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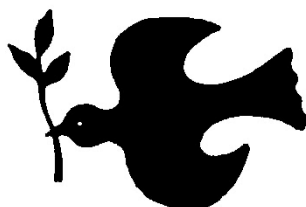
Sarn Helen Care and Support Service proposal – feasibility study

December 2021



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1. Introduction

Urban Foundry ('we'/us/'the consultants') was commissioned by Dove Workshop ('the client') to undertake an outline feasibility study into the proposals for developing a care and support service.

The business would service Onllwyn, Seven Sisters, and Crynant initially.

The project concept is to develop a service with input from local residents drawing from shared experiences, particularly (though not necessarily exclusively) of local vulnerable and elderly people, who find it difficult to identify the appropriate people to offer care and home help services.

Dove Workshop are the clients for this study, but the intention is for the business (if deemed feasible) to be a set up as a newly created co-operative and operating independently of Dove Workshop.

This work was funded by a grant to Dove Workshop from the Welsh Government's Rural Development Programme ('RDP'), administered via Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

The work commenced in July 2021 and was concluded in December 2021.

Project background and outline

Dove Workshop and their partners – various individuals from the local community – have formulated the idea of Sarn Helen Care & Support Service.

The idea stems from input from local residents and from shared experiences of local vulnerable and elderly people who find it difficult to identify the appropriate people to offer care and home help services.

Casual discussions had been held with several local residents who have been unable to access the services they need, when they needed them. There had also been casual discussions with several skilled people who could offer a range of services, and who were keen to find work. However, they do not have the financial resources for marketing or taking part in training. Dove Workshop are also working with their local Councillor (Cllr Dean Cawsey) and the Local Area Coordinator for the Dulais Valley Ioan Richards.

The proposed social business is intended to ensure good access to local services, building confidence amongst prospective users of the service as a visible, accountable business using people that are familiar to them.

The business is intended to provide a hub for local skilled people with support in marketing their services, providing access to training locally, and access to a worker that will manage the booking system and payments. The client intends that the business will become a model of working that will support and encourage younger generations to gain skills, get involved, and in the future take up traineeships and/or apprenticeships.

The business will be set up as a (newly formed) co-operative. It will not be a trading arm of Dove; it is anticipated that it will be a stand-alone co-operative supported by Dove Workshop to establish itself.

Brief

The brief we received from the client for the feasibility study was to address the following:

- the availability of local people with skills and their interest in joining the co-operative;
- identify the needs and challenges of local people;
- establish the cost of providing the service and how accessible those services are;
- research potential competition / duplication and how the client might work with existing businesses to enhance and improve services.

If the feasibility study is positive, then Dove Workshop and its partners will formulate a business plan and seek start-up costs.

The project aims to provide local access via a community-run co-operative of skilled workers who will have taken part in safeguarding training, hold an enhanced DBS certificate (when appropriate). The intention is that the co-operative will ensure those who use the service: will be treated with respect; are not overcharged; and safe working practices are maintained for both the worker and the user.

The services that the co-operative is intended to offer are listed as: gardening; decorating; small maintenance jobs; shopping; and basic household chores. In regard to close personal care, the business will consider tendering for Local Authority contracts in our geographical areas of operation in the same way as other companies do. If the consultative phase of the feasibility study finds that there are other services people would like included and those would be taken into consideration.

Dove Workshop and its community partners do not wish to compete with other services or to employ handypersons directly.

Approach

The work consisted of the following phases:

Theory of change workshop

We began the work with a Theory of Change workshop with key local stakeholders, who were identified by Dove Workshop. Due to ongoing Covid19 risks at the time the work commenced, the workshop was conducted online via Zoom and facilitated by the consultants.

The workshop considered: the needs driving the project and whose needs they were; the intended outcomes (impact); what the actions (activities) would be that the project would deliver; and considering some of the key constraints (including potential for competition/duplication), prior to undertaking wider consultative work.

Consultative phase

Two surveys were designed for Dove Workshop to take to the community; one survey focused on potential customers and the other on potential suppliers.

The budget was insufficient for gathering of primary data through a community consultation, and so our proposal, as commissioned, involved us in designing surveys to then be administered by Dove Workshop. We also designed a data input coding sheet and Dove Workshop input the data from the surveys.

Originally planned for completion in summer 2021, the data gathering proved challenging with a low response rate, requiring a lengthened timescale for the survey extending into the autumn. 70 community responses were received along with 5 supplier responses. The results were input into the form we provided and sent to us as raw data for analysis.

We also conducted three semi-structured one to one interviews with the other providers in the wider area that are delivering similar services to those proposed.

Summary report

We concluded the work with this summary written report of the findings and recommendations and the offer of a learning to action session in follow-up if required.

Report structure

Section 2 of this report outlines the visioning workshop, which produced a Theory of Change for the project, providing:

- a description of the 'needs' driving the initiative and whose needs (stakeholders) they are;
- the potential risks/constraints involved;
- the actions to be undertaken to meet the identified needs;
- the anticipated outcomes (benefits/impact) of the proposed course of action; and
- a brief consideration of the potential competition.

Section 3 provides a summary of key policy that could directly drive demand for these proposals.

Section 4 summarises the findings of the community consultative work and section 5 provides further insight into potential for competition/duplication of the work drawn from one to one interviews with other organisations based in the area undertaking similar work.

Section 6 summarises the key risks of undertaking this approach.

Section 7 provides a summary conclusion, including an appraisal of the viability of the proposals and possible alternatives, and recommendations on how to proceed.

Supporting materials are provided as appendices and cross referenced in the text where relevant.

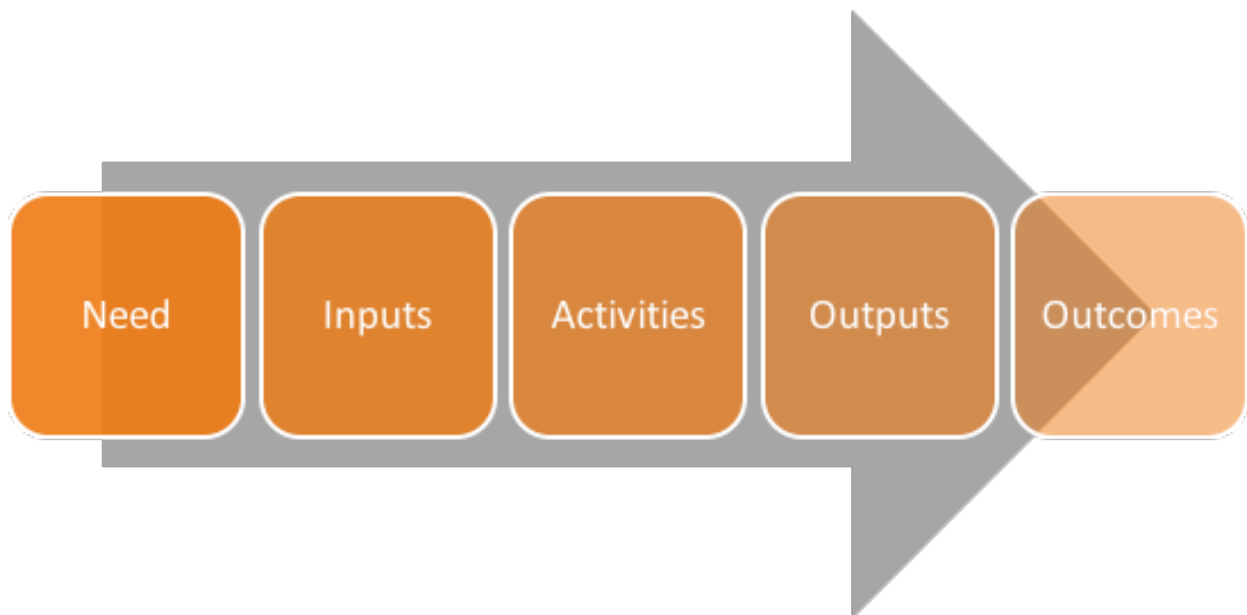
2. Visioning exercise

We conducted a workshop with various stakeholders seeking to establish the Sarn Helen Care & Support Service – a community coop to provide a range of services to individuals in the community in a safe and appropriate way, likely at people’s place of residence.

