven in no uncertain terms that through collaboration and working together, anything can be achieved.

‘Wales is still unique in many respects, particularly in terms of trailing a blaze for children’s rights. These are most certainly exciting times ahead and I am really pleased the Bill has received Royal Assent.’

Fostering Network Wales said that following years of campaigning, young people in foster care would now be able to remain living with their foster carer up to the age of 21 - as long as both they and the carer wanted to continue the arrangement.

Crucially, local authorities would be obliged to support foster carers financially if they entered into such arrangements, something that could not have been achieved without the Fostering Network and Action for Children’s joint Chance to Stay campaign.

Fostering Network Wales Director Freda Lewis said: ‘This is a real landmark for young people living with foster carers in Wales. For years, we have argued that care leavers should not be forced out into the world before they are ready, and we are delighted that the Welsh Government has been able to listen and respond to the strong case that we have been making throughout this time.

‘This change in the law will make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable young people. We’re also really proud that this marks the final piece in the jigsaw of our successful campaigns across England, Scotland and Wales to allow young people to stay with their foster families beyond their 18th birthdays.’

Age Cymru is another organisation hailing the Act as a landmark piece of legislation. ‘We were pleased to see some positive additions during scrutiny, including the addition of duties to provide access to advocacy services - and removal of powers to charge for such services,’ said Policy Advisor Amy Clifton.

The charity had campaigned for advocacy duties to be included in the legislation and for advocacy services to be provided free at the point of use, when the threat of charging emerged, she added.

‘We are delighted to see this now secured in Welsh legislation.’

‘We are delighted to see this now secured in Welsh legislation. Another positive late addition was an amendment that care visits must be of sufficient length to meet needs - this could make a real difference in terms of people receiving dignified care at home, and a reduction in inappropriately short care visits.

‘Of course, the passing of the Act is not the end of the process. Regulations and guidance are currently being developed, and full implementation is planned for 2016. As always, the devil will be in the detail and the delivery to ensure that the legislation improves outcomes for people in Wales.’

Cymorth Cymru, the umbrella body for organisations working with vulnerable people, also welcomed the Royal Assent.

Director Auriol Miller told Network Wales: ‘We look forward to working with our members, Welsh Government, local authorities and others to ensure that the views of social value care providers and the people they support help drive the design and delivery of improved care services in Wales.’

Wales Council for Voluntary Action represents, supports and campaigns for voluntary organisations, volunteers and communities in Wales.

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A delegation of European experts visited Wales this month as part of a study into the role of civil society in the implementation of the EU Renewable Energy Directive.

The visit was hosted by WCVA Vice President, Tom Jones OBE, in his role as a member of the European Economic & Social Committee (EESC) – a consultative body to the European Union.

The EU is increasing the production of energy from renewable sources with renewable accounting 13 per cent of the energy consumed within member states in 2011 – up from 8.5 per cent in 2005.

With varying performance across continent in relation to EU targets, the study aims to identify good practice and develop recommendations about energy policy beyond 2014 for the EU institutions and member states.

The delegation is visiting six member states: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and the UK, and the study will look into renewable energy sources in which local communities are typically involved: solar, wind, hydro and biomass. More information on the study can be found on the EESC website – www.eesc.europa.eu.

As part of the visit to Wales, the Welsh Government organised a programme of site visits for the delegation, which included the Penllergaer Community Hydro Scheme, NSA Afan community energy project, Talybont on Usk community hydro and pv project.

The projects demonstrated how renewable energy can generate a long-term income source for communities, reducing household energy bills, as well as creating jobs and business opportunities.

Participants in the hearing welcomed the Welsh Government’s efforts to create a step change in energy generation capacity to deliver small scale projects.

Alun Jones from WCVA’s Communities Investment Fund spoke at the hearing about the provision of fund management expertise to the Welsh Government’s Ynni’r Fro programme: ‘Ynni’r Fro has brought a very practical focus to the development of community energy schemes, enabling technical and financial support to work closely alongside each other to turn projects from concept into reality.

There is a real determination on all sides to break down barriers and get things built and working for the benefit of communities.’

Tom Jones added: ‘The EESC delegation was impressed by the community renewable energy sector in Wales and excited about the potential to increase renewable energy, with encouragement from the Welsh Government, to expand community scale projects.

‘If we can support these community projects, we can help to reduce energy costs and tackle fuel poverty while generating sustainable income streams for local communities.'
Elections underway for representatives to the Third Sector Partnership Council

Communication and collaboration between the third sector in Wales and Welsh Government is vital and the mechanisms by which this takes place are set out in the Third Sector Scheme. The Third Sector Scheme is unique to Wales and is a statutory requirement of the Government of Wales Act 2006 - this means that the Welsh Government has to set out how it will promote the interest of third sector organisations.

The recent Continuity and change consultation by Welsh Government has led to a refreshed Third Sector Scheme, which can be found on WCVA’s website.

