RESEARCH

Valleys Taskforce: stakeholder survey

This report provides findings from a survey with Valleys Taskforce stakeholders. It aimed to gather stakeholder views on the programme including challenges, benefits and future priorities.

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Contents

Introduction

This summary presents findings from an online survey with Valleys Taskforce (VTF) stakeholders.

The VTF programme was established in July 2016 by the then Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies AM. It 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 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.

Research aims and methodology

The research aimed to explore stakeholder views on the VTF. It aimed to:

- gather information on how stakeholders viewed the programme
- explore stakeholders understanding of the work of the VTF
- explore how stakeholders perceived challenges in their work with VTF
- explore how stakeholders perceived benefits arising from the VTF
- discover stakeholders future priorities for the Valleys

The study was conducted between November and December 2020. A list of relevant stakeholders were identified by the Welsh Government Valleys Taskforce policy team. These individuals were then contacted by email and invited to complete the survey. The stakeholders were from the seven priority areas of the Valleys Taskforce[1]. Overall, 178 stakeholders were identified and a response rate of 21 per cent (37 participants) was achieved. A majority of participants were from local authorities (30%) or the third sector (38%). There was relatively low response rate from the private sector (5%). All of the survey participants held senior roles[2] in the organisations which they represented.

Due to the targeted sampling strategy and response rate this survey does not provide a representative sample of the views of all Valleys Taskforce stakeholders, however it does provide a useful insight to the views of those who responded.

Two types of analysis were undertaken on the survey results, descriptive analysis of closed questions and thematic analysis of open response questions. Where percentages are reported in this report they have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. For a small number of questions no percentages are used, this is when findings relate to answers provided to the open-ended questions. The themes used to analyse these questions are reported.

[1] The seven priority work areas are: Transforming Towns, Valleys Regional Park / Discovery Gateways, Valleys Taskforce Innovation Fund, Alumni / Education, Strategic Hubs, Transport, Entrepreneurship and Business Support, Foundational Economy, Housing.

[2] As derived from a simplified version of the **National Statistics socio-economic Classification** used.

Findings

Engagement with the Valleys Taskforce

A majority of participants (70%) had been involved in the work of the VTF since the current Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters MS, who took over the role of chair in 2018. Although, almost a third (27%) of participants had been involved since the start of the programme.

Participants stated that they had the most engagement with the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) (68%) and The Foundational Economy (51%) priority area. Housing (16%) and the Innovation Fund/ Alumni/ Education (19%) were the priority areas with the lowest contact from participants.

Chart 1: Contact with priority work areas of the VTF for all survey participants (base=122)
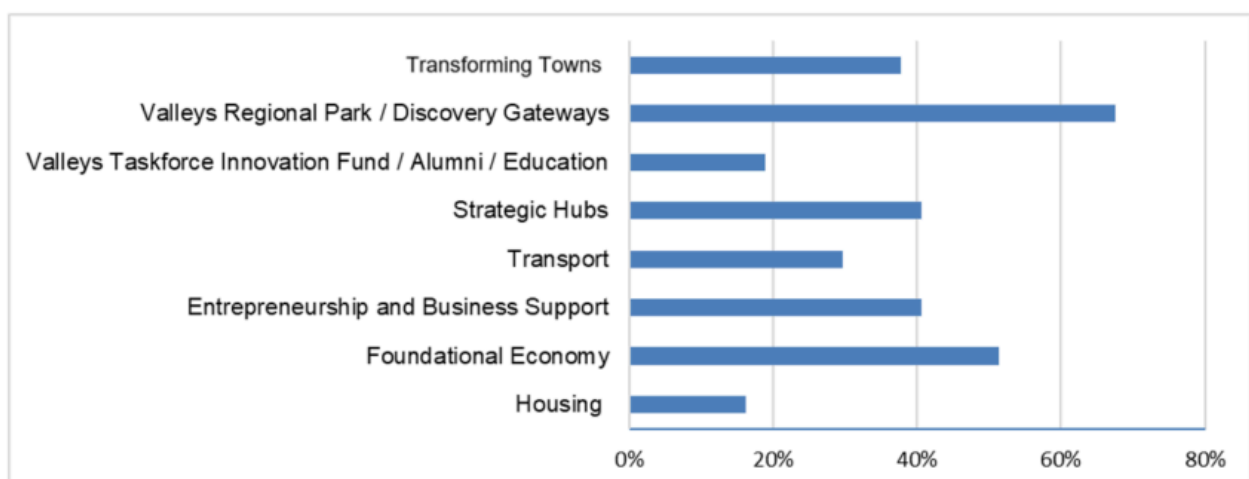
Overall, participants stated that they were happy with the support they had

