

Communities and Culture Committee

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Financial Inclusion Strategy

In July 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government published Wales' first Financial Inclusion Strategy "Taking Everyone into Account". The Strategy gives us the opportunity to provide a lead to our partners in tackling financial exclusion and over-indebtedness in Wales and provides a much needed focus to the work underway at the UK, Wales and local levels.

Free-to-use ATMS

In 2006, John McFall MP, Chair of the Treasury Select Committee, published the findings at his ATM Working Group ("Cash Machines - Meeting "Consumer Needs). It recommended that an additional 600 free-to-use ATMs would be required to ensure access within 25% of the most deprived communities. As a result LINK agreed to work with high street banks to roll-out the facilities and confirmed 198 target areas in Wales. As at August 2009, 144 free-to-use ATMs have been installed in Wales with a further 5 under contract.

Post Offices

Following the re-launched Post Office Diversification Fund (PODF) 141 post offices have benefitted from the first two application rounds of the Fund. Since making the first awards in July 2009 a total of £855,969 has been paid out to 70 of the successful post offices. Of these 31 have completed the capital works funded by PODF.

Income Maximisation

£1m a year for the next 3 years has been allocated to further support the take up of Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. Grants are being paid to local authorities from 2008 - 2010 and they are being encouraged to work with relevant organisations within their local areas, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, to make sure that as many people as possible are reached and helped to claim the benefits that are available to them.

Credit Unions

£1.25 million pounds has been made available between 2008-11 to help deliver our three One Wales commitments on continuing credit union development:

Establish credit unions as a form of social enterprise throughout Wales;

Encourage more to offer child trust fund accounts; and

Provide every secondary school pupil in Wales with access to a credit union by 2011

Child Trust Fund Cymru

A top-up to the Child Trust Fund is being provided to all eligible children in Wales. CTF Cymru is providing £50 to all children, with payment of £100 to those children living in low income households. Claim forms have been distributed via Local Education Authorities in Wales with parents able to apply for the top-up on a voluntary basis. The first payments were made on the 15th December.

UK Government Funding of advice

£45 million was made available to the Face-to-Face Debt Advice Fund of which £3.15 million was awarded in 2006-08 to Citizens Advice Cymru for the appointment of 37 debt advisers across Wales. As at 30 September 2009, the total number of new clients seen in Wales as a direct result of this project was 18,985. The Fund is continuing for 2008-11 but with a slight reduction in real terms resulting in the reduction in the total number of advisers in Wales to 36.

Citizens Advice single number advice line

In November 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government provided £747,000 for Citizens Advice Cymru in 2009-10 to establish the single number advice line. Citizens Advice plan to integrate all bureaux in Wales into a Virtual Call Centre over the next 12 months to help clients benefit from the economies of scale this system will bring whilst retaining a local presence.

Independent financial advice

In November 2009 the UK Government announced the national rollout of the MoneyMadedclear service and introduced legislation that, if

passed, would enable to FSA to establish a new consumer financial body to run this national service. As part of the Financial Services Bill 2009, an independent consumer financial education body is being established to raise the profile of the FSA's current financial capability work.

In Wales the FSA has already advertised for a Money Guide for Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent, two areas identified as having poor availability of money advice services, to work through key intermediaries and generate interest for and then deliver face-to-face money guidance sessions to members of the public.

Communities First

Our Communities First Programme aims to provide local people in the most deprived communities across Wales (c. 20% of the population) with opportunities to play an active role in shaping the future of their community.

Under the programme, there are 157 local Partnerships and a wide range of local work has been undertaken across the six themes of the Communities First Vision Framework (Child Poverty, Environment, Community Safety, Health and Well Being, Jobs, Business & Income Generation and Education, Training and Skills) which helps build the skills, experience and expertise of community members engage with service deliverers and ultimately regenerate the community.

Following consultation in the early part of 2008, Communities First is now into a new phase which includes a greater focus on outcomes and on addressing the causes and effects of poverty. The vision for Communities First in this stage has been summarised as a programme which will mobilise and enable local people to contribute to the regeneration of their communities in practical ways (through the Vision Framework), in line with their local priorities and those of statutory bodies such as the Assembly Government, local authorities and health bodies.