The workshop was focused on developing a ‘Theory of Change’ – a process that links a series of needs to a range of desired outcomes – to inform the feasibility process.

The workshop introduced the concept of a theory of change (figure 1 below) and key considerations.

Figure 1 – Theory of change



The workshop exercises considered:

- the needs (or demand) that drives the process;
- stakeholders and their characteristics (in other words whose needs the above are);
- the desired outcomes;
- the activities that could be delivered to achieve the outcomes;
- the inputs required to resource the activities; and
- some of the key assumptions that must be made to achieve the outcomes, what risks these pose, and how they might be mitigated.

Limitations

As with all such workshop exercises, there are limitations, particularly:

- a short workshop cannot consider every eventuality, and so the findings of the workshop summarised in this document will help to refine thinking, but do not provide a definitive picture – it should be reviewed and added to;

- an initial review in a workshop setting does not allow for reflection to any great extent, and so the workshop findings should be reviewed to ensure that they remain valid in their eyes now that a short period of time has elapsed since holding the workshop; and
- workshops inevitably reflect the thoughts of the individuals that participate in them, and so this should be reviewed by any participants that were invited but unable to attend the workshop. Additionally, other key stakeholders will input through the consultative phase, and this may also raise further needs and require amendment of the outcomes prior to conclusion of the work.

This section is a summary of the results of the facilitated workshop where participants developed the rationale, facilitated by the consultants with the principal aim of informing the feasibility study. For evaluative purposes, further work would be required to develop a full Theory of Change.

Additionally, elements in this section reflect the workshop, whereas there are later sections that analyse need/demand and competitors for example, drawing on wider research.

Needs

The first section related to needs – what is the social and/or economic market need that is driving the business and whose needs are they?

Stakeholders

A brief exercise was held to consider the key ‘customers’ (or beneficiaries or stakeholders for the work).

The following personas were reflective of the types of people that the project is intended to support:

Older person

- Vulnerable
- Without extended networks
- In need of a home service such as odd jobs
- Some will be on low incomes though many (perhaps 70%) will be on reasonable pensions with disposable income (mining community and so many men retired with good pensions)
- Used to paying for some services
- Open to how people might engage but the anticipation is that they will want to engage with services at their home for work to their house/garden

Whilst this is reflective of the principal user group that the project seeks to support, it is not intended to be exclusive, and other user groups might also include:

- single parents;
- low-income families (busy and time poor and often do not have basic repair skills that older generations had); and

- potentially BAME groups.

Geographical area of focus

The service would initially cover the 3 communities of Seven Sisters, Crynant and Onllwyn though it was noted that whilst funded elements may be restricted to these areas, there is no reason to unduly restrict the trade area of any business, albeit its immediate focus and social impact focus is the local community.

The project might but does not necessarily need to be located at the existing Dove facilities.

There are around 6000 people locally and perhaps around 1500 in the target age group, and so the size of the 'market' is relatively modest given that only a small percentage of these may engage directly in a commercial sense.

Key constraints

The key constraints of the user groups engaging with these types of services might be:

- knowledge of what is available;
- cost (for some);
- safeguarding considerations;
- fear of getting 'ripped off';
- privacy;
- pride (not wanting to show that they need help).

Needs

The workshop next considered the specific needs that user groups might want from the social business.

Practical tasks at home such as gardening, garden clearance, moving furniture, getting rid of/removing bulky items, shopping, simple home improvements (e.g. painting/decorating or stripping walls of old paper). Essentially, a 'handyperson' service that is versatile.

Some might be annual activities; others may be more regular.

The intent is for the project to pull together people already delivering these types of services rather than creating new.

Many of the people that the project is targeting may be harder to reach, which poses some challenges. Specific to the project's market research will be to find out whether people currently use these types of services, whether they would use them, and what other services would they like.

Part of the feasibility work is to try to find out who delivers these services locally and to seek to tie them in with the initiative.

Some of these services are available in principle from the public sector as well as the private, but there are issues of speed with the former, and trust with some of the latter.

Outcomes

The workshop next considered the outcomes that the project wants to achieve.

Shorter-term outcomes (those that can be directly achieved through service provision as described) included:

- better (and faster) access to these types of services;
- better value for money for services received;
- safer/more trusted services; and
- more and better work opportunities for local people.

Medium to long-term outcomes (those that are indirectly achieved through direct service provision as described) included:

- more elderly people engaging with the wider community;
- more training opportunities for trainees/apprentices;
- more referrals to other agencies; and
- improved wellbeing (decreased stress).

Activities

The workshop then moved on to discussing the activities that can be conducted to achieve the desired outcomes.

The 'product'

The service interface might be an app, but will initially be a mobile-enabled website, taking account of the older generation focus for its services.

The site would have a menu of services it can provide (which can start simply and be added to as the project progresses).

A phone line to ring and request support would diversify the means of customer engagement though would add costs.

Income would be generated from people delivering work – the project would either receive a percentage or might charge a membership style fee. The service providers that are deliverers would have more work and would set their prices and the site would charge a small commission based on actual sales.

The idea is that it is a coop for the tradespeople that would gain work through it.

The level of sales would have to be relatively substantial for a percentage fee to be charged, and so a membership fee may also be required for end users. The project may have a modest amount of demand initially – perhaps 50 people in year one (with some of those engagements repeat support).

Staffing

The project will require site maintenance, someone to talk to people, to give the right advice and support, and to quality control.

A key issue will be to keep staffing costs and other overheads modest so that the bulk of fees received can be passed on to the third-party providers who deliver the work, without making the cost of those services too high and cheaper on the open market without going through the Sarn Helen project.

Competition

The service delivery would begin with what already exists locally – the intention is not to create new jobs that would ‘compete’ with existing providers, but rather to act as a ‘broker’ for good quality providers to secure more work locally.

Aside from individuals providing these services locally in a self-employed capacity, there are other organisations that might provide some or all of these, including larger firms as well as:

- Housing Associations (Tai Tarian and Coastal are the major ones operating locally) – the sense was that Seven Sisters has a higher proportion of social housing, whereas the other communities are mostly privately owned;
- Care and Repair Western Bay are providing similar services but can be very slow. They are also a social enterprise; and
- Age Cymru.

We have also identified Calon y Cymoedd (see later notes) as a social enterprise that are a potential ‘competitor’.

3. Social care policy context

The Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014 places a responsibility on local government adult social services to assess need for support services.

This report does not seek to delve into the finer details of the Act and rather draws out the elements that are of relevance to the proposed social enterprise.