received (68% agreed or strongly agreed). In addition, 59 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Welsh Government have facilitated partnership working.

There were mixed results from respondents on how easy it had been to access support from the VTF. A majority of respondents (57% agreed or strongly agreed) felt it had been easy to access support. However, a notable minority (16% disagreed or strongly disagreed) felt it had not been easy to access the support needed.

Ways of working

Overall, there were high levels of communication reported between Welsh Government and VTF stakeholders.

- 70% of participants had met with Welsh Government officials, 68% had attended events and 60 per cent had received information and communicated with Welsh Government officials over the phone, email and social media.
- Relatively few participants reported that they had delivered a project with the VTF (27%), but this may reflect the nature of the work that is undertaken by the VTF where it can be hard to identify specific projects.

Chart 2: Types of contact with the VTF for all survey respondents (base=144)
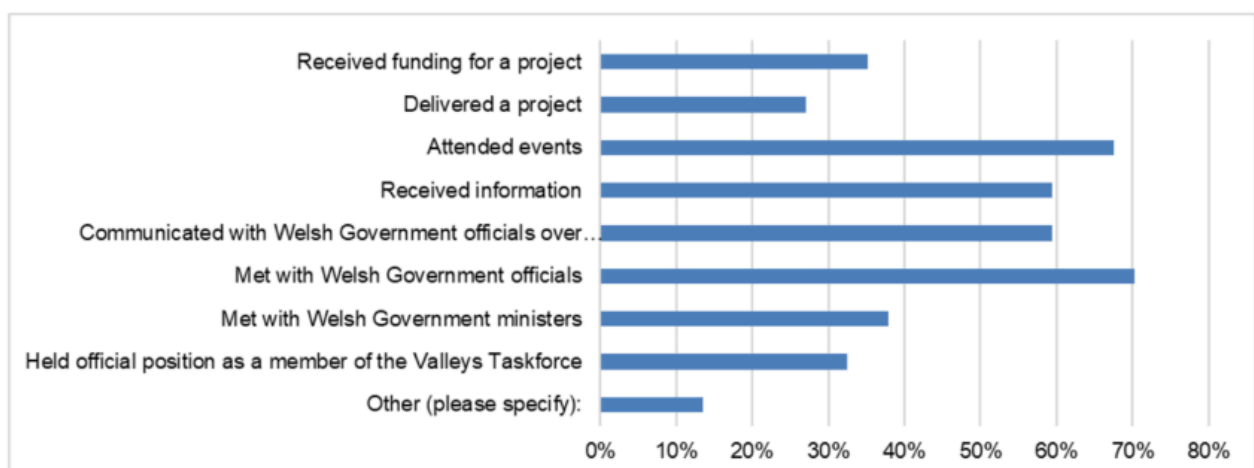
In addition, it was found that there was good communication within priority work

areas, as 60% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the VTF led to better communication with others in their priority work area.

