

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Date: 22nd March 2007

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: Communities First: Update on Initiatives

Purpose

To inform the Committee of the progress made to date on implementing the Communities First Programme.

Summary

During the joint Social Justice and Regeneration and Local Government and Finance Committee meeting on the 19th October 2006 I gave an update on the progress of Communities First. This paper now addresses progress since that date and invites comments from the Committee. Key progress is highlighted below:

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

Local areas are making progress on the submission of applications for the eligible 46 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) across Wales. Officials are expecting applications by March this year – although it is likely that in some cases this will be a preliminary expression of interest while local consultation continues. In some cases it is expected that new areas will wish to combine with existing partnerships, or with each other, rather than developing a new partnership for every LSOA. It is important to re-iterate that all key stakeholders must be involved in the process of submitting applications on how the LSOAs will be integrated in the Communities First programme.

A new secondee has been recruited to the Communities Directorate to aid this process and will be supporting the establishment of Communities First in these new areas.

Review of Communities First Support Fund Organisations

At the previous Committee meeting I gave an update on the funding that currently goes directly to Communities First Support Fund Organisations (such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and Business in the Community etc) which is ending in March 2007. The decision was based on the findings of a review that was undertaken to look at the support requirements of Communities First Partnerships. The report recognised that the support structure for Communities First Partnerships had been adequate during the early years of the programme. However, the clear evidence from the review was that this would not be the most

effective or efficient way of providing support in the future. The overwhelming evidence from the report stated that there should be a refocus in the way that support is provided in order to ensure the support could be accessed by Partnerships according to their particular needs.

I am currently considering options on how to take this work forward. This involves looking at how future funding will be allocated and what activities should be supported, especially to ensure that Communities First Partnerships continue to address the needs of excluded groups.

Review of Communities First Trust Fund

I have previously informed the Committee that I have agreed a one year extension to the Communities First Trust Fund for 2007/08. I have decided a review of the Trust Fund will be undertaken shortly and will inform the future of the Trust Fund post March 2008.

The main aim of the review is to assess whether the role, management and administration of the Trust Fund needs to be revised from 2008, and if so, how. On this basis, the review will also provide recommendations about what changes should be made. The review will be carried out by an independent organisation under usual procurement arrangements; details will be advertised shortly.

Evaluation of the Communities First Support Network

I have agreed that an evaluation of the work of the Communities First Support Network should be undertaken. The review will look at the impact of recent developments in the Communities First programme on CFSN and will inform on what support should be provided in the future. As with the Communities First Trust Fund a procurement contract will be advertised shortly.

Interim Evaluation of Communities First

The Evaluation of the programme, published in September last year, has been very much welcomed by the Welsh Assembly Government. We have discussed the evaluation several times in Committee and at plenary on the 8th November 2006. The Evaluation has presented some key challenges for the forthcoming period. For example, the report says that there should be more emphasis focus on local monitoring and evaluation and also on programme bending.

In terms of local monitoring and evaluation, work is underway to develop a national framework supported by a focus on individual Partnerships. Discussions have taken place with the Assembly Government's Research and Evaluation Unit in the Department for Social Justice and Regeneration around the collation of this information. To aid the process, my officials are currently improving their data collection systems. This involves updating the necessary forms used by Partnerships for funding applications and for quarterly and annual monitoring. These are being finalised and will be sent out to Communities First Partnerships shortly.

Mainstreaming

I feel it is important to re-iterate the importance of organisations at national and local level

mainstreaming their programmes and policies to support the activities of Communities First Partnerships. I am working at Ministerial level, and my staff at official level, to ensure that areas across the Assembly and also outside the Assembly mainstream their programmes and policies at Communities First areas. We must accept that the success of Communities First is dependent on other service providers engaging with the programme and with local Communities First partnerships.

At the last Committee meeting members highlighted some confusion over the term programme bending. The Communities First Support Network (CFSN), on behalf of the Assembly Government, held seminars on programme bending and what it means for Partnerships. These were well received but there was a recognition that much work needs to be done on raising awareness of programme bending with service providers. Officials in the Assembly Government will be taking this forward with the CFSN and Welsh Local Government Association. The Assembly Government has also had a number of meetings with key areas that impact on programme bending and the Communities First Programme more generally. For example, the Communities First Unit (along with the CFSN) is represented in the Making the Connection Public Engagement Working Group. Meetings have also taken place with the Assembly Government's Local Government Policy Division, Stonewall Cymru, Continyou Cymru and the Big Lottery Fund, to name a few.

I have agreed that officials should host two conferences on youth work and Communities First on the 27th March and the 18th April to explore in more detail the good practice that is taking place around activities for young people in Communities First areas. These conferences (which are being jointly funded through the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills) will look at what needs to be done to obtain better information on what happening around youth work in Communities First areas so that officials may move the programme bending agenda forward. Where there is innovative youth work being delivered by Communities First discussion will take place as to how best it can be promoted and celebrated. Officials will also be exploring the details of relationships between Communities First Youth Work and the wider voluntary and maintained youth work sectors and what can be done to promote and enhance these relationships. The Youth Service Strategy will also be disseminated at these conferences.

Cross Cutting Themes

The very nature of Communities First means that it is a cross cutting programme. Work is ongoing to ensure that other policies and programmes are mainstreamed to support the work of Communities First Partnerships. For example, work is being undertaken with the Arts Council of Wales, Health Challenge Wales and Food Co-operatives, Sports Council of Wales and Cymorth.

Action for Subject Committee

The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee is invited to note the progress made to date on Communities First and to comment on its future development

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