The key implications for the proposed initiative that arise from the Act are:

- if the local authority determines after an assessment that an individual has eligible needs as defined by the Act and its accompanying frameworks, then they have a duty in law to provide those services, either directly or by procuring them;
- if the above occurs, a care plan must be produced with input from the individual that details the required services and how they are to be provided;
- the types of support can vary and not all would fall under the remit of the proposed enterprises (e.g. specific adaptations to the home) but it does include domestic assistance.

The Act and its frameworks and the resulting actions create clear potential for a social enterprise/third sector delivery model to assist in fulfilling needs, though the areas that could be fulfilled under the proposed initiative covered by this study are relatively narrow in relation to the whole range of services (many of them for acute needs).

Additionally, these are likely to refer to high needs, and there are more wide ranging needs likely to arise from the community that may not qualify under eligibility criteria, but nevertheless that need to be met either through a subsidised model, or on a commercial basis, and care should be taken not to restrict the provision to the most acute needs.

Where there is acute need with eligibility criteria fulfilled, and within the scope of the services that can be offered, the key factor for any proposed social enterprise is that the individual is not the purchaser – the State is (albeit budgets might be delegated) and so purchasing decisions allow for pricing at or close to ‘real’ costs, rather than the relatively modest open market rates (see sections 4 and 5).

4. Community demand

Dove workshop conducted a community survey using a template that we designed by us, and the client input the data to our specification and provided the raw data to us – we then analysed and summarised the data. The findings are summarised in the following section.

Customer survey

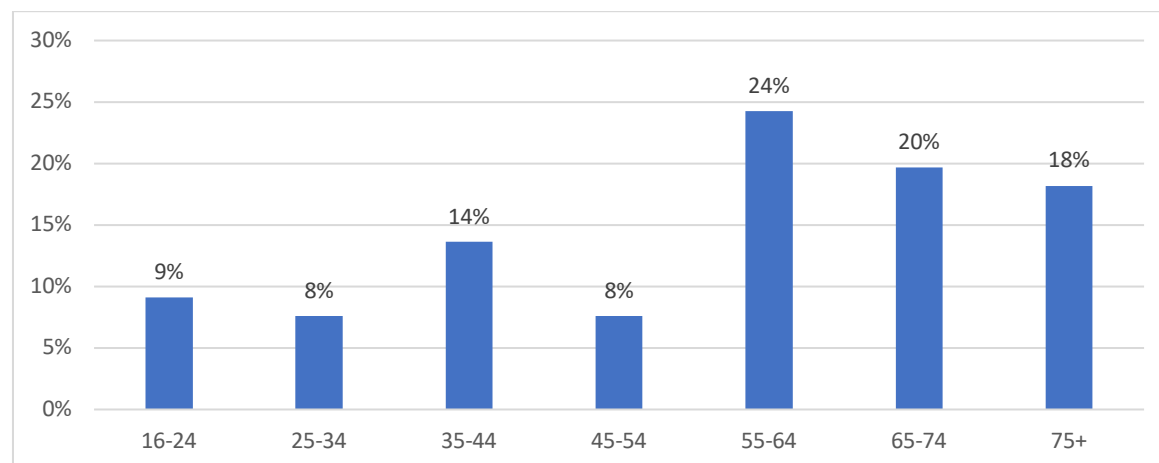
70 customer surveys were completed between August and October 2021.

Who responded

The survey included a small number of demographic questions to better understand who completed it:

- 61% were female and 39% were male;
- there was a good spread of ages (see figure 2), however most people were older (62% were 55+);
- 23% had a disability;
- 97% were White British; and
- 87% live in SA10 9 postcode area and 13% in SA10 8 postcode area.

Figure 2 – Age profile of respondents

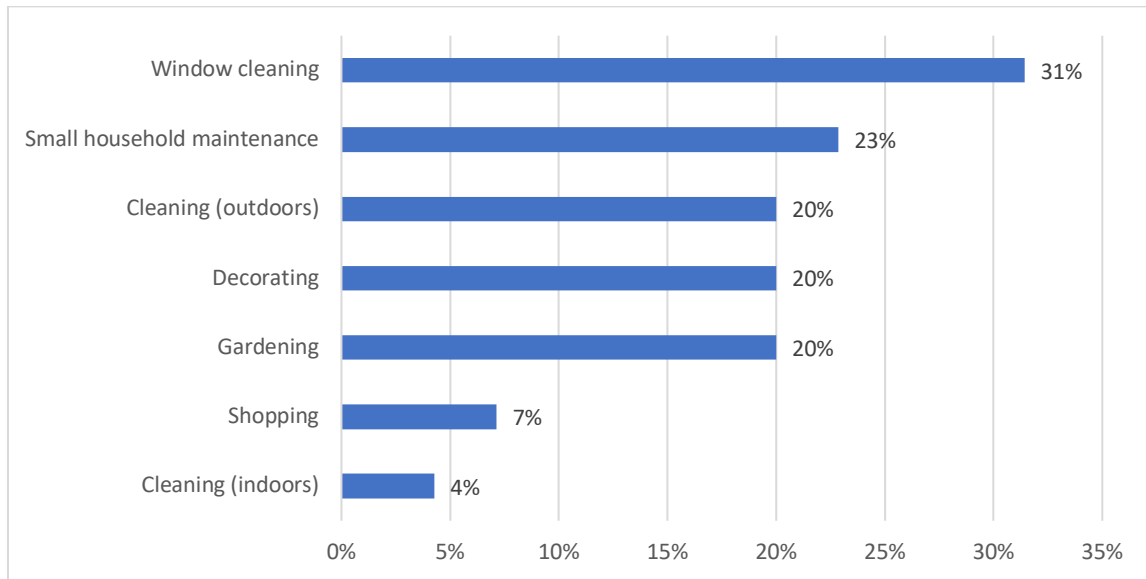


Current services

The survey asked respondents which care and support services they currently pay for – the results are displayed in Figure 3 overleaf, which shows that the most popular are window cleaning, which a third of respondents currently pay for, followed by small household maintenance jobs, which a quarter currently pay for.

A fifth currently pay for outdoor cleaning, decorating and gardening, and less than 10% pay for shopping or cleaning indoors. 41% of respondents currently do not pay for any services, 41% pay for 1 or 2 services, and 19% pay for 3 or more.

Figure 3 – Current services used



Current tradespeople used include:

- Mark, Painter, Ystradgynlais (x 2);
- Mal Craven (x 8);
- Miller Decoration;
- Spoton Cleaning;
- WDR - Wheelie Bins;
- Emmas Cleaning Services;
- Grant, G.C.G.;
- Martyns Garden Services;
- Gardening David Herdman (x2);
- Mels Window Cleaning;
- Marco Garden Maintenance;
- BAG Services;
- Fusion Construction;
- 3 Step gardening;
- Jason Painter;
- Mand M;
- Crynant Cleaners;
- PVC Cleaning; and
- Tai Tarian (x 2).