Participants also suggested they had a good understanding of the VTF:

- 62% had good or very good understanding of the role of the VTF
- 57% had good or very good understanding of the programme of working being undertaken by the VTF
- 68% had a good or very good understanding of the objectives of the VTF

Stakeholders suggested that the VTF had facilitated and increased partnership working.
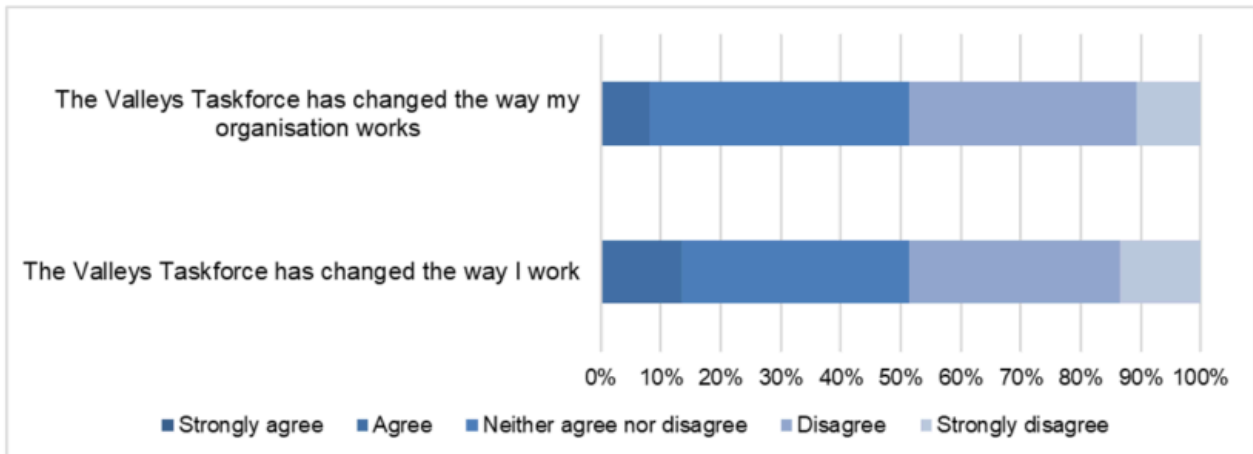
- 65% agreed or strongly agreed that the VTF had led to increased opportunities for partnership working. Whilst, 52% agreed or strongly agreed that the VTF had been able to increase partnerships between organisations working in the Valleys.

Chart 3: Percentage in agreement with statements on work based opportunities through the VTF (base=37)
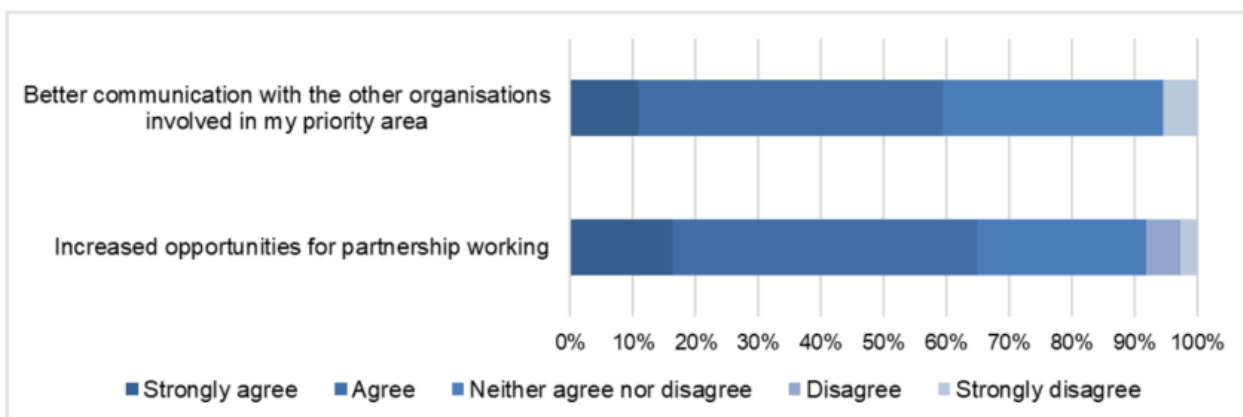
However, participants did not feel that the VTF had changed the way they, or their organisation, worked overall (14% and 8% respectively agreed).
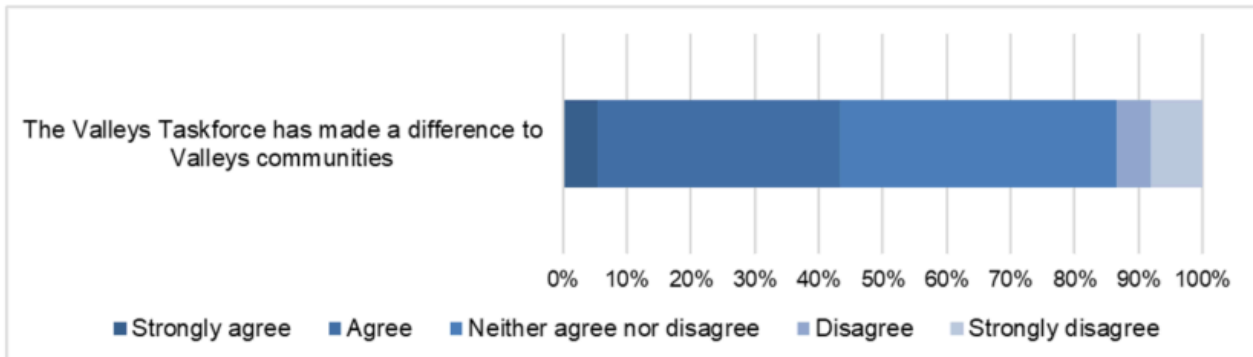
Chart 4: Percentage in agreement on changes to ways of working attributed to the VTF (base=37)

