

# Audit Committee

AC(3)-13-09(p5) : 15 October 2009

## Caia Park Communities First Ltd

### Response to document presented to the National Assembly on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2009 by the Auditor General

#### Background to Caia Park Communities First Ltd

Caia Park Communities First set up their partnership board (herein after referred to as Caia Park Executive Board) in 2003 as per the Welsh Assembly guidance document.

The guidance advised the use of the thirds principle and this arrangement still exists today; one third statutory sector representation, one third voluntary sector representation and one third community sector representation.

Consultants were employed in 2003 to undertake wide scale research in the Caia Park and Queensway Communities First areas with a sample of 600 residents. This provided a 95% certainty that the sampling error was +/- 3.8%.

This research allowed the partnership to construct their 10 year strategy and action plan based on the needs of the local community.

The structure of the company overseen by the Caia Park Executive Board consists of the Caia Park Interagency Forum; a large group made up of both residents and professionals - the Interagency Forum are an information sharing forum meeting bimonthly and are responsible for electing members onto the Caia Park Executive Board. The programme in Caia Park also benefits from a large group of residents; the Caia Park Residents Advisory Panel who meet monthly to discuss local issues and form project work for the Communities First team to present to the Executive Board. The membership of the Caia Park Executive Board has been steady since the outset of the programme with only minor changes in membership due to local council elections.

The partnership is a company limited by guarantee and its own grant recipient body for both the core running costs and other third party funded organisations. The company is audited by external auditors on an annual basis.

In reference to the issues raised in the Auditor General Report presented to the Assembly on July 9<sup>th</sup>; Caia Park Communities First would like to submit the following response detailing our experience of the programme to date.

The programme was launched as the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Flagship regeneration programme' for Wales' most deprived communities. A lot of media attention was given to the launch and ambitious objectives were set. It was positive to see WAG commit to a long term programme in order to achieve positive regeneration outcomes. However; a lot of pressure was put upon the original team as the local authority and other statutory and voluntary agencies had been led to believe that this programme would bring huge investment to the area.

As the staff team began to work towards the action plan that had been set by the residents; there were high hopes amongst the community. Good relationships were formed with local people and numerous project groups were set up. However; on several occasions the projects were difficult to develop as partners were often unwilling or unable to offer funding for projects with little or no match funding available.

It has been recognised for a long time within Caia Park that there is not only the need to develop the community both socially and economically i.e. through delivering projects reliant upon in-kind help from partners but to ensure that the community can be improved physically but with lack of capital monies available this has been an ongoing challenge. Caia Park ranks highly on the WIMD housing index and there is a real need for housing to be improved in the area to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard as well as general other improvements needed in the local environment.

We feel that local benefits have been achieved within Caia Park.

This large estate has seen vast improvements in partnership working and joined up thinking. Resulting from the structure that the Communities First programme has put in place; there has been less duplication across service delivery and project development in the area; making services better value for money and by reducing the number of meetings project staff, local authority staff and staff from the voluntary sector have to participate in. This in turn results in economising resources and officer time.

Since the start of the programme, Caia Park Communities First adopted a facilitation role as opposed to a service delivery role. Where other areas across Wales actually deliver services to the community e.g. youth provision; Caia Park merely ensures it takes place. The staff team are involved temporarily in projects until these projects can sustain themselves. A number of initiatives resulting from Caia Park Communities First have now been taken on by external partners who have mutual benefit. Some examples of these are as follows:

#### Caia Park New 2 You

This project was set up by Communities First to provide low cost, quality furniture to the community in Caia Park and to reduce landfill. The project is run solely by volunteers who can take part in training opportunities to improve their own employability. The project has evolved into a fully self-sustaining social enterprise business that has continued to provide a high level of service to the community. Communities First are no longer involved in the project as the company has now appointed its own directors and still operate at such a low cost by involving volunteers.

## **Winter College**

Winter College provides taster sessions to young people who are able but not focused at school to introduce them to further/ higher education opportunities. This project started in 2005 by Communities First and saw outstanding results with approximately 90% of all participants entering further education after leaving school (These are pupils who had shown that they were not interested in continuing with their education; despite the school reporting that they were more than capable). This project has been recognised as good practice both locally and nationally and cost very little to deliver. Communities First no longer facilitate this project as it has been taken on by the Wrexham 14-19 network to sustain its future.

## **Bus Services**

Communities First have been responsible for undertaking research in the local community regarding satisfaction with local bus services. The local authority were approached and this project resulted in re-routing the bus services in response to local need; thereby actually increasing income for the bus companies and not costing anything whilst delivering a better service to the community.

In our experience we have found that some local authority departments and statutory bodies have welcomed the programme more so than others. E.g. Excellent links have been made with the Police in our locality and this has seen a vastly improved community policing team in Caia Park.

We feel there is a need to ensure that services are tailored to local requirements and to ensure local authorities bend their services into Communities First areas. In order to achieve this, there is a need for WAG to reduce funding to local authorities if they cannot demonstrate programme bending to areas of need. We have found that achieving positive outcomes for the community through programme bending for us has often been through the goodwill of local authority officers and not through the recognition that this is expected of the authority by the Assembly.

Caia Park have been looking at options in improving the quality of the housing stock in the area. This has included Tenant Management options and Partial Housing Stock Transfer options. Despite the willingness of local residents to take on such a responsibility (demonstrating the high level of capacity building that has taken place in Caia Park) there is significant lack of support from the Local Authority although they have failed in presenting an alternative option to upgrade the housing stock.

We have found frustration in the changes made to the way in which the WIMD was constructed at each publication. Alterations in published Indices and the method used to calculate each index, then the revised Lower Super Output Areas; resulted in us not having an ability to utilise the WIMD to monitor progress within the Caia Park Communities First area.

We feel that recently there have been higher levels of support from WAG. We now have much more support from our contacts at the Assembly. The way in which the Assembly has been monitoring the programme has vastly improved in recent years with much more stringent guidance and support offered. The Annual Monitoring Reports we submit have been improved greatly and allow for important target setting and monitoring processes.