85% of respondents (who do pay for tradespeople) are currently satisfied with the service they receive (54% very satisfied and 31% quite satisfied), 8% are dissatisfied and 8% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Reasons given for the level of satisfaction are summarised in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 – Reasons for satisfaction

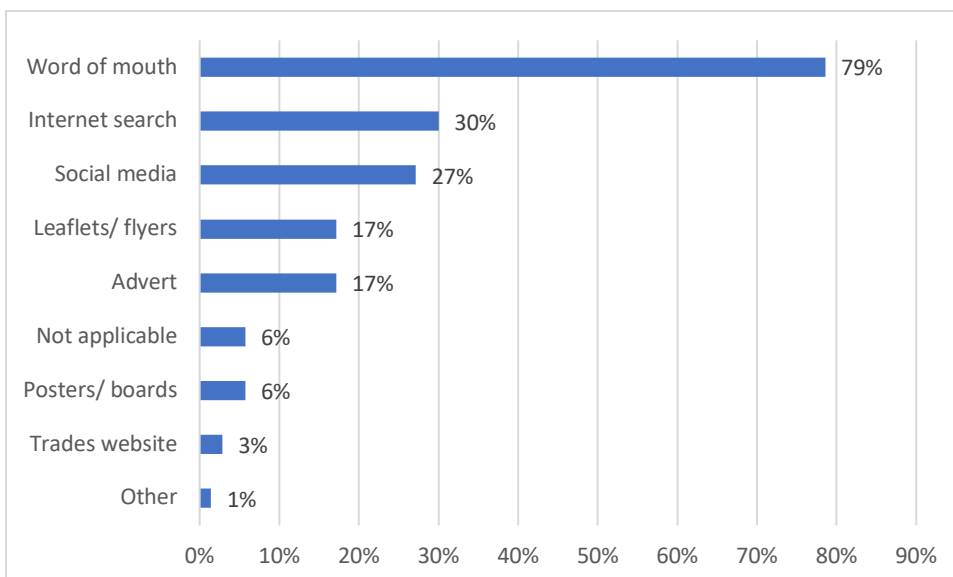
Reasons why satisfied	Reasons why not satisfied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean and tidy • Fair Prices and Very Reliable • Regular Service • Good Time Keeper • Local • Good Service • Helpful and honest • Polite • Clean windows and nice people • He cleaned around after he had finished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not come around often enough • Want him to do other work which he is unable to do • Never know when they are going to be here and ask for payment • I am struggling to manage on a low income - cost • Varied intervals between cleans

How people currently find tradespeople

Figure 5 below shows that word of mouth is the most popular way of finding a tradesperson with 79% using this, followed by an internet search or social media (around a third).

Leaflets/flyers and paid for adverts are less popular, and only a small percentage use posters/boards or specific trades websites to search for companies.

Figure 5 – How people find tradespeople currently



Ease of finding tradespeople

Around two-thirds (65%) stated that they find it easy to find tradespeople, whereas a third (35%) find it difficult.

Factors when choosing tradespeople

When choosing tradespeople, the most important factors people take into consideration are:

- that they come recommended and the quality of the work (98% say this is very or quite important); and
- proven track record and safe working practices (96% say this is very or quite important).

Least important factors are taking into account reviews of recommendations from strangers, whether they are personally known to you or are local to the area. See Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 – Key factors when choosing tradespeople



Other considerations stated were:

- reliability;
- honesty;
- friendliness;
- easy to communicate with; and
- tidy up after themselves

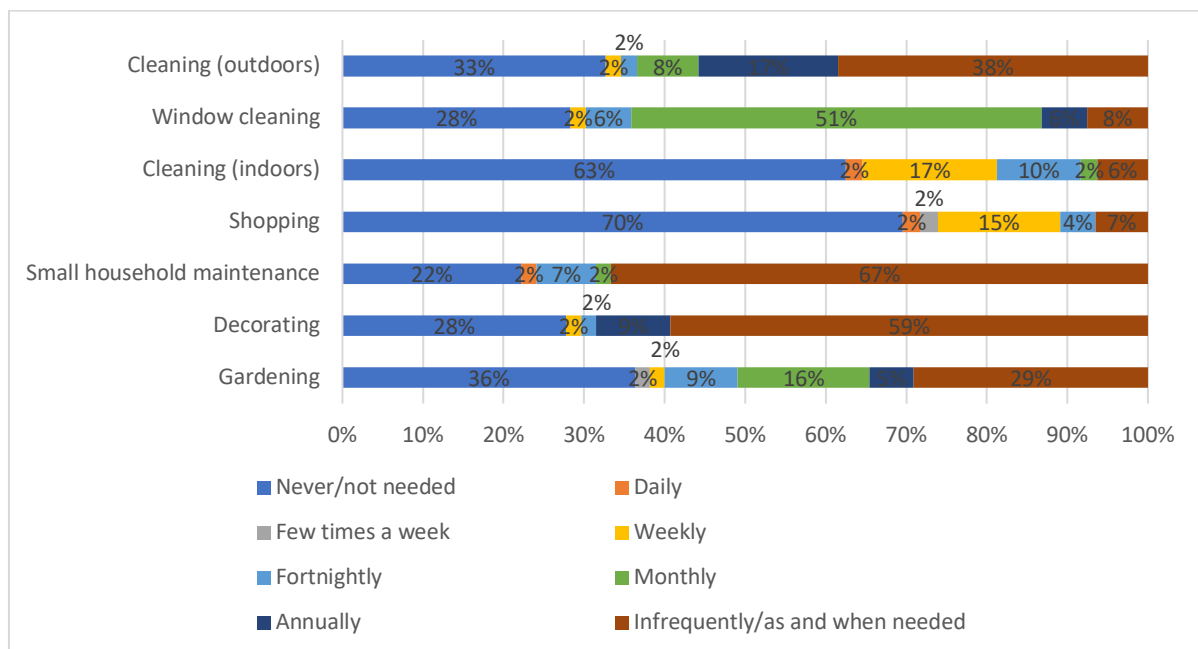
Frequency of use

A relatively high proportion of people never use tradespeople for the services outlined in the survey; 70% have never needed to pay someone to help with their shopping and 63% have never paid for help with indoor cleaning and around a quarter to a third with the other services listed.

The most frequently paid for services are window cleaning monthly (51% of respondents) – see Figure 7.

For those that do pay for cleaning or shopping, this is mostly carried out weekly or fortnightly. Most other services are paid for on an ad-hoc or as needed basis.

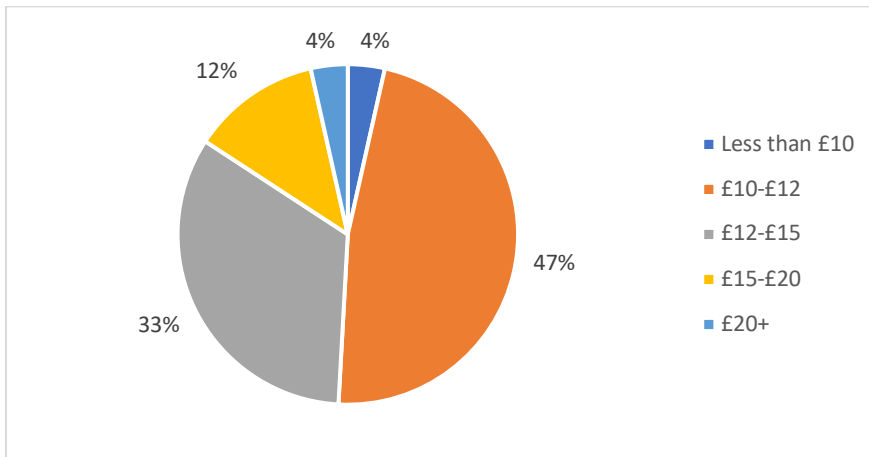
Figure 7 – Frequency of use of various services



Fee tolerance for the services proposed

The majority (81%) of respondents would expect to pay between £10 and £15 per hour for services, as shown in Figure 8 overleaf.