Communities First Outcomes Fund

The Communities First Outcomes Fund - which has available no less than £25million over the three years from April 2009 - is designed to provide Communities First Partnerships with the financial incentive to encourage deliverers of services to work with them on common goals. It is a key part of helping us take forward our "programme bending" agenda, where the main services and programmes of the Welsh Assembly Government, its agencies, local authorities and all other key partners are prioritised to enhance services in those areas of greatest need. Examples of projects funded under the Outcomes Fund are attached at annex 1 and demonstrate how Communities First Partnerships, Local Authorities and other partners can work together to achieve common goals for the benefit of the wider community.

Digital Inclusion

Digital Inclusion has recently risen up the social inclusion agenda and is about people being able to use technology in a way which will enhance their lives and help them overcome other disadvantages.

In its written evidence to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee (WASC) Inquiry into Digital Inclusion, in January 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government undertook to produce a Digital Inclusion Action Plan for Wales, which would be taken forward on an inter-Departmental basis. Work on the Action Plan started in early autumn 2009, to identify excluded groups, the barriers which cause exclusion, and measures to be taken to address them. The key issue is that people are engaged, consequently improving communities by being digitally included.

A Digital Inclusion Ministerial Task and Finish Group has been established. The first meeting was chaired by the previous Deputy Minister for Regeneration and future meetings will be chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government.

The Action Plan is also an identified action in "Delivering a Digital Wales," our framework for addressing challenges of rapidly evolving trends in information and communications technology, digital media and the internet in a citizen focused way and, embracing the opportunities and imperatives of this rapidly evolving world. The framework provides a Welsh perspective on many of the issues raised in Digital Britain and whilst a publication date has yet to be finalised it will be considered by the Ministerial Steering Group chaired by the Deputy Minister for Science, Innovation and Skills at the meeting in March.

Communities 2.0

Communities 2.0 started on 1 April 2009 and is our latest digital inclusion initiative that will help individuals, communities and organisations in the Convergence Areas of Wales benefit from using technology by helping them overcome barriers, building their confidence and creating opportunities for them to use new skills. It follows our first digital inclusion initiative Communities @One which ended in March 2009.

Poverty European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)

The European Union has designated 2010 as the 'European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion' (EY2010). It aims to raise public awareness of the importance of combating poverty and social exclusion for personal, social and economic development and to give a voice to those who daily experience poverty and social exclusion.

Whilst the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is the lead Government department in the UK (as the member state) for the year my officials and representatives of the other Devolved Administrations are involved in activities in connection with the year through

membership of the National Implementation Body (NIB). The NIB has been set up by DWP to coordinate and formulate the UK position and to orchestrate funding, under delegated arrangements from the European Commission, for awareness raising activity across the UK.

Third Sector The Voluntary Sector Scheme - An Unique Scheme

The Annual Report on the Voluntary Sector Scheme 2008-09 is to be published shortly and will be laid before the National Assembly for Wales in late March. An analysis of our direct spending on the Third Sector has revealed a spend of nearly £493 million during 2008-09, a significant increase on the previous financial year.

GwirVol

GwirVol the new flagship youth volunteering programme was officially launched on 6th April 2009 and is designed to provide an increase in better quality volunteering opportunities. Indicative funding of £1,060,900 has been provided for 2010/11 and £1,092,727 for 2011/12 has been approved.

Social Enterprise Action Plan

The Social Enterprise Action Plan for Wales was launched in February 2009 and sets out some of the steps we are taking to promote social enterprises in Wales. These include facilitating the establishment of a new organisation to champion social enterprise, a new Community Asset Transfer Fund and delivery of the first major conference on social enterprise in Wales (the VOICE 10 conference) in Cardiff on 1-2 February 2010.

Community Safety

Liaison with Policing and Criminal Justice

We are committed to delivering stronger and safer communities in Wales. Although policing and criminal justice are non-devolved, policy responsibility for many of the factors that can influence levels of offending and criminality are devolved to Welsh Ministers, including housing, health and social services, education and other children's services, economic and community regeneration, and substance misuse. I therefore intend to continue the excellent working relationships that exist between the Welsh Assembly Government and the criminal justice system. I have already met with the Police Authorities of Wales and with the chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers Cymru, and intend to meet with all the Chief Constables in the near future. I will also be meeting representatives of the Probation Trusts, and the National Offender Management Service.

I will also be chairing the second meeting of our National Criminal Justice Forum, on 21 April. The Forum brings together senior representation from all the key policing and criminal justice agencies, as well as from local authorities and the third sector, to discuss key strategic issues affecting criminal justice and community safety in Wales.