The Valleys Taskforce has changed the way my organisation works

The Valleys Taskforce has changed the way I work

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

What should success look like?

42% felt that the VTF has made a difference to Valleys communities.

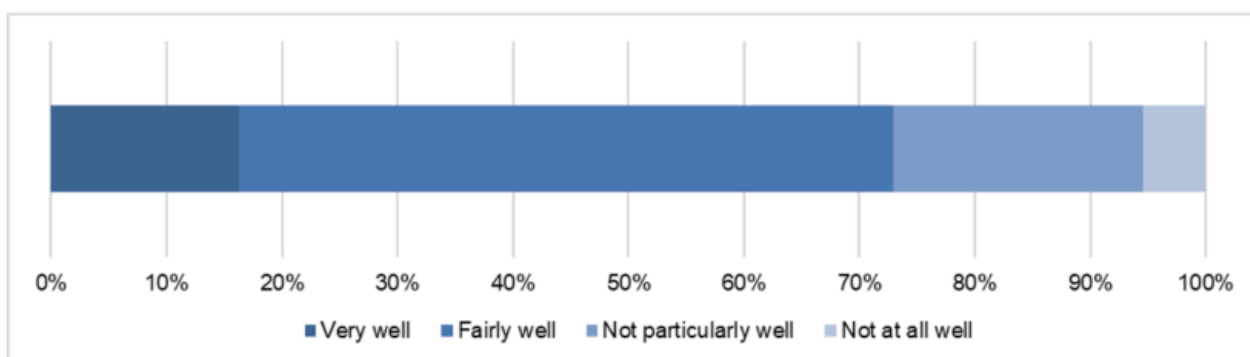**Chart 5: Percentage in agreement that the VTF has made a difference to Valleys communities (base=37)**

The Valleys Taskforce has made a difference to Valleys communities

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

When asked to evaluate the extent to which the VTF are fulfilling their role, a majority (57%) thought they were doing 'fairly well'. In response to the free text option to express why they thought this, participants identified several common factors.

- Many identified that the VTF is operating in a challenging and complex environment. Participants suggested that there had been some clear successes, such as the Empty Homes Grant but that there had been challenging timescales in other priority areas.

