

Mid Wales gets closer to Europe

Mid Wales residents are able to get instant access to information about the European Union, thanks to a service run by WCVA. People living in the most remote region of the country will be able to get instant answers to questions on dozens of subjects, ranging from how to get their qualifications recognised to how to complain about unsafe products.

WCVA is one of six Welsh information relays - and one of 700 across Europe - that link up with the Europe Direct service, which provides advice and information to 450 million people throughout the 27 EU member states.

Fiona Harris, who recently took up a new position with WCVA coordinating the Europe Direct Relay in Newtown, Powys, said: 'Europe Direct aims to offer general information about EU matters in any of the official EU languages, answer questions on any European Union policy and provide practical information on dozens of subjects.'

The service provides contact details of relevant organisations the public may need to deal with and offers advice to help overcome practical problems

with exercising their rights in Europe. It can also assist by organising relevant events and aims to provide speakers on a wide variety of topics relating to the EU.

'Europe Direct sets out to answer the questions of citizens about the EU's institutions, legislation, policies, programmes and funding opportunities - as well as promoting local and regional debate,' Fiona added.

'It allows European institutions to improve the spread of information tailored to local and regional needs, giving the public an opportunity to send feedback in the form of questions, opinions and suggestions.

'And WCVA aims to inform through the relay the provision of hands-on EU information to people at a local level.'

- Europe Direct will have a stand at some of the schools farmers' markets organised by Mid Wales Food and Land Trust and taking place across Powys throughout 2008.

To contact Europe Direct, please call 00800 6 7 8 9 10 11.

Report on vital source of third sector revenue

The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have published a joint report on the main obstacles facing charities taking up Gift Aid.

The report, *Key barriers to the adoption of Gift Aid*, was undertaken following claims that charities are not making the most of Gift Aid due to lack of confidence and awareness. The research was carried out by Ipsos MORI during Autumn 2007, and included interviews with 46 charities of varying sizes, six intermediary organisations who help charities administer tax efficient giving, and five organisations with expertise in third sector policy development.

The research concluded that Gift Aid is viewed positively by all charities, regardless how often they use it. It is an extra source of vital funding for many and had become a vital part of many organisations' fundraising strategy.

There is a low level of understanding on how Gift Aid works within smaller charities who often rely heavily on donations as an income stream, whereas larger charities are more aware of the rules and registration process but less reliant on the additional funds.

Richard Harrison, CAF's Director of Research commented: 'The findings clearly informed the

Government's plans for improving Gift Aid, announced last month. The improvements focus particularly on helping smaller charities, and this research fully supports the notion that it is smaller charities who need support to make the most of Gift Aid. The promised simplification of audits, information and guidance is exactly what they have said they want.'

WCVA Chief Executive Graham Benfield OBE added: 'It is vitally important that charities and third sector organisations become fully conversant with the ways and means of Gift Aid as it is a vital source of additional funding for the sector. WCVA warmly welcomes the Chancellor's decision to allow charities to reclaim Gift Aid at existing income tax rates, for the next three years, even though income tax will fall this month.

'The Chancellor's decision to support large and small charities in this way will save them approximately £100m a year for three years. We hope the government will now act on proposals from the sector to simplify this important relief, and improve its take-up.'

For a copy of the report, please visit www.cafonline.org. For more information on Gift Aid please contact WCVA's Helpdesk on 0800 2888 329.



News and information for Wales from:
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Revised guidance hopes to open new doors to public sector contracts for sector

Revised guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government will help community and voluntary groups better compete for public sector contracts and operate in a level playing field, a conference in Cardiff was told on Wednesday 7 May.

Andrew Davies, Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery launched the refreshed Opening Doors Charter that sets out advice on working with the third sector.

Mr Davies said: 'The Welsh Assembly Government has an ongoing commitment to champion the role of community and voluntary organisations in public service delivery, as well as other areas such as community transport, recycling, housing or community regeneration.

'The refreshed Opening Doors Charter marks a significant milestone in improving public sector procurement opportunities for this important part of our society. Since its launch in 2006, the charter has enabled significant progress to be made, with every major public sector organisation now signed up to the Charter principles. The refreshed 2008 version makes it clear that the term 'SMEs' also refers to third sector organisations and supported businesses.

