



WCVA Strategic Volunteering Grant Evaluation Report, March 2025

Llais y Goedwig has been in receipt of a WCVA Strategic Volunteering grant since Autumn 2023, enabling us to work with a dedicated set of Local Authorities in Wales to help them define and improve pathways and processes for volunteering at different levels. This has ranged from support with LA managed volunteer groups on green spaces, training and marketing, support with recruitment and newsletters and helping with management agreements for autonomous volunteer groups wanting to manage LA owned green spaces.

In the final 3 months of the initial grant funding, we also widened out the scope and reach of the information we're collecting to all Local Authorities across Wales by working with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGGA) to survey all Welsh Councils and their local CVCs on their volunteering needs

Project Aims

- Help local authorities make their green spaces more accessible to volunteers and environmental organisations through good volunteering opportunities
- Provide bespoke support with systems and protocols for volunteering, complementing existing strategy on green spaces.
- Help with internal department connections to support volunteering and health and wellbeing opportunities for all residents of your county.

Project Activity

We began with a list of Councils we already have contact and a good working relationship with and widened out the list via links with partner organisations. Initial Councils that expressed an interest were, Wrexham, Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend, with Flintshire added via partner links. Of the seven potential participants, we took forward 4 main Councils to work with; Flintshire, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot, As well as several other workstreams and projects to develop case studies to showcase best practice and interesting solutions to issues. These included projects at Bridgend County Council, Brecon Town Council and NE Community Council.

Flintshire

Initial contact with Flintshire (FCC) was via a partner organisation, Cynnal Cymru. Flintshire at that point were interested in support with advertising opportunities, consolidating links with other local volunteering organisations and streamlining processes for volunteers and staff within the Council.

Following initial meetings, we made attempts to capture current volunteering opportunities, processes and support, plus any aspirational opportunities for volunteering. We also generated a list of ideas around expanding their volunteer offer, asking for their input on which they would like / had capacity to prioritise. Publicity and Marketing of existing opportunities was identified as one such area that required additional support and prioritising, taken forward with Liz Mutch. Training support for volunteers was a second area of focus, taken forward by Hywel Dodd.

See Case study provided separately for more detail.

Carmarthenshire

Our initial project plan with Carmarthenshire was to scope and collate information on existing opportunities, collect examples of good practice in managing existing volunteering activity and support the roll out of new volunteering software.

We had two main areas of work we had liked to work on. A scoping exercise, aiming to ascertain the range and status of Council-led volunteering opportunities across the Council and share best practice and knowledge to ensure consistency and quality of experience for volunteers and Council employees. Secondly, to catalogue and chart the progress of a new online volunteering platform and support the potential for this to roll out to the rest of the leisure directorate.

See Case study provided separately for more detail.

Ceredigion

Our initial main council contacts have been unable to engage with us due to illness and pressure of work, so our engagement shifted focus out of necessity to instead work more directly with CAVO. Unfortunately however, it proved impossible to move these proposals forward, despite initial enthusiasm.

The case study provided separately shows that on this occasion the true conclusion is that we were unable to find a way to overcome the barriers discovered within the time that we have. The capacity of the teams involved was such that we simply couldn't progress our ideas, ironically geared though they were, to improving capacity.

We have however, in the process of evaluating this work, had some productive conversations with departments individually, so opportunities remain for further support in the coming months.

See Case study provided separately for more detail.

Neath Port Talbot

Another of the Councils where pressure on staff time has led to an inability to engage as much as they would have liked. We attempted to work with the local CVC with similar hopes to that of our attempts with CAVO / Ceredigion in place, and investigated supporting the implementation of their imminent Volunteering Strategy. However after several attempts with different departments we were unable to progress our ideas.

We have since followed up with the local CVC as part of the evaluation of this project to get a more holistic view of the area's volunteer opportunities and their management.

Additional projects / Case Studies

Brecon town council

Llais y Goedwig are supporting Brecon Town Council as they take on the management of local park 'Island Fields' from Powys CC, and exploring how they might work alongside local organisations and volunteers to develop and utilise the site.

See Case study provided separately for more detail.

Powys County Council

We have been unable to progress our work with Powys directly, however Powys Council have been involved in the work outlined above with Brecon.