Figure 8 – Anticipated fee tolerance



What would encourage people to use a new service

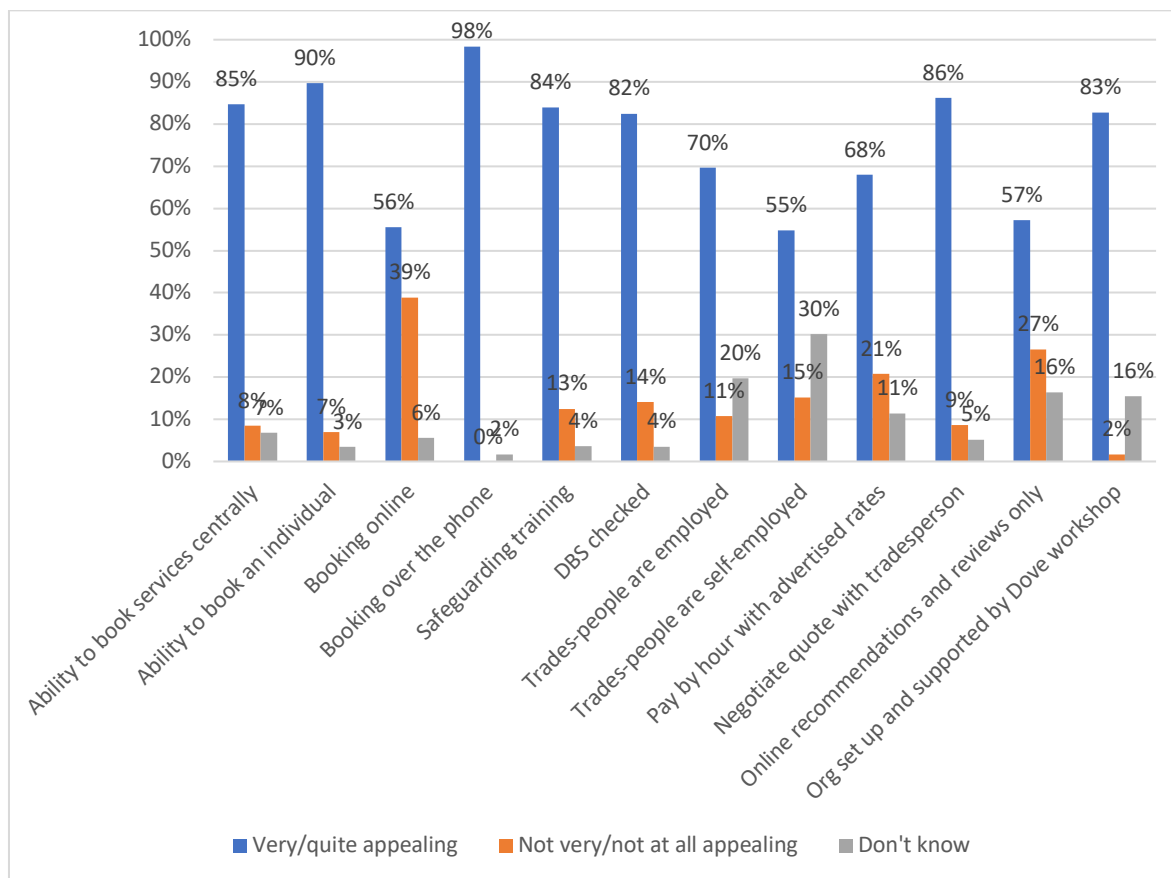
Figure 9 below shows what potential customers would find appealing and not appealing about a new care and support service. It shows that the most appealing features would be:

- the ability to book over the phone;
- the ability to book an individual to do the job; and
- the ability to agree a quote with the tradesperson themselves.

Features that would be least appealing are:

- online booking;
- a site that provides reviews and recommendations only; and
- a service where you pay by the hour with advertised rates.

Figure 9 – Key features to consider in any service provision



Confidence in using the proposed services

Respondents were asked what would give them confidence to use a new Sarn Helen Care and Support service over another provider.

Responses were:

- security;
- local /locally trusted service (x10);
- came recommended by people I know (x3);
- local, community-led/using local businesses (x4);
- the standard of work (x4);
- assurance of trusted tradesmen;
- knowledge of the people involved/ meeting them;
- reliable/trustworthy (x4);
- knowing that the organisation is set up and supported by DOVE Workshop;
- good to have a number of suppliers in one place; and
- known provider.

Other comments made were:

“Although I feel connected and able to source these types of services, I know this isn’t the same for everyone so can certainly see the benefits for... community “

“If they are as helpful as the present and past staff I will feel safer and happier”

“A trade apprenticeship course would be more useful”

“I think it is good especially for elderly who sometimes get ripped off by some builders”

“Great for creating jobs for local people”

Supplier survey

As only 5 potential suppliers completed the survey, we have not carried out quantitative analysis of the results as the sample size is too small. However, the results show:

- 4 out of the 5 are self-employed tradespeople and one is an employed tradesperson;
- all work in Seven Sisters and Onllwyn, 3 work in Crynant and 3 in other areas;
- 3 out of the 5 said there are currently no barriers to them finding work; those that did cited competition (1), lack of time to market services (1) and lack of skills/qualifications (1);
- one supplier is a gardener and outdoor cleaner, one is a decorator, and one carries out small household maintenance jobs and carpentry (2 did not answer this question);
- only two of the five respondents felt that any of the potential features of a new Sarn Helen Care and Support service would be appealing to them as tradespeople:
 - *both felt that the ability to be booked by a central system would be quite appealing;*
 - *one felt that the organisation contracting with self-employed tradespeople and training provided by the organisation would be very appealing, and being paid by the hour, the ability to negotiate the quote directly with the customer and the fact the organisation was set up and managed by Dove Workshop were quite appealing;*
 - *the other respondent that was interested felt that the ability to have online reviews and recommendations would be very appealing; and*
 - *one was interested in help to grow their business and the other was interested in supporting the local community.*

The sample size for the second survey was very small, and the client should be cautious about drawing too many conclusions from the results from a very small number of responses. However, in such a small geographical area with a modest

overall population, there are unlikely to be that many tradespeople in the target group located within the area, so the 5 survey responses received are still useful to gauge potential interest in the scheme.

5. 'Competitors'

We conducted three in-depth one to one interviews with Age Cymru, Care and Repair Western Bay (referred to as 'Care and Repair' hereafter), and Calon y Cymoedd; all three agencies either do (at least in principle) cover the geographical area that the proposed service would operate in, or could do so. All of them either currently offer, or intend to provide in the future, similar services.

We also reviewed additional materials that were kindly highlighted and/or forwarded to us in follow-up by those agencies during/following our discussions with them (these are mentioned in the text where relevant). This section summarises the key issues arising from those interviews and review of any additional materials.

The term 'competitors' is provided here in inverted commas as all agencies are seeking to achieve very similar outcomes, are community-oriented in their governance structures and means of delivery and are collaborative in their approaches and therefore not full 'competitors'.

Demand

All three agreed that there is a demand/need for the service described; Age Cymru have a 4 month waiting list. Much of that is more specialised and not more general 'handyperson' type work, though Age Cymru noted that there is very high demand for small scale painting and decorating work with a lengthy waiting list. Where there are quite basic requirements (e.g. changing a lightbulb) the need is immediate and usually cannot wait.