'By giving greater recognition to the third sector in procurement practices we can break down the

commonly cited barriers of the lack of information about contract opportunities, trends towards larger scale contracts, complex and costly tendering procedures and short term contracts.'

The Business Procurement Task Force, chaired by Andrew Davies, will be switching its focus from the Welsh Assembly Government providing the building blocks to focusing on contributions from other sectors. Task Force work will include delivery of commitments contained within the Third Sector Action Plan agreed with WCVA.

The Supported Businesses Sub-group of the Task Force is currently developing a reserved framework contract for supported businesses. A supported business includes social firms who employ disabled people comprising more than 50 per cent of their workforce. The Welsh Assembly Government's Value Wales is leading this work. Value Wales has also commissioned the development of a new course for public sector procurers on how to work with the third sector. It will be rolled out later in the year.

Opening Doors - The Charter for SME Friendly Procurement and Procurement and the Third Sector: Guidance for the Public Sector in Wales can be found at:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingervices/better/vfm/publications/openingdoors/?lang=en>.

What's in store for your area of Wales?

The Wales Spatial Plan Update Consultation is now closed. The response has been encouraging, with excellent attendance at the regional events, with a good mix of sectors and a genuine enthusiasm to participate and help take the work forward.

In addition to the regional events, the Spatial Plan team has been engaging with the business sector, the planning community, the voluntary sector, as well as children and young people.

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New Ministers are in place in all of the areas and have been attending the events. The lead Ministers will be working closely with the Area Groups to drive delivery forward in their regions, and the discussions about delivery from the consultation workshops will be fed in to this process.

The Spatial Plan team aims to get the updated document published in the summer.

WCVA is coordinating the voluntary sector involvement in the Spatial Plan at both area and national level, and we are always looking for ways to improve our engagement with the sector and welcome any recommendations.

For more details please contact Constance Adams on 01686 611052 or at cadams@wcva.org.uk. For more information about the Update, or any aspect of the Wales Spatial Plan, please contact the team on 029 2082 3759 or send a query to WSP@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

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Rewarding good work

Voluntary organisations across Wales will be put in the spotlight during 2008 thanks to the newly established *Network Wales* Awards.

The *Network Wales* Awards, supported by Class Telecommunications, were launched at WCVA's annual conference. They have been set up to showcase the work of the third sector and provide national recognition for outstanding achievements.

Individuals can nominate their own organisation for an award and can also nominate other organisations in separate categories. Each nominated organisation will receive a certificate of commendation and the winners will be presented with an award at WCVA's annual conference dinner in 2008. The deadline for receipt of nominations is 19 September 2008.

To receive a nomination form for the *Network Wales* Awards 2008 please contact the WCVA Helpdesk on 0800 2888 329 or visit www.wcva.org.uk.

A stronger channel of communication

Phase 2 of the Strategy for Older People was recently launched and as the voluntary sector is recognised as having a leading role to play, Age Alliance Wales (AAW) is revamping its website to deliver a stronger communication network.

Working on the principle that something can't be regarded as good practice until you tell someone else, people working with and for older people will be given the opportunity to share the good work they do on AAW's new website. Capturing knowledge in this way is vital to ensuring that solid evidence of what works is shared around Wales

Lowri Griffiths, Chair of the Alliance, said: 'Information sharing is so important when we struggle to recognise what works. If you believe that what you are doing makes a difference to people's lives, let someone else know. Giving in this way may mean lives will be changed for the better elsewhere.'

The new website will be interactive, allowing up to 300 people from all over Wales to become accredited users to share good practice and exchange information about older people's issues. If you want to take part, call 029 2043 1538 or email martyn.pengilly@agealliancewales.org.uk.

Last chance to apply to the *Be Informed* scheme

Sustainable Funding Cymru (SFC) has introduced the *Be Informed* scheme aimed at helping groups in their bid for sustainability by showing them how - and how not - to go about finding it.