Bridgend

Llais y Goedwig has had a number of projects running with the support of Bridgend Borough Council (BCBC), or instances where we have been successful in our aims because of long standing relationships with individuals in the Council.

BCBC appointed Llais y Goedwig to manage Bedford Park LNR for and with the local community, developing a volunteer base, supporting a programme of volunteer-led activities, and identifying social enterprise activity. Through this commission we were able to consolidate community links, recruit more volunteers and engage with more and varied groups to widen participation and use of the site. Working closely with BCBC colleagues and local groups to ensure that Bedford Park is managed for and with local people.

See Case study provided separately for more detail.

Survey of all Council Areas

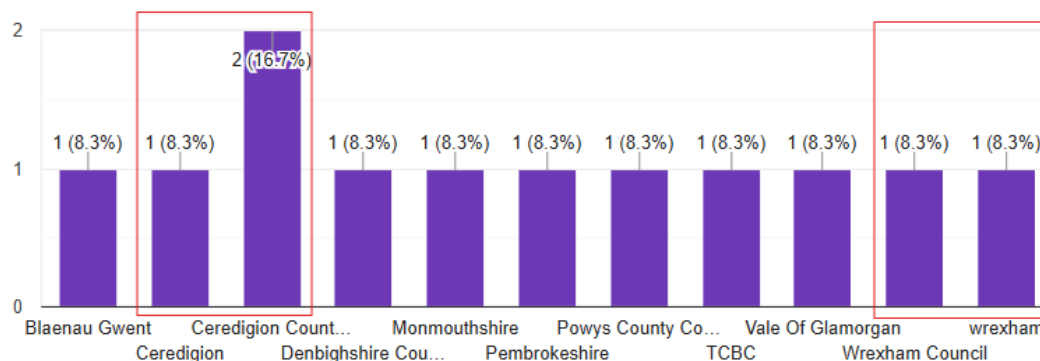
A survey was developed by Llais y Goedwig in early 2025 and sent to Local Authority contacts across Wales plus Council Voluntary Councils (CVCs), Local Nature Partnership Leads and via our work with the WCGLA, the Climate Change Officers group. There were around 90 individuals contacted directly. We received full responses from individuals within 9 of the 17 local authority areas contacted. Though roughly 50% of councils, it was only a tiny percentage of the individuals we had contacted.

The aim of the survey was to try and tease out how these councils are currently working with volunteers, what they think the gaps and barriers are to their being able to offer a consistent and coherent volunteering offer and what support would help them get there.

Which Local Authority do you work within?

 Copy chart

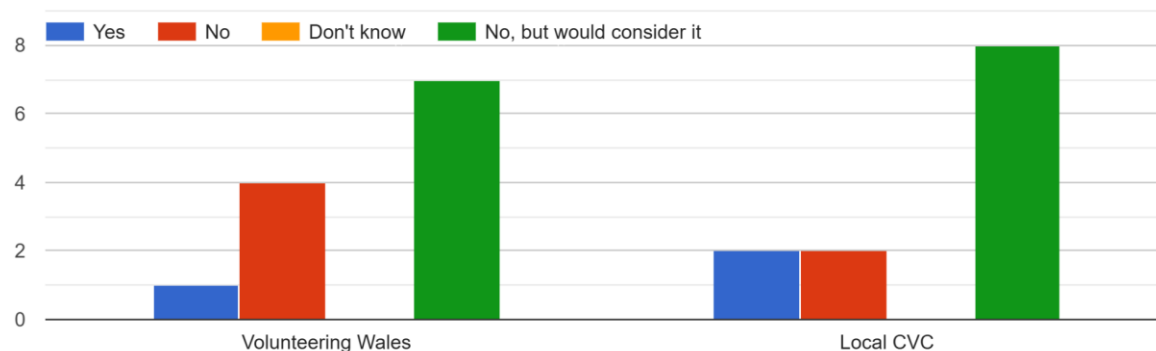
12 responses



Within the responses, we heard that councils have volunteer programmes to encourage local communities to take ownership of their green spaces, to educate and inform, as well as in a very practical sense, as a cost-effective way to keep on top of the many varied tasks required in order to manage and improve those spaces. Many had successful programmes with a small regular core group of volunteers that they could rely on.