- Participants also identified that resource and focus were spread across a large range of priorities.
- Other stakeholders identified strengths in visible and practical outcomes, such as in the Foundational Economy priority area.
- Some participants suggested that the VTF was doing a good job, as it was important there was a programme to target support to the Valleys.

However, there was not agreement that the VTF has targeted the correct priorities, with 46% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 22% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Chart 6: Respondents view on how well the VTF is fulling its role (base=37)

Chart 7: Percentage in agreement that the VTF has targeted the correct priorities (base = 37)
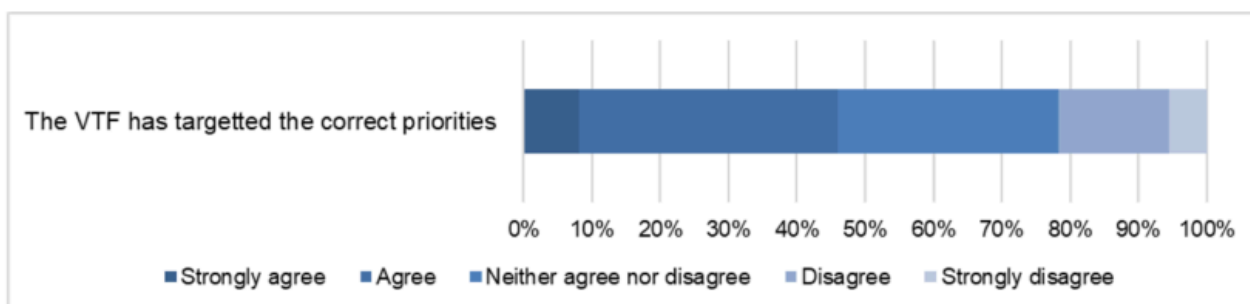

There were mixed views on whether the VTF had led to increased access to funding and resource.

- 49% agreed or strongly agreed that there had been increased access to funding.
- 38% agreed or strongly agreed and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed

that the VTF had led to increased access to resources.

Chart 8: Percentage in agreement that the VTF led to access to funding and resources
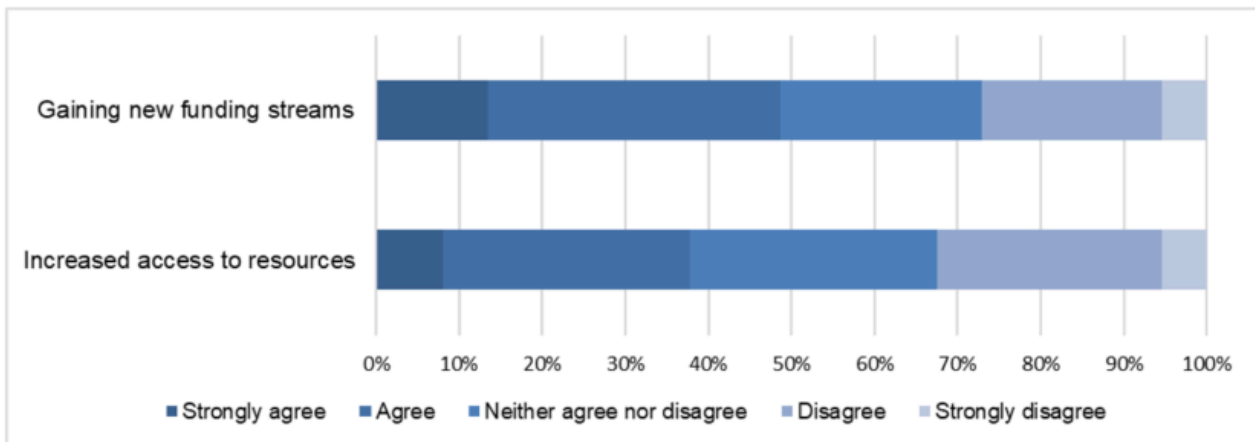
The majority of participants felt that work they had been involved in had been sped up as a result of the VTF (65% agreed or strongly agreed). Whilst 49% suggest the projects they'd been involved in would not have gone ahead without the VTF, 24% disagreed - suggesting the work would have gone ahead without the VTF.