Age Cymru commented that general 'handypersons' are dying out, with most in their experience focusing on a specific trade. Although it was anecdotal, in part it was thought that this is likely due to the low cost basis of the service and the demands of the wider market – there is more to be made from trades coupled with high demand for those trades (more so currently at the time of writing due to the COVID19 pandemic and how that has fuelled domestic repairs/refurbishment work).

Care and Repair also cited difficulty in finding quality local providers to meet demand.

“Contractors [are] one man bands and generally quite established. Generally they chase the money and that’s in larger construction projects. That’s why we employ our own handypersons – it gives us more control.”

Age Cymru also noted that there is high demand for trades but insufficient supply to meet demand swiftly:

“There is a huge lack of training for trades – after the last financial crisis the building trade was on its knees and so there weren’t the apprenticeships ... that created backlog, plus [the heightened] Covid demand.”

Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service commissioned a feasibility study to look at a social enterprise for domiciliary care around 4 years ago. The study was provided for us to review on a strictly confidential basis and so we cannot share it directly, but the basic conclusions support those of this report and directly led to the creation of Calon y Cymoedd.

The Calon y Cymoedd project provides domestic home help support, including housework, shopping, laundry, running errands, preparing light meals and companionship/befriending. Rates are £12 - £15 per hour and the project began to operate in July 2021 and covers the Upper Afan Valley and Upper Amman Valley presently but with scope to expand.

They work in partnership with Gentle Care, who operate out of the Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre – they are a private company, but very small.

They too have identified demand for a handyperson with a van type provision.

Delivery

All three were already delivering this in some way, and two the organisations – Age Cymru and Care and Repair Western Bay – already work closely together, with the former often making referrals to the latter. Whilst Age Cymru's focus is older people, they can and do work with 18+.

Care and Repair's core services can only work with over 60s who are homeowners, but some of their workers can work with anyone and other care and repair services elsewhere offer wider range of service to different demographics.

Care and Repair have a list of approved contractors and check their accreditations, health and safety processes and monitor their work. For them, the work tends to be larger scale rather than the handyperson type jobs that are short notice, short duration and relatively straightforward.

They conduct a healthy home check and then refer on to their handypersons service – that is usually free to the end user and covers a wide range of people. Small 'odd job' work gets covered through that service.

They have 26 handypersons that are community based and out regularly – they do not get that many referrals from the area that this project is intended to cover, and similarly struggle to get contractors local to the area.

Calon y Cymoedd employ their helpers directly on 16 hours per week to provide security and a guaranteed wage. They have training packages in place for their workers. They too work in partnership with Care and Repair Western Bay and can provide advice and support on benefits and filling in application forms, repairs and adaptations to the home (including grant applications) and keeping homes warm.

Calon y Cymoedd cited the example of Community Catalyst in England (www.communitycatalysts.co.uk) who use a brokerage and accreditation model, matching people with needs with local providers; essentially a searchable directory model but with some built in safeguards in terms of certain community standards that are required.

Members can be removed from the directory if they do not adhere to these, and there is a disclaimer where Community Catalyst do not accept responsibility for work. As an information portal, it seems likely that they are removed from the direct transaction,

but it is unclear how their financial model operates – given the small scale nature of their client base of providers. The site states that members can access the resources once registered free of charge, so it may be that the site is core funded, though there are no apparent credits to funding bodies on the website.

Also, Solva Care in Pembrokeshire were cited as a model that is also looking to branch out into this type of provision and that they are an organisation that is willing to share expertise.

For all of them, their delivery in the areas proposed for this project was relatively low or they did not deliver there at all. In all instances, in principle the areas to be covered by this project can be covered by the other providers, but there are issues of sourcing labour and linking that to high demand across the sector:

“Right now, contractors don’t need it ... 5 or 6 years ago contractors came to us for our brand, now it’s the total opposite.”

Financial viability

Whilst all three recognised that there is a strong social demand, there was little confidence that there would be sufficient demand that is also coupled with adequate purchasing power for a commercially viable service to operate:

“It’s not commercially viable - lots of clients want it, but people wanting to pay for it are far fewer...people aren’t willing to pay £20 - £30 for basic work.”

“People tend to think you can get things done for £10 - £20 per hour. VAT pushes that up. Most of the time that then pushes them to say ‘we can get someone down the road to do this cheaper’.”

Additionally, it was noted that there is often a significant drop-off between the initial interest stage and provision of quotes/take up of services.

From the experience of other providers, the approach is likely to be quite administratively intensive (and therefore costly), although for the likely levels of demand in the Dulais Valley may be a part time rather than full time administrative resource requirement.

Age Cymru began their service with a salaried position, initially funded by the Local Authority, but after 6 months they determined that to be viable they would need to move to a brokerage service, though some are employed directly by them and then trained.

The feeling is that the approach can only work at large scale and, even then, with the existing operators it requires subsidy through their models. Even with scale, both Age Cymru and Care and Repair rely on funding to make their services work. Care and Repair’s social enterprise is 10 years old and still not self-sustaining financially.

Calon y Cymoedd are also publicly funded, with a modest level of earned income, though they are working towards creating a more financially viable model and their enterprise is in the very early stages of development.

The freely available support from others also creates potential difficulties:

“People will wait 6 months for Care and Repair because of the reputation but also [because] lots is free.”

Age Cymru felt that volunteering approaches can work, particularly for immediate support requirement that do not require skill (e.g. changing a lightbulb) but that the range of tasks that can be undertaken has to be specific and limited, for example they are not allowed to do anything that requires use of electrically powered tools, or to deal with any electricity, gas or plumbing issues.

Risk

All the providers commented on the risk of using third party providers to deliver the service with a ‘brokerage’ type service – if something goes wrong, the liability can fall on the ‘hub’ to put the work right.

Given the low income generation potential anyway, that creates further risk as there is insufficient margin generated to mitigate against occasional issues that generate peaks in cost to investigate/rectify issues.

Care and Repair have a leaflet that tells people what to look out for with tradespeople and as a minimum that approach could be developed at very low cost as a local information service provided by Dove and its partners. In that case the best approach would be to support the extension of existing messaging by the other providers, and then fill in where there are any gaps to certain demographics but essentially copying the same messaging.

Potential for collaboration

The recognition of demand and alignment of outcomes across the various organisations creates opportunities for partnering, regardless of the outcome of this study, to signpost and drive referrals, so regardless of the viability of a scheme developed locally, there is clear social demand and scope for collaboration that should be pursued.

It was also suggested that there may be scope to create a wider collaborative forum, linking with Repair Café Wales and Mens Sheds.

6. Key risks

This section summarises the key risks involved in the proposed approach, drawing on the workshop held with local stakeholders, the consultative survey, the interviews with other providers in the same field, and our experience in supporting and/or directly delivering various social enterprises.