Community Safety Reassurance Scheme for Older People.

We are making nearly £1.2million available in 2009-10 to Community Safety Partnerships under the Community Safety Reassurance Scheme for Older People. The fund has three components; to tackle crime and anti social behaviour and address older peoples' fear of crime.

The scheme is also providing an additional £500,000 to support the All Wales Doorstep Crime Partnership in running a national initiative to tackle distraction burglary and other doorstep crime. As part of this work the partnership is supporting/promoting the establishment of 'no cold caller zones'. £43,000 is also being provided to commission work to examine the issues that influence fear of crime and levels of confidence in the police and other local agencies amongst older people.

Community Cohesion

'Getting on together - a Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales' was launched on 3rd December 2009 with an accompanying action plan. This is part of our One Wales commitment to achieve a fair and just society, a place where citizens are empowered to determine their own lives and shape the communities in which they live.

To support the development of the Strategy a Community Cohesion Fund of £2million for 2009/10 has been apportioned to local authority areas through a formula based approach. A Community Cohesion Grant of £150,000 over a three year period until March 2012 has also been made available to each of the four most ethnically diverse local authorities in Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham) to enable them to kick-start cohesion or Prevent activities.

Violence Against Women And Domestic Abuse

One of my key priorities is to continue to ensure that domestic abuse is not tolerated in Wales. I issued a Written Statement on 5th January 2010 when I made it clear that I am wholly committed to ensuring violence against women in Wales is properly addressed. Making progress on this vital agenda is one of my top priorities.

In my Written Statement I set out that the new integrated strategy will extend beyond domestic abuse to tackle such issues as prostitution, sexual assault, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour based crime. This is in line with commitments that were given in response to the Communities and Culture report on domestic abuse that was published in December 2008.

I have already made additional funds available to extend the current New Year publicity campaign to ensure it challenges the wider issue of violence against women. This campaign will make use of a number of media formats and will include television advertising. In addition to this I have also approved additional funding of £250k in the current financial year to support Welsh Women's Aid to put in place an IT system that links all their refuges. This will keep women and their children safer. The funding for these two initiatives are on top of the extra £1m that is being added to domestic abuse and violence against women budget from April 2010.

Fire and Rescue Service

Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales 2008-2011

In September 2008 Welsh Ministers published a new Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales setting out our priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales. It also describes what is expected of them during the three year lifespan of the document. The Framework focuses on collaboration; placing the citizen at centre stage; and the wider role of the FRS in working with children and young people; their impact on the environment; the economy; tourism, etc.

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) are required to prepare, publicly consult on, and publish for each financial year their own Risk Reduction Plans ('RRP'). Risk Reduction Planning guidance advises FRAs to manage risk in a comprehensive, transparent and robust manner. It allows FRAs sufficient scope for local flexibility and innovative ways of delivering their services to the citizens and communities they serve. The FRA's RRP will provide the strategic agenda for that FRA. FRAs must discuss with content of their plans with me following public consultation but prior to publishing the final document which must be done by 31 October of each year.

The Fire and Rescue Consultative Forum advises Welsh Ministers on issues affecting fire and rescue in Wales. As part of its role in taking forward the commitments contained in the National Framework the Forum is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the Service Standard to Fires in the Home, and is also considering a review of the effectiveness of the Retained Duty System in Wales. I expect to receive both reviews during the spring of 2010.

Community Fire Safety

I provide funding of £3.8m annually to support FRAs in taking forward preventative activity. This includes £1.2m (2009-2010) for the provision of equipment (such as long-life smoke detectors) for use in Home Fire Safety Checks ('HFSCs').

Between 2007/10 the Welsh Assembly Government also made £12m available to fund sprinkler installations in 56 schools which are considered at risk of arson and to provide target hardening (security and other measures) in 99 other schools classed as vulnerable to crime and arson but unable to undertake sprinkler installation.

Other activity includes funding for FRA youth intervention programs such as 'Phoenix' and 'Dragon' which look to engage with disaffected young people. Building on this work the Assembly Government, through the Consultative Forum, has commissioned a Children and Young People's Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service, which looks to embed FRA youth activity within the wider agenda of the All-Wales Youth Offending Strategy and implement key partnership work to support this agenda.