Chart 9: Percentage in agreement with statements on projects undertaken with the VTF
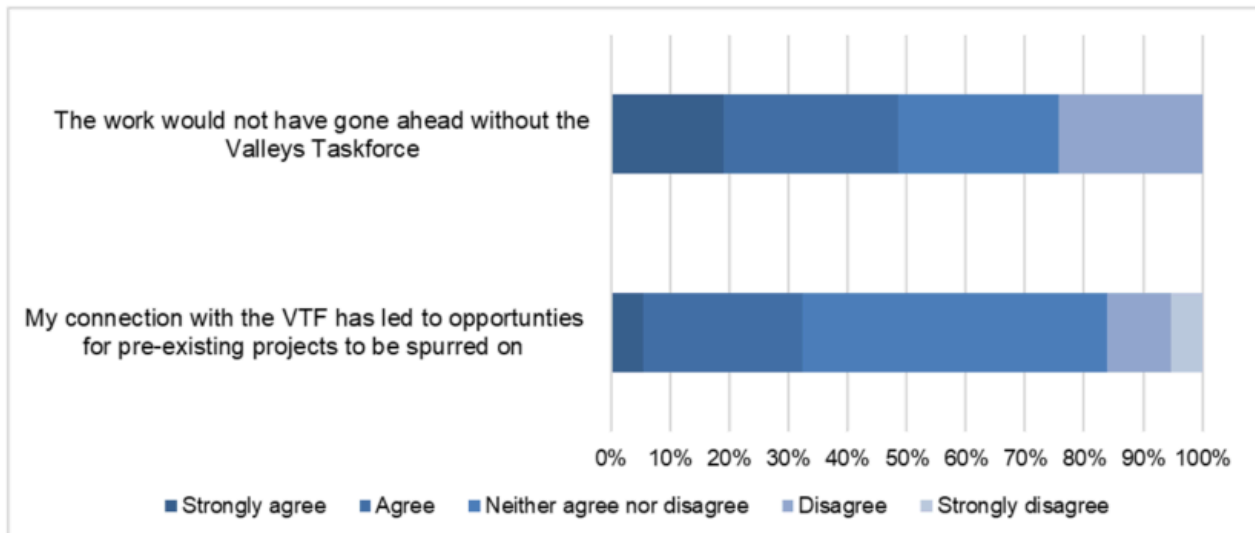
What should success look like?

Three quarters of respondents (76%) felt the programme had changed over the

course of their involvement, with 27% who felt the programme had changed significantly.

A mixture of reasons were given for perceived changes to the VTF. Three main themes could be identified from the responses to the question on changes felt over the course of participant's interactions with the programme.

- Participants identified that the programme had improved to become more focussed and goal driven.
- Participants recognised that the change of chair had resulted in a change to projects and direction
- Participants suggested that there had been a reduction in engagement with particular organisations or areas, for instance community gateways and hubs.

Challenges

57% of participants identified challenges in their work with the VTF.

Four themes across the challenges were identified.

- **Awareness of the work of the VTF**: participants suggested that they felt the work of the VTF could be more visible. They also suggest those who were less involved with the VTF may benefit from more clarity on the different projects that had been undertaken by the VTF.
- **Vision for the Valleys**: participants suggested that the aims for the VTF in their work in the Valleys could be bolder. It was thought that this might require more resources to be directed to the programme.
- **Changes to personnel**: it was suggested that changes to the VTF team had led to loss of momentum in the past. It was though this might be due to a loss of expertise as people moved on from the programme.
- **Co-ordination**: differing working practices across local authorities were seen as challenging, it was suggested that there needed to be better co-ordination between organisations as well as within them to allow the aims of the VTF to be reached.

86% agreed or strongly agreed that Welsh Government support would be needed to allow projects to continue. Multiple areas of support were suggested.