Key risks are:

- The price point from the market is likely to be around £15 per hour according to the research conducted both directly with the community and with the existing organisations delivering similar services that responded, whereas likely full cost recovery is closer to the £30 per hour mark.
- Administrative overhead costs are required to provide quality control and to troubleshoot with a brokered service – it is very unlikely that these can be recovered from earned income, therefore the scheme is unlikely to be financially viable without ongoing subsidy.
- If subsidy is required, there are questions over duplication – whilst the two large and one new entrant to the marketplace do have some gaps in provision, and do not service the local area to the extent that is likely required, they can in principle do so and in the case of Calon y Cymoedd, may need to do so in due course to make their own business model viable.
- Two of the ‘competitors’ (albeit community minded and cooperative ones) are far better-resourced and much longer-established brands operating at scale, and it is not credible that a start-up can compete with or emulate that existing provision.
- There is potential direct risk to the newly created Calon y Cymoedd, itself attempting to operate within this space and with a challenging business model of its own to fulfil.
- Demand reported by established providers appears relatively strong, though it was not as strongly expressed in direct research for this study (which was limited in scope) and that could mean that the geographical scope is too small for these proposals to be viable.
- There are potential safeguarding issues that make a directly brokered service more complex as liability would likely rest with the organisation should something go wrong (whilst the same could be true of a ‘signposted’ service, the liability would be lesser).
- There is a financial risk of liability from claims against poor work if the service is directly brokered and facilitated with transactions flowing through the newly created body, again this may be lesser if it was more of a signposted service, but that presents further financial viability challenges as income generation would likely be lower through that route.
- There is potential for reputational damage to the various partners should there be poor work and/or more serious issues around safeguarding risks.
- There are administrative burdens beyond the quality control aspects with respondents favouring services with direct engagement with administrators (as opposed to online engagement).
- There is insufficient supply of labour identified by the large organisations already operating in this field, coupled with high commercial demand for those that do, meaning that those in the marketplace who are good are busy with direct to consumer sales – the very limited evidence from the small number of responses to the consultation reflects this also.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This section summarises the key issues and provides a conclusion and recommendations.

Summary of key issues

Clarity of purpose

The Theory of Change produced in the visioning exercise (section 2) maps out a clear, logical approach that maps needs to outcomes via the desired activities that is coherent and measurable, with both short and longer-term social impacts.

The needs identified and the outcomes desired are supported in part by the research and align with the discussions with other providers delivering similar services in the wider area.

There is a strong network and partnership approach with local collaboration, led by a well-established and trusted partner in Dove Workshop, with the potential for strong co-production.

Demand

The consultative work indicates there is a social need/demand for these types of provision. It was not strongly expressed in the direct research conducted that this study draws on – a majority of people who responded stated that they can access these services relatively easily and that they are generally satisfied – but was evident.

The study resources were limited, and it was reliant on the data being gathered and collated by the client; the client found it challenging to gather data and it required several extensions of the fieldwork phase to generate sufficient responses to draw some conclusions from.

The responses could be skewed towards an ‘easier to reach’ cohort that are generally more able to meet these needs by accessing the market directly, and a larger study sample may have drawn out more of the harder to reach groups that wider research and market intelligence suggests will have more acute needs and therefore demand for these services.

The two large agencies that have been operating in this area at scale for some time indicated that there is a wider social demand that is perhaps under-represented by the survey data. The newly created Calon y Cymoedd has also been formed in response to this potential social demand and itself follows-on from a feasibility study exploring this issue.

Additionally, the key stakeholders that formulated the Theory of Change in the facilitated workshop represent a range of community interests, including the Local Authority, and themselves draw on their wider memberships and client bases – the proposals have not arisen in a vacuum, they are informed by extensive track record from a range of knowledgeable, experienced and expert partners operating locally with very strong local knowledge and networks.

Furthermore, the Social Care Act, coupled with pockets of deprivation and an ageing population more generally, will likely also continue to drive demand for these types of services.

So, the assessment of potential social demand for the service appears well-founded.

Mismatch between supply and demand

The two established providers we spoke to reported lengthy waiting lists for these services and difficulties in recruiting freelancers within the delivery area proposed for this project.

They also reported that sending remote workers to these areas is challenging for them on a cost/benefit basis given the relatively modest fees that can be secured from earned income for this type of service and so they could benefit from more local providers to deliver services.

So, the need for securing more local labour to deliver local solutions also appears well-founded.

Lack of attraction to suppliers

Only a very small number of responses was received from suppliers, which produces challenges for drawing firm conclusions. The window for receiving responses was extended several times, and the number of responses received overall for both surveys was considered by the client to be the most responses that could realistically be secured with the resources available.

Three of the five individuals that responded as potential deliverers of the handyperson type services did not think it would make much difference to them, reflective of a wider sector in high demand, and the two that felt it would assist appeared to require a range of capacity building support to enable them to meet demand anyway.

Were they to build their capacity then it seems reasonable to assume that they would be more inclined to go to the market directly (as the other 3 respondents did).

This was also supported in discussion with the larger providers.

So, whilst the need for a brokered service with quality control mechanisms may be well-founded, the attraction to small scale providers of filtering work opportunities through such a scheme is less well-founded. There is high demand in the open market that is creating plenty of opportunities for straight-to-market delivery by those individuals without the need (from their perspective) of an intermediary.

'Competitors'

There are three existing providers who can cover the proposed geographical area, although not necessarily all demographics within it, with one of those organisations a very recent addition to the market.

The latter has been established in direct response to a previous feasibility study and operates nearby with scope to expand, and so there is scope for duplication with them, even though at present they are not operating in the geographical area proposed for this initiative.

Additionally, the newest entrant into the marketplace has a similar financial viability challenge (see below) and they may need to expand geographically to achieve financial viability. Another very similar project in the near vicinity could hinder their ability to do so.

The feeling amongst the key stakeholders for this study was that whilst it is the case that there are two large providers, the coverage is inadequate to meet potential local demand within the areas described for this project and to achieve the desired outcomes.

This is borne out in discussion with the three providers who themselves have some limitations in terms of the groups they can work with, coupled with labour shortages in this geographical area and long waiting lists, plus the relatively early stage of development of Calon y Cymoedd as a new to market enterprise.

So, the premise that there are no other operators in the area delivering the same is true in part, as there are gaps in provision from the two large providers, and the newly formed Calon y Cymoedd does not yet operate in this area, but there is potential for duplication as all three of the other organisations can cover this provision and are already set up and operating.

Financial viability challenges

Whilst quality is a clear differentiator, the market for these services has a low fee tolerance and the likely capacity for purchases has been found by other operators in this space to be too low for the service to be commercially viable.

The existing providers, two of whom are operating at a much greater scale and able to take advantage of economies of scale, state that they are only able to make these services work with significant subsidy.

Whilst the newest entry into the marketplace – Calon y Cymoedd – intends to operate on a more commercial footing, it too is currently heavily reliant on grant subsidy, and agreed with our emerging conclusions that achieving commercial viability of the initiative as proposed will be very challenging.

The data gathered also underlines the conclusions reached by other providers in the marketplace of a likely price point of around £15 per hour for the types of services proposed, which will cover costs for an individual to attend, but leaves very little margin to be drawn towards core overhead costs of administration (including any quality control) and marketing particularly.

Dove Workshop would be capable of delivering this project but does not wish to incorporate these facilities within its own structure, preferring a stand-alone newly created cooperative structure as the delivery model, principally to generate a feeling of wider ownership.

However, removing such provision from an existing and well-established brand and establishing something new creates further challenges – as an additional ‘bolt on’ to an established organisation, it can tap into existing structures and processes, and achieve efficiencies with core services (e.g. accounting, HR, office costs, insurances, phone/broadband costs and similar). As a stand-alone entity there may be deals to be struck to help, but these costs will have to be largely borne by the new organisation.