The Third Sector Scheme established the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) as a formal mechanism for regular dialogue and partnership working with the sector. The Council is chaired by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Jeff Cuthbert AM, and made up of network leads covering 25 areas of third sector categories of interest. Members of the TSPC serve for two years (subject to any changes in its composition that may be agreed during this period) and elections for members to serve 2014 – 2016 are currently underway.

WCVA is responsible for facilitating the selection of the third sector members of the TSPC. Membership must, as far as possible, reflect a cross section of the sector’s interests and activities. Nomination forms have been sent to all WCVA national, regional and local voting members to enable them to nominate the network or organisation they think is the most appropriate one to represent the interests of organisations falling within each of the 25 categories that make up the TSPC.

The network or organisations identified will normally be a recognised Wales-wide network of organisations with a common interest. The nominated network or organisation does not have to be a member of WCVA. However, it must be able to identify its constituents and have arrangements in place for communicating with them.

Nominations close on 27 June and if there is only one nomination to a category, this is uncontested, that network or organisation puts forward a lead and an alternate representative for the TSPC. When more than one network or organisation is nominated as representative in a particular category, WCVA will attempt to negotiate a solution that accommodates all interests in that category.

If the negotiations fail to achieve a mutually acceptable solution, WCVA will invite its members to elect the most appropriate body to represent the interests of that particular category. Following the election, the approved network or organisation will put forward a lead and an alternate representative for the TSPC, subject to any changes in its composition that may be agreed during this period.

WCVA is aiming to have the new TSPC arrangements in place by the next meeting which is likely to take place in the Autumn period.

Details on the TSPC and current representation can be found on the representing the sector area of www.wcva.org.uk. If you have any queries please contact Fiona Harris at fharris@wcva.org.uk

Project to help heritage groups with fundraising

A new project which aims to help heritage organisations in Wales to become more financially sustainable has started work this month.

The project, Catalyst Cymru – Heritage fundraising, is being delivered by WCVA in partnership with CyMAL and the Funding Centre and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. CyMAL, part of Welsh Government, helps to promote and protect the culture and heritage of Wales by supporting museums, archives and libraries. The Funding Centre, a fundraising consultancy, specialises in supporting cultural and heritage organisations in Wales.

This is a three year project, aiming to enable heritage organisations in Wales to develop their fundraising capacity and become more financially sustainable. This will be achieved by offering a programme of evidence-based learning and networking opportunities, web-based resources and other capacity building interventions across Wales.

These will be aimed at up-skilling and increasing the confidence, competency and effectiveness in fundraising of staff and volunteers, so that they can increase their organisations’ funding from private donors, corporate sources and trusts and foundations.

The challenge for many heritage organisations in Wales is that they are reliant on dedicated volunteers for their day-to-day operations, strategic management and fundraising. This project will help voluntary organisations to build their capacity and become more resilient.

The project aims to reach over 1,512 individuals from 614 heritage organisations based across the whole of Wales.

Eileen Kinsman, Lead Project Officer at WCVA, said: ‘Our research findings recommended the need to bring about a change in culture of heritage organisations in Wales which begins with getting buy in across organisations.

‘The first step in achieving change is to inspire people to want to make the change, making objectives urgent, real and relevant.

‘Our introductory road show Catalyst Cymru – Heritage fundraising aims to raise awareness of the need and benefits for the heritage sector to build fundraising capacity and provide the initial inspiration to start the long process of changing culture and fundraising behaviour.’

To find out more about the project, visit www.wcva.org.uk or contact ekinsman@wcva.org.uk.
Budgets cuts and implications of Williams discussed with the Minister for Local Government

Third sector representatives met with the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, Lesley Griffiths AM, on 28 April September 2014, as part of the arrangements under the Third Sector Scheme.

Among the items discussed were budget cuts to third sector organisations by Local Authorities in Wales, and the recommendations of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (the Williams Commission).

At local level across Wales, many third sector organisations have experiencing dramatic cuts to their funding, at a time when demand for their services is increasing.

While it was recognised that some local authorities had taken engaged approaches to dialogue with third sector organisations, representatives at the meeting raised concerns with the Local Government Minister that there were a number of local authorities that had cut third sector services and activities without undertaking cost/benefit analyses, taking due account of the full value that such organisations provide, or exploring alternative options for delivery.

Representatives stressed the need for space within the budgetary cycle for third sector organisations to demonstrate the value of their services and propose alternative models of service provision, and that reasonable transition arrangements were put in place to allow organisations sufficient time to plan for change.

The Minister appreciated the issues raised and encouraged organisations to engage with local authorities as early as possible to demonstrate their value.

The Minister appreciated the issues raised and encouraged organisations to engage with local authorities as early as possible to demonstrate their value.

The report of the Williams Commission has generated a lot of discussion in the third sector, in particular about the recommendations related to mergers between local authorities.

The latest draft Framework for Engagement was discussed. This sets out the formal arrangements for how Welsh Government and the sector will work together in future. The current draft is a good start but more work needs to be done.

Third sector representatives raised concerns about the challenges for working strategically and on subjects which span several government departments and how to evidence new arrangements will lead to better wellbeing for people and communities across Wales.