- Several participants suggested that they'd like to see support for businesses in future, in order to help to support economic resilience. They proposed support would be welcomed for start-ups, social enterprises and for project management across organisational types.
- Several participants wanted to ensure learning from the VTF was taken forward, including examples of effective delivery and how these could be incorporated into mainstream practice. Participants wanted to embed examples of good practice and make sure there was long term support available for successful initiative.
- A few participants wanted clearer roles for partners and additional promotion of partnership opportunities.
- Some participants wanted to see greater communication with communities and small third sector organisations.
- Others suggested that there needed to be a clear review of activities, to help with a planned exit strategy and planning of integration with on-going work streams outside of the VTF.

Respondents also had ideas how the programme should evolve.

- They suggested that it would be important to keep systems in place that had worked well, so that innovation continued to be funded. It was suggested that this could be supported by retaining the existing VTF Welsh Government officials to help build legacy and continue momentum.
- Some also suggested the VTF could do more to increase awareness of the VTF and there could be come re-engagement with communities.

Respondents provided their 3 future priorities for the Valleys, these were identified by thematic analysis and are included in Table 1. The top 3 priorities suggested are:

- support for employment (including upskilling, training and reducing barriers to employment)
- transport
- the environment (including energy and greener homes)

Table 1: Top 3 priorities for future programmes to target the Valleys

Priorities for the future of the Valleys	% of total responses	Number of responses
Employment support	19	15
Transport	8	6
Environment and green energy	8	6
Vision for the Valleys	6	5
Digital connectivity	6	5
Promote tourism	6	5
Business support	5	4
Communication	5	4
Hubs	5	4
Community focus	4	3
Valleys Regional Park	4	3
Health	4	3
More resource	4	3
COVID 19 recovery	3	2
Valleys focussed procurement	3	2

Priorities for the future of the Valleys	% of total responses	Number of responses
Educational opportunities	3	2
Awareness of opportunity	1	1
Change funding structures	1	1
Improve built environment	1	1
Improve town centres	1	1
Remove geographical boundaries	1	1
Tackle poverty	1	1
Total	100	78

Conclusions

This report summarises the findings of an online survey of stakeholders who were involved with the Valleys Taskforce.

The evidence from stakeholders suggests that there has been high amounts of communication between Welsh Government and VTF stakeholders and that a majority are content with the support provided. The results from the survey suggest that the VTF have facilitated partnership working (68% agreed or strongly agreed) and supported stakeholders to improve communication across priority work areas (60% agreed or strongly agreed). Stakeholders also report a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the VTF.

The stakeholders surveyed reported a mix of views on whether the VTF had led to new projects and increased access to funding and resources. Just under half

(49%) of the stakeholders surveyed suggested that the projects they'd been involved in would not have gone ahead without the VTF whilst 24% disagreed, suggesting the work would have gone ahead without the VTF.

However, there was agreement from stakeholders that the VTF has increased the progress of pre-existing projects (65% agreed or strongly agreed). Of the stakeholders who responded to the survey, 38% agreed or strongly agreed and 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the VTF had led to increased access to resources.

There were several challenges identified in open text responses in the survey, these covered a range of scales, from programme level issues to macro organisational challenges. Some stakeholders suggested that the aims of the VTF could be bolder, but also that aiming to facilitate partnerships of across a range of organisations was always going to highly challenging. It was also suggested the changes to the VTF officials and priorities had led to a requirement to deliver to challenging timescales.

The stakeholders who responded to the survey did not feel that the VTF had changed the way they, or their organisation worked overall (14% and 8% respectively agreed). In addition, there was not agreement on priorities from the stakeholders surveyed on the focus of the VTF (46% agreed or strongly agreed and 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

The evidence from this survey suggests that stakeholders wished to see the support from the VTF to continue (86%). They suggested that future priorities should include: support for business and other forms of economic support, greater facilitation of communication by the VTF as well as a review of work undertaken to explore what should be taken forwarded. Stakeholders suggested that it was important to continue momentum.

Contact details

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

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