Recognising the importance of engaging with children, I have made available funding for a range of specific Key Stage materials, which recognises the importance of engaging with children and as part of the Personal and Social Education element of the National Curriculum.

Arson continues to be a problem in Wales, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities. I am providing funding of over £2.5m up to 2011 to continue the work of Arson Reduction Teams in Wales, which comprise dedicated police, fire and administrative resources with the remit of tackling arson in hotspot areas across Wales.

We are currently independently evaluating the affect of our arson activity and funding. The results of the evaluation will be due within the next few months and will inform future levels of funding and targeting of resources from 2010/11 onwards.

Performance Management for Fire and Rescue Authorities

We have worked with the Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) over recent years to bring performance management for FRAs in line with Local Authorities. One of the reasons for this is to ensure that communities, and individual citizens, have access to information about the performance of public services locally in a consistent, timely and accessible format.

In the Autumn of 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government consulted on guidance to support the implementation of new arrangements for improvement planning for FRAs under Part 1 of the Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The draft guidance, which will be introduced before 1 April 2010, mirrors the guidance developed for Local Authorities but has developed some FRA specific approaches.

In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government has consulted on the policy to bring the development, consultation and publication arrangements for risk reduction planning under the Fire and Rescue National Framework and improvement planning under the Measure together. To enable this, I laid an Order under the Measure in February 2010, which means that:-

Citizens and communities will have access to one plan which clearly identifies the priorities of their FRA in any given year. This will reduce any overlap and confusion that may be caused by the same or similar priorities being consulted on and published in two separate documents;

There will be a reduced burden on FRAs - undertaking one integrated process instead of two similar processes.

Further work is being undertaken in the first half of 2010 to review the current suite of performance indicators. These include statutory indicators which will be annulled by the Measure from 1 April 2010. The current set has been designed to focus, where possible, on outcomes to measure the impact of service delivery on citizens. They provide information about the impact that community fire safety work has on prevention and the reduction of risk of fire to citizens, as well as providing some information about the effectiveness of emergency response.

The New Dimension Programme

The New Dimension (ND) programme originated as part of the UK Government's Civil Contingencies Capabilities Programme. Its aim is to enhance the country's preparedness and resilience by improving the capability of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) to respond to major and catastrophic incidents.

Special equipment to undertake these duties has been procured by ourselves and the UK Government for the FRSs at a cost of £7.3 million to provide the appropriate response (within 2 hours) to high risk areas in Wales and across the UK. Assets held in Wales are hosted by the three Fire and Rescue Services but currently ownership rests with the Department for Communities and Local Government. A formal transfer of these assets to the Welsh Ministers is being arranged.

With the co-operation of the FRAs, we intend that ownership of the assets will be transferred to the FRAs as soon as possible after ownership of the assets has been vested in Welsh Ministers.

Firelink

A principal aim of the Firelink project is to provide a resilient radio communications system that will enhance the ability of the fire and rescue service to respond efficiently and effectively to emergencies. The system will enable the Fire and Rescue Service to communicate with the other blue-light emergency services such as Police and Ambulance.

The contract to provide the Firelink system was let to Airwave Solutions Limited following competitive tender on 29 March 2006. The first phase of the rollout (Phase A), which builds the resilient infrastructure for the system, is nearing completion. The final phase (Phase B) will see fire and rescue authorities brought onto the network incrementally with the provision of equipment and training in its use for fire fighters.

Phase B rollout of the Firelink project, installation of radio and data terminals to "front-line vehicles and officers cars", commenced in all three FRSs in Wales in January 2010. Current estimates are that full completion of Phase B will be reached in June 2010 when the system will become fully operational.

Resilience of Control Rooms Project

I am funding a £1.912 million project to link the FRS Control Rooms in Wales and with a monitoring facility in the emergency Coordination Centre in Cathays Park. This is to provide resilience and back up to the emergency call system in all three FRSs in the event of the overload of one or more of the Control Rooms in spate conditions or catastrophic failure. The project is programmed to go live in June 2010 coterminous with the Firelink project.

Dref Werdd is a community led project that works to enable the community of Bro Ffestiniog to utilise the environment as a resource to develop a sustainable and resilient future for the residents. Their aims are to take care of the local environment; reduce the ecological footprint of the community; encourage community development; and to contribute to global environmental sustainability. One of the overriding aims of the organisation is to work towards becoming a 'Green Town', with the guidelines set by the community itself.