Managed and administered by WCVA and funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) in Wales, the initiative will give groups financial support to visit another organisation to learn about their first hand experiences and the key issues to consider when attempting to find funding.

The *Be Informed* scheme will enable the sharing of best practice and result in organisations improving their understanding of the processes involved in sustainable funding.

As well as contributing a maximum of £200 towards group members' out of pocket expenses such as time and travel, *Be Informed* will also pay the host organisation a consultancy fee to a maximum of £200 for the time spent with its visitors.

Application forms are available from WCVA's Helpdesk on 0800 2888 329, email help@wcva.org.uk or visit www.sustainablefundingcymru.org.uk/beinforme. Closing date for the fund is 30 June 2008.

consultation

The Welsh Assembly Government is consulting on proposals to extend the provision of rates relief to certain shops, registered child carers and credit unions.

It invites comments on the proposals and draft order that will implement them. The consultation (<http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/currentconsultation/locgovcurrcons/smallbusinessrelief/?lang=en>) includes a draft outline of the order which will implement the final proposals. With appropriate re-numbering this will be incorporated into the existing Non-Domestic rating (Small Business Relief)(Wales) Order 2006.

Local authorities are invited to identify and justify any reasonable additional costs that they will incur from administering the scheme. Deadline date for responses is 24 July 2008.



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What next for Communities First?

The Welsh Assembly Government has been consulting on its proposals for the next phase of Communities First (C1st), their programme to tackle the causes and effects of poverty in Wales' most disadvantaged communities.

The consultation document restates the commitment to a 'community-led programme' and includes proposals for a clearer focus on tangible outcomes and increased programme bending, together with streamlining of Programme support structures and a shift in funding from support to frontline delivery.

WCVA's response to the consultation has welcomed the drive for greater clarity of direction and purpose but warns that the proposals place heavy responsibilities on C1st Partnerships, including their community members who give their time voluntarily, whilst saying little about what will be done to assist them. WCVA's response also calls for action by the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage and support the delivery of frontline services by third sector organisations in C1st areas.

At community level the C1st programme relies for its success on a considerable network of thousands of volunteers, community and voluntary organisations. They bring expert knowledge of their community to contribute to the planning and design of services together with their power to co-produce the outcomes that are desirable for regeneration - more people in work, safer neighbourhoods, less waste, more social enterprise. They bring their experience of delivering services that are meeting the needs identified by C1st Partnerships.

WCVA has called for the Welsh Assembly Government, as a priority, to take steps to reassure C1st Partnerships, particularly their volunteer members, that they are valued as partners in the process of regeneration. Our response sets out three other initiatives that the Assembly Government should undertake to assist Partnerships.

- Introduce a training and support programme for Partnerships, in planning, development and

project management and skills for participation, representation and partnership working.

- Develop new sources of support, including peer-to-peer learning and mentoring, as proposed in the consultation document, but with the proviso that these may not be able to provide a universal and consistent level of support to all Partnerships.

- Introduce a national initiative to support and develop the skills of co-ordinators and support staff across the programme, backed up by a national support service, accessible in the way that Partnerships want to receive it - independent, co-ordinated and responsive to their needs.

The consultation document proposes an increase in 'programme bending' - the directing of public services towards those areas of greatest need - and the creation of an 'outcome fund' to encourage this.

WCVA's response calls for:

- additional incentives that could encourage local and shared agreements about the content and delivery of services, including funding for participatory budgeting and a percentage of public service budgets for community commissioning;

- greater recognition that third sector organisations are already delivering 'frontline' services, many with independent and self-generated income, and an initiative from the Welsh Assembly Government to encourage their involvement in the programme; and

- an unequivocal statement on citizen engagement from the Welsh Assembly Government, that requires service providers to work with C1st Partnerships, to link them into strategic planning, and to put in place training in engagement skills for frontline staff and for service planners and managers. Citizen engagement in the design and delivery of services is critical in these most disadvantaged communities where the alternative is a continuation of service failure.

WCVA's full response can be found at www.wcva.org.uk.

The next editions of this WCVA national supplement will be available at the end of July and September.



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