



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

# Valleys Taskforce: stakeholder interviews (summary)

This report gathers the views of Valleys Taskforce (VTF) Stakeholders through interviews. It aimed to summarise the progress of the programme since inception, how it has worked and how effective it has been.

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## Introduction

The VTF programme was established in July 2016 by the then Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies AM. Its establishment represented a new way of working on a cross-governmental basis to try to tackle deep-rooted socio-economic challenges across the south Wales Valleys.

The VTF published its first plan of action, **Our Valleys, Our Future**, in July 2017, setting out three overarching priorities for

- good quality jobs and the skills to do them
- better public services
- my local community.

In July 2019, the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters MS (who took over the role of chair in 2018), announced that the VTF would focus

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upon seven priority themes ([Update on the Ministerial taskforce for the south Wales Valleys](#)). In addition, the geographical boundary of the Taskforce was extended to include the Gwendraeth and Amman Valleys in Carmarthenshire.

## Aims and objectives of study

OB3 Research, in collaboration with Dateb, was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake qualitative interviews with key VTF programme stakeholders.

The aims of the study was to:

- summarise the progress made by the VTF since it was established in 2016, specifically around the three priorities and seven workstreams
- identify how the VTF has worked and how effective this has been as a regional approach to policy development and delivery

The study was expected to address ten objectives including a requirement to identify the key drivers behind the VTF, review the effectiveness of programme governance and delivery arrangements, identify examples of effective joint working between partner organisations and gather evidence on how lessons from the programme could inform and shape future work.

## Method

The study, undertaken between September and December 2020, involved:

- an inception stage, which included a virtual inception meeting with Welsh Government officials and the preparation of a refined methodological approach and project plan
- desk based research, which involved a light-tough analysis of relevant Welsh Government policy and strategic documents as well as a detailed review of programme documentation
- preparing a qualitative discussion guide for interviewing stakeholders and interviewing a total of 32 stakeholders

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- synthesising the findings of the fieldwork and desk-review and drafting a report

## Main findings

The study found that in terms of what VTF set out to achieve, interviewed stakeholders thought that:

- there was a strong case for intervention given that the Valleys region has faced long-term socio-economic disadvantage
- the VTF was a well-intentioned effort which had the potential to adopt a different approach to improve the prosperity of Valleys communities, compared with previous delivery initiatives
- it had been appropriate for the VTF to be established with a region-wide Valleys remit as this would provide a strong advocacy voice for the Valleys, in keeping with an increasingly place based and regional approach to policy development and programme delivery across Wales
- the VTF's priorities and delivery plan had been well informed by initial community engagement activities and views
- the VTF had been established with very ambitious aims and objectives, but questioned whether these were achievable within the timescales set
- the aims of the VTF were two-fold: many stakeholders considered the aim of the VTF to establish a cross-governmental, spatially based approach which would coordinate existing policy and interventions to increase the impact of current resources in the Valleys. Others placed greater emphasis upon the VTF being a delivery vehicle which would fund specific interventions for the benefit of the Valleys communities
- there had been a shift in VTF's priorities and delivery plans over time, this was felt to be driven by political influences rather than informed by evidence about the effectiveness of interventions

The study found that in terms of VTF's ways of working, stakeholders thought that:

- the VTF governance arrangements have been appropriate. Strengths included commitment from strategic players, effective leadership and a

transparent way of working. Weaknesses included over complicated structures (e.g. in terms of the seven sub-groups) and a lack of formal community input to the Ministerial Taskforce

- the Programme Board had functioned effectively but that the effectiveness of the working sub-groups varied
- the lack of a substantial capital and revenue funding had hampered the VTF's efforts. Stakeholders considered the Welsh Government operational team to have been under-resourced
- promoting the work of the VTF had not been a priority and more could have been done to publicise what was happening under the VTF banner
- the VTF had engaged effectively with, and strengthened connections between, key stakeholder organisations from across a wide range of sectors and geographical areas. Several samples of effective joint working between partner organisations were identified as having come about due to the VTF
- two sectors, health and education, and existing regional structures (notably City Deals) were thought to have been less engaged with the VTF

In terms of achievements and difference made, stakeholders thought that:

- it was difficult to come to a firm view about the progress made by the VTF, not least as it did not have specific indicators in place to assess performance
- progress had been hampered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, particularly VTF projects or ideas which were in their infancy or under development at the outset of the pandemic
- the VTF had effectively brought organisations together, which was resulting in increased collaboration and co-production, including cross governmental working between different Welsh Government departments
- the VTF had effectively championed and advocated the Valleys cause, and several examples were cited where VTF led discussions had influenced existing mainstream policies, approaches and funding decisions
- initiatives supported by VTF had predominantly been small-scale and low impact, reflecting the limited funding and capacity available
- the Empty Homes Grants Scheme and the VRP were two of the VTF's most noteworthy and successful projects
- being associated with the VTF offered community groups and existing initiatives increased traction and status, which in turn led to increased

- interest and support from other organisations
- the VTF had a fairly limited direct impact upon the Valleys communities. Positive impacts were thought to be mostly associated with initiatives such as the Empty Homes Scheme, Foundational Economy Challenge Fund projects and the VRP

## Conclusions

- There was a strong underlying rationale and a clear need for intervention which would place the needs of the Valleys at the forefront of policy development.
- Whilst the VTF recognised that the issues to be addressed needed a long-term solution, the model adopted was time-bound by the current programme of government. To achieve the aims which VTF set itself, the intervention mechanism should have allowed for a much longer-term commitment to be adopted from the outset. This raises fundamental questions about the type of structure best suited to address the deep-rooted issues facing Valleys communities in the future.
- A key strength has been the effort to engage communities to elicit their views and opinions about the priorities which the VTF should focus upon. It is evident that the feedback gathered was used effectively to inform the priorities of the work programme and distinguishes the VTF from its predecessor programmes.
- The VTF had very ambitious aims and objectives but lacked the resources and capacity to deliver on these effectively. A key issue raised was whether the VTF ought to have been established from the outset with an adequate level of revenue and capital funding to enable it to achieve its ambitious aims and objectives.
- The VTF has succeeded in part in achieving its aim of influencing and gaining leverage over policies and interventions which were already in place, to accelerate and amplify improvements for the Valleys. It has played an important advocacy role for the Valleys by ensuring that a greater focus is given to Valleys specific issues across mainstream policy and service delivery.
- The VTF has functioned effectively as a conduit to facilitate relationships and

encourage collaboration and co-production across different policy areas. It has contributed and helped to reduce silo working across a number of policy areas, particularly within Welsh Government, and the research found several examples of effective cross-policy joint working which had been instigated by the VTF.

- The feedback suggests that programme governance and management arrangements were broadly appropriate. Having a strong Chair in place for the Ministerial Taskforce and ensuring transparency of working were highlighted as strengths. The main weaknesses of the arrangements adopted were the lack of community representation within governance structures, an under-resourced operational team and possibly an over-complicated governance structure in terms of having seven working sub-groups.
- A key lesson learned is that the VTF, considering its fairly limited capacity and resources, would have benefited from prioritising its efforts to focus on a narrower range of policy areas and fewer, more strategic projects. Another key lesson is that the VTF would have benefited from reviewing its sector and policy coverage at its mid-point stage to identify, and where appropriate address, any gaps in terms of its reach into these. In the case of the VTF's delivery to date, these gaps were considered to have been most evident in health and education.

## Recommendations

Taking into account the views offered by stakeholders, the report offers the following recommendations for the Welsh Government to consider.

### Recommendation 1

On the basis that the Valleys area continues to experience deep-rooted issues and inequalities when compared to the rest of Wales, there is a strong case for continued intervention and focus on the Valleys as a regional entity

## **Recommendation 2**

That consideration be given to the most appropriate structure which would be best suited to address the needs of the Valleys in the future, ensuring that this structure allows for a long-term approach to be adopted and which reflects the establishment of CJsCs across Wales

## **Recommendation 3**

That the scale of ambition set out for any future Valleys-based intervention be appropriately matched in terms of capital and revenue funding resources, recognising that this is likely to be impacted by budgetary challenges post COVID-19

## **Recommendation 4**

That any future Valleys-based intervention adopts a narrower range of priorities and considers supporting a smaller number of larger, more strategic projects

## **Recommendation 5**

That any future Valleys-based intervention builds upon effective community engagement approaches adopted by the VTF and considers how this engagement could be sustained and built into future programme design and governance arrangements

## **Recommendation 6**

That any future intervention clearly articulates, via a theory of change approach from the outset, short term delivery goals (for example, within the term of one government) and longer-term transformational outcomes and aspirations



## Recommendation 7

That consideration be given to how some of the successful interventions piloted via the VTF (notably the Empty Homes Grant Scheme and the Valleys Regional Park) can be sustained in the future.

## Contact details

Bryer, N (2021). Valleys Taskforce Programme Qualitative interviews with stakeholders. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 19/2021

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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