Who is involved

The Green Town environmental project was established in pilot form in August 2007 with a small amount of funding from the Partnership's CF funded "activities budget", together with funding from CAE (Eryri National park) and the Countryside Council for Wales totalling £12,367 over 3 years. The project also received "in kind" contributions of £5,249.33 and lots of volunteer time.

The project employs a Project Manager and an Administrator to handle the day to day operations and they rely heavily on volunteer support when projects are being developed and implemented. This is reflected in the application for Outcomes Funding where volunteer time is a key element of the match funding identified. Projected outcomes include improving the natural environment, re-developing the food economy and improving sustainable energy.

Neath Port Talbot (NPT) - Welfare Rights Project Aim of Project

Communities First provides Outcomes Funding for the county wide Welfare Rights project which provides benefit and debt advice to all the Communities First areas in Neath Port Talbot. Due to the current economic climate and changes being made in the benefit system additional resources were identified as being a key priority by all the Communities First Partnerships and Welfare Rights Unit. The support of the local Communities First teams is a main factor in the development of the project as most other advice provision in NPT is in the town centres of Neath and Port Talbot. This makes it very difficult for people from outlying areas to access those services. As well as providing debt and benefit advice, referrals are also made to other services/agencies such as Want2Work, Women's Aid, Citizens Advice Bureau, West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and Shaw Trust, thereby helping to tackle longer term poverty issues.

Who is involved

The project links in with NPT CBC's Health, Social Care and Well being strategy, Children and Young People plan and their Community Plan. External funding identified by NPT CBC as well as funding from NPTCBC Chief Executives' Social Inclusion Fund and NPT CBC Social Services, Health and Housing Directorate Community Care division has been used as match towards this project. The project will help to focus support services in NPT on those communities in greatest need.

Swansea - Youth Work Team Aim of Project

The project forms part of the new City area youth work team within Swansea that will work with young people in Communities First areas and which will progressively be part of the development of integrated multi-agency teams for the support of children and young people. Previously there was no identified cohesive youth work provision in the Communities First areas in Swansea, apart from Townhill, which was previously funded by the programme. The Communities First youth work staff will be managed within the new structure of the Youth Service in Swansea. Each team will engage with young people in different aspects of community life and support young people to identify and achieve individual positive outcomes. The project is aimed at young people aged 10-25, and each team will work closely with the Communities First Partnerships to ensure local needs are met. Local schools and other key services will be engaged through multi-agency teams in targeting young people that are at risk of exclusion from school, have been involved in crime or anti-social behaviour and others who are not reaching their full potential.

Who is involved

The project shows clear links to a variety of strategic plans and proposals such as the Children and Young People Plan and its core aims; NEET Strategy; Early Intervention and Prevention Priority of the Local Service Board; Swansea Youth Service Plan and UN Rights of the Child. A significant proportion of the match funding for this project is being provided by restructuring the existing youth service in Swansea in order to target Communities First areas, representing significant "programme bending", additional funding has come from the Youth Capital fund and the Youth Service training fund.

Cardiff - Time to Engage, Spice Innovations Aim of Project

'Time to Engage Schools' is a project developed by Spice Innovations - an organisation formed to disseminate the 'community time credits' across Wales and England

The overall aim of the proposal is to further develop timebanks to promote an active culture of volunteering and engagement that supports closer cohesion between the schools and the community. The community timebanks will seek to encourage more volunteering and engagement from students, parents and the adult community in activities at the school, local community centres and wider community.

Who is involved

The project work with six Communities First areas and four local secondary schools across Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Namely:

Communities First area:

Ely/Caerau.
Penygraig & Williamstown, Cwm Clydach, Llwynypia and Trealaw
Penygraig & Williamstown, Cwm Clydach, Llwynypia and Trealaw

Participating School(s):

Michaelston Community College and Glyn Derw High School
Tonypandy Community College
Pontypridd High

The total project cost is £686,119 with match funding of £411,071 provided by Spice Innovations and the four participating schools

Employment Pathways Aim of Project

The Employment Pathways project was created to address economic inactivity in Newport. Its primary aim is to reduce the skills gap in CF areas through increased pathways to vocational training, employability support and basic skills that will lead onto a work placement/employment.

Who is involved

Communities First areas in Newport, Newport City Council, Gwent Careers Wales, Learn About, Newport CAB and Job Centre Plus. Communities First Funding of £249,894 was awarded in February 2009 and will end March 2012.