The draft volunteering policy which had been developed by a small working group was discussed. Good progress has been made but further work was needed.

The sector expressed concern about the implications of the Bill; as a key partner the Sector needs to be aware of the implications of the Bill and will be expected to work to the same standards as required of public/statutory partners. There will be a detailed discussion at the next TSPC meeting in the Autumn.

TSPC puts draft volunteering policy on agenda

The Future Generations Bill, Welsh Government’s volunteering policy and the latest draft of the Framework for Engagement were top of the agenda at the last meeting of sector representatives and the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty earlier this month.

The latest meeting of the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) took place on 8 May 2014 at Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay.

From the chair Minister Jeff Cuthbert recorded his thanks for the work and commitment to the sector of Graham Benfield, former Chief Executive of WCVA.

He then stressed the importance of the Future Generations Bill; as a key partner the Sector needs to be aware of the implications of the Bill and will be expected to work to the same standards as required of public/statutory partners. There will be a detailed discussion at the next TSPC meeting in the Autumn.

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The sector expressed concern about the impact of UK Government benefit reforms and potential compulsory unpaid work experience which is not volunteering. The Minister confirmed that Welsh Government was talking to the UK Government over these issues. Other issues raised included the need to invest in support volunteers both in time and money, recognising Welsh Language as a skill and the need to have a citizen centred approach, involving service users.

The WCVA volunteering conference in July will give the opportunity to discuss the work further with members and the aim is to launch a finalised Volunteering Policy at WCVA’s annual conference in November.

Other issues discussed included regional working, local third sector compacts and the impact of the Williams Commission on public service governance and delivery on the third sector.

The minutes and papers for meetings can be found at http://tinyurl.com/kfh5fec.
Deputy Minister visits LEGO Innovation Studio

A third sector organisation that uses LEGO to help adult learners and job-seekers develop their skills in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) has been backed by Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology, Ken Skates.

The LEGO™ Education Innovation Studio in Rhyl was set up by community interest company, G2G Communities, and has provided training and education for more than 1,500 people in Denbighshire since 2011.

Supported with funding through WCVA and Menter Mon, it is the first community-based studio of its kind in the UK and is working in partnership with LEGO™, Agored, Learndirect and the British Computer Society to develop accredited courses in science, technology and maths using LEGO™ innovation.

The courses will be some of the first in the UK to use LEGO as a central resource.

G2G Communities was set up by Bill and Moira Lockitt who were formally teachers and educational researchers - and now employs 10 people at the Innovation Centre in Rhyl.

Moira Lockitt said: ‘The LEGO™ Innovation Studio came about through research in the area that Bill was undertaking on behalf of the Open University.

‘It’s taken two years to conceptualise, research and launch and we’re extremely proud that the only community-based LEGO™ Education Innovation Studio in the UK is here in North Wales.

‘It has brought a fantastic brand and multinational organisation to Rhyl. We’ve taken the technology to schools in the area and it’s been a massive hit.’

Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology, Ken Skates, commented: ‘If we don’t act now to address the skills shortage in STEM careers, the Welsh economy will lose out.

“That’s why the Welsh Government is doing everything it can to encourage learners to take up these subjects.

‘G2G Communities CIC are helping to lead the way by making learning fun, interesting and accessible.

‘The LEGO™ Education Innovation Studio has not only helped learners to develop their skills but also their self-confidence and self-belief.

‘Bill, Moira and the team at G2G have all worked extremely hard to make the studio a reality. They should be proud of what they have achieved.’

Director of Programmes at WCVA, Phil Fiander, added: ‘We know that this type of innovation and flexible approach to learning is effective in meeting people’s differing circumstances, interests and abilities.

‘G2G is an excellent example of a local organisation in touch with local needs and changing people’s lives as a result.’

Volunteering conference open for bookings

Volunteers make a difference people’s lives every day. But how can you best make a difference for your volunteers? That’s what we’ll be asking at this year’s Wales Volunteering Conference, which comes to Cardiff City Stadium on Tuesday, 1 July, 2014.

Titled Shaping the volunteering landscape, we’ll look at how to make a positive difference to help your volunteers become even better at improving people’s lives.

Speakers include:
• Paul Dear, Head of third sector and community policy at Welsh Government, on a Volunteering Policy for Wales
• Emma Makarova, Volunteering Manager at Refugee Action, on guidance around asylum seekers and volunteering
• Independent training consultant Huw Edwards on lobbying and influencing government

Workshops will include:
• Consultant Rob Jackson on shaping volunteers’ environment within your organisation
• Bev Hampson of Breast Cancer Care and Suzanne Chisholm of WCVA on how your volunteering views can influence government policy
• Constance Adams of WCVA on volunteers shaping public services

And watch out for our unique lunchtime Brief Encounters - mini-presentations held over lunch in the exhibition area, focusing on improving understanding on volunteering and benefits, developing volunteer-led services, and more.

You can read the full programme and book your place at www.wcva.org.uk or by emailing eventsadmin@wcva.org.uk.