It was regularly mentioned that council’s need more volunteers for the programmes they want to carry out. However, councils do not always have a single point of contact for potential volunteers, have no budget for marketing, and only two had a relationship with their local voluntary council.

Do you advertise with Volunteering Wales / your local CVCs (eg PAVO, CAVO etc)?



It was almost universal that current volunteering opportunities were mostly taken up by older, usually retired people, with a lack of younger volunteers, and also that finding volunteers who are happy to take on a lead role being particularly difficult. This makes Ceredigion’s Aberystwyth University model all the more interesting as a case study.

The take-away from the survey is that, while with all the best intentions, teams that do not have a dedicated volunteer coordinator are feeling too stretched to put time into updating processes, or considering alternative approaches to volunteering to make it more accessible or reflective of their local community.

Project challenges

- Capacity Constraints – Limited resources within councils often slowed progress, but LlyG’s interventions helped prioritise key actions.
- Balancing Control and Community Involvement – Encouraging councils to shift from a top-down approach to a more participatory model remains a critical area for development.

In general terms, the remit of Countryside and Rights of Ways teams within local authorities have expanded while their teams have shrunk. Their capacity to complete statutory duties is so low, that working on projects like this is understandably quite low down their list.

The response rate of the survey too, evidences the pressures felt. We struggled to get many responses to the survey, which further supports the argument that councils are simply too stretched to consider making changes to processes and procedures, or indeed to complete a survey about those challenges, even when our hope is that we can in some small way improve their capacity in the longer term.

Project Impact

Llais y Goedwig (LlyG) has found ways to support local councils, community groups, and organisations to manage green spaces effectively and support meaningful volunteer engagement, in ways that work for them at this point in time. The five case studies illustrate key areas where LlyG’s expertise has led to tangible improvements in governance, participation, and sustainability.

Key Areas of Impact

1. Facilitating Community-Led Green Space Management.
 - a. LlyG has supported councils in navigating the complexities of taking on and managing public green spaces, ensuring they are community-driven rather than top-down initiatives.
2. Developing Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Strategies.
 - a. Provided councils with practical tools and insights to improve how volunteers are recruited, retained, and engaged over time.
3. Strengthening Organisational Capacity and Policy Knowledge
 - a. Addressed gaps in councils’ expertise, particularly around volunteer management, GDPR compliance, and communications.
 - b. Assisted councils in transitioning from outsourcing tasks to co-creating with the community, reducing anxiety around volunteer management.
4. Training and Upskilling Volunteers
 - a. Facilitated skills development to enhance volunteer contributions and long-term engagement.

Proposals for future activity.

Llais y Goedwig’s interventions so far have gone some way in establishing more structured, inclusive, and effective approaches to managing green spaces and volunteers. Key next steps include:

- Continuing to support councils in long-term management planning, ensuring volunteers can play an active role in site stewardship.
- Refining engagement strategies to strengthen volunteer retention and participation.

- Exploring the potential for administrative volunteer roles within councils to alleviate burdens on staff while maintaining robust support structures.

Some suggestions from the survey to Local Councils include;

- Facilitated networking sessions and sharing of best practices between council departments,
- Volunteer management/coordination training
- Sessions on recruitment and comms strategies.
- Exploring recruitment platforms / portals, as with Carmarthenshire
- Supporting the expansion of the volunteer offer

As one specific example, Wrexham state that their recruitment and induction of volunteers is: “Very casual, and I would like to start using a platform”. So there is potential there to create links with Carmarthenshire around their recent work managing volunteers via a central online portal, with Flintshire around Marketing, or with their local CVC using Volunteering Wales.

There are also specific volunteer programmes that we could support to deliver, for example Ceredigion’s proposed ‘Trail Champions’.

Supporting Documents provided Separately:

- Case Study; Carmarthenshire
- Case Study; Ceredigion
- Case Study; Bridgend
- Case Study; Flintshire
- Case Study; Brecon
- WLGA Survey Results
- Word cloud, responses to ‘challenges’ prompt within survey
- Word cloud, responses to ‘support needed’ prompt within survey