So, the principal issue arising from the study in terms of feasibility is one of financial viability and potential for duplication – the former is likely to be very challenging to achieve, with ongoing subsidy likely, and if subsidy is required from grant funders, then the issue of potential for duplication becomes all the more relevant.

High risks

There are also significant potential risks for a small entity by using a brokerage service, which could be mitigated to a degree with a strong core administrative support, but with very limited ability to cover those administrative overhead costs from earned income and therefore a potentially significant deficit between income and expenditure.

These risks could be offset if there were a compelling commercial proposition to balance them out, but in the absence in our view the risks are too high to be manageable without a heavily subsidised model. Again, this is reflected by the current large scale providers in this space.

So, to mitigate these risks would require ‘backstopping’ checks and balances to be undertaken (vetting suppliers, checking their work, providing basic training and similar) and that will introduce additional costs to an already challenging financial business model, which appears unrealistic in comparison to the likely price points for the market.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion is that whilst there is a social demand that should be met, that market demand is not matched with sufficient purchasing power to deliver a service that also has to cover the costs of mitigating the various risks of the proposed brokered approach.

Additionally, there is no strong evidence of demand arising from individual suppliers for a ‘trade body’ type approach as there is more demand than supply for their services directly on the open market. Regardless of whether the safeguarding and quality control aspects would be stronger through a brokered body (they likely would be) there is insufficient pressure presently from the market to drive demand from the supplier side to link in with a brokerage body for this reason.

If there were no other providers already in this space, then the project would have a strong case for funded support. However, there are two large operators already operating at scale, and a third just getting going very nearby. There are gaps to their provision that need to be addressed, but they can in principle provide these types of services in the local area.

So, in summary, the proposed approach, though well-conceived in terms of the clear social demand and outcomes that need to be achieved, is not considered viable because:

1. there are significant financial viability challenges that dictate that a model as proposed will almost certainly require ongoing grant revenue subsidy; and
2. the presence of very well-established large scale providers plus a newly created provider offering very similar services nearby, all of them publicly funded already, present issues of duplication if grant is sought when they could

achieve the desired outcomes through a collaborative approach with local stakeholders.

However, whilst it is not considered viable to create a social enterprise as described in the initial proposal for the reasons above, there are still gaps in provision and evident social demand for the services outlined in the local area.

The other three providers – Age Cymru, Care and Repair Western Bay, and Calon y Cymoedd – would be happy to work in collaboration whatever the outcome as their social purposes are aligned with those of Dove and the outcomes that were articulated for this project and summarised in section 2. This collaborative approach should be pursued to explore how gaps can be filled locally.

Alternative options

As well as gaps in certain demographics that need to be serviced, there is a clear lack of labour to fulfil current as well as potential demand.

The lack of supply is both in terms of overall numbers and sufficient capacity for shorter-term notice support with lengthy waits in many cases, often for quite basic requirements.

So, it is in this space (direct provision of these types of services) that further work could be focused – direct delivery to boost supply, rather than a brokered service. The income generation dictates that such provision is likely to be sole traders. There may be scope to develop a larger entity, but that would be a high risk business strategy for the reasons described above.

The focus should be on how more sole traders can be supported to develop to address the supply issue of good quality handypersons that the larger providers as well as the open market can access, and to do this in a way that instils core principles in new entrants to the market (as well as existing ones) in terms of quality control and particularly safeguarding.

This is more of a labour force development approach – closer to an economic/educational project rather than a social enterprise, and so diverges somewhat from the original brief. It would not be an ‘enterprise’, it would be a funded project to boost capacity, involving a range of partners (Dove might be the lead delivery partner potentially, though equally that might be a training college or similar).

Additionally, a ‘directory’ style brokerage service could be explored, which is one step removed from a facilitated approach (the latter being where transactions take place via the organisation, the former being a ‘signposting’ service with far lower risks and liabilities) and simply lists services available in an area with some accompanying quality control criteria but on a light touch basis.

This would be relatively inexpensive to do and could be grant funded in its entirety to build the website. However, it would require some ongoing marketing resource to be effective and would likely work better at scale – this is the model used by the Community Catalyst project in England. The existing providers could assist in promoting the resource, as could other agencies e.g. the police might promote such a resource as a means of crime prevention (how to reduce the chances of scams/rogue traders).

An accompanying accreditation programme to cover basic safeguarding issues for handypersons would be useful, with simple to use basic 'charter' (as with the Community Catalyst project) for individuals to voluntarily sign up to as a kind of 'industry standard'. This may carry a small fee to providers, though the low income base of the sector may mean that this is better as a funded service and freely accessible as the outcome is to make such provision safer and fairer to those receiving the services.

Whether Dove and its partners feel that this is the space they wish to inhabit – in other words essentially creating additional 'handyperson' supply for other parties to meet demand and/or creating a signposting website – requires discussion between the client and its key stakeholders.

In the initial workshop it was strongly felt that direct job creation to fulfil these roles is not what the project should be doing, but there is a clear need for that type of provision, though it may not be wholly restricted in terms of its geographical area of provision to the local areas identified initially for the purposes of this study and is a different proposition to the creation of a social enterprise delivery vehicle.

Recommendations

There are clear labour shortages in terms of handyperson type services (and handypersons with a van potentially), and the premise that there are safeguarding and quality control issues with vulnerable people is borne out from discussion with other providers.

So, the basic premise is sound and a means of addressing these matters to achieve the outcomes that are broadly outlined in the theory of change exercise should be pursued. But a social enterprise is not considered a viable approach for the reasons described and instead a capacity building project and potentially a signposting service could be approach – these would also not likely be viable as stand-alone social enterprises, but there may be some earned income elements to them where they might 'bolt on' to existing provision.

This should not require another study but clearly this does require further detailed discussion between stakeholders and the existing larger providers (plus potentially some additional new stakeholders e.g. training colleges perhaps) of the parameters for any such relationship, who would lead, how it would operate, and similar.

The stakeholders should review the report and consider the alternative options proposed and determine whether they feel this is something they wish to pursue/is in their remit to pursue.

The alternative options outlined above deviate from the original proposal, so if it is not a favoured approach, then our recommendation is then to work with the existing organisations operating in this field already to provide referrals and to use your local stakeholders network to help them service the local area more than they do at present.

Fulfilment of RDP requirements

In line with the requirements outlined by RDP for a feasibility study, this document has provided:

- a detailed description of the issue that the proposals are expected to address with particular reference to the stakeholders and their requirements and the applicant's current position in relation to the issue;
- details of the actions that are to be undertaken following the recommendations, including suggestions of alternatives that could be pursued;
- a clear answer to the brief:
 - the likelihood of a pool of local handyperson labour requiring such a provision;
 - establishing the needs / challenges (demand) requiring such a service;
 - exploring the financial viability of the proposed approach;
 - understanding the potential competition / duplication and scope for collaboration;
- a clear summary of the key risks;
- a clear recommendation of the likely viability of the project as proposed; and
- recommendations for next steps.

As the study has concluded that the proposed approach is not considered viable, at present it is not considered applicable to produce the following:

- three-year cashflow project for the proposal; and/or
- three-year forward business / marketing plan for the proposal.

Appendix – Consultees

The consultants are grateful to the members of the community that completed the survey and for Dove Workshop for conducting the community consultative research.

We are also grateful to the following for their time and insight given via one to one interviews:

- Conner James – Age Cymru
- Margaret Lake – Calon y Cymoedd
- Emma Tweed – Care and Repair Western Bay