

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

### COMMUNITIES FIRST – CONSIDERATION OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION EXERCISE

#### 1. Purpose

1.1 The Committee's views are invited on the way forward on 'Communities First' in the light of the responses received to the first phase of the consultation exercise. We plan shortly to publish a second consultation paper, which draws on those responses and sets out firm proposals for this programme.

#### 2. Summary

2.1 The key issues which were identified in response to the initial consultation exercise were that:

- **barriers to community development** - such as discrimination against certain groups of people and funding mechanisms which discourage inter-agency working - need to be removed;
- **poor service provision** in poor neighbourhoods exacerbates inequalities in life chances and life expectancy;
- **housing quality** directly affects health and quality of life, and the increased availability of affordable housing could help to stem rural depopulation;
- **diet and health** contribute directly to employability, as well as to quality of life;
- people living in deprived communities need investment to provide them with the **skills** to attract employment opportunities to their area – but without **job prospects**, they may be unwilling to enter training;
- children's education, with a particular focus on **numeracy and literacy**, is a vital element in a community renewal strategy framework, and attention needs to be given to ensuring that league tables and inspections do not add to the stigma perceived to attach to schools in disadvantaged communities;
- **better transport** could help to reverse depopulation and support wider access to training and education;
- improved access to **good facilities, services and cultural services** (from post boxes to medical care) is an essential aspect of a sustainable community;
- community spirit and civic pride are fostered by **maintenance and improvement of the**

- **physical environment** (litter collection, play spaces, trees);
- **criminal activity and anti-social behaviour**, linked with substance misuse, deeply concern deprived communities and undermine community confidence; and
- **apathy**, arising from youth disaffection and general community indifference, is increasing and has been made worse both by communities' feelings of isolation and by previous, short-term, regeneration programmes which are perceived to have focused on economic development in isolation from the other factors outlined above.

2.2 The new consultation paper will propose that:

- **100 of the most deprived communities** in Wales should be identified, using a combination of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and local knowledge;
- up to five deprived communities should be selected from **every local authority area**;
- the Assembly, and other partners, will make a **long-term commitment** to funding and otherwise supporting the communities participating in 'Communities First', both through a specific grant scheme and through the Assembly's mainstream Programmes;
- **capacity building** will be an integral aspect of the Programme, to ensure lasting and sustainable change is achieved;
- **community partnerships** will develop their community's vision and plan its delivery; will manage, review and evaluate its implementation; and will engage with the community and local agencies to ensure that the local plan continues to meet local needs and priorities;
- **Assembly Members** would be encouraged to join the partnerships in their constituency; and
- **progress should be measured** by means of a system of benchmarking against a set of twenty-five measures (covering the fields of economic activity, education and training, environment, health and civil society) which would be externally validated.

2.3 A series of questions for consultation, arising from these proposals, will be posed throughout the consultation paper. They will also provide the focus for a consultation conference to be held in mid-Wales soon after the publication of the consultation paper.

### 3. Timing

3.1 It is intended that the second phase of consultation on the 'Communities First' programme should begin shortly, with the publication of the new consultation paper. Assembly Members are invited to give their views in advance of that process getting under way. 'Communities First' is due to be implemented from April 2001.

### 4. Background

4.1 Tackling social disadvantage is one of three major themes which the Assembly has adopted in its strategic plan, 'Better Wales'. The Assembly is committed to combating poverty and social disadvantage and to bridging the gap between the most deprived communities in Wales and the more affluent ones.

4.2 'Communities First' was launched on 31 March, with the publication of the first consultation paper. That document set out the principles for the Communities First policy framework, which are:

- that a non-prescriptive, community-centred approach to community regeneration is needed, targeted at the most deprived communities in Wales;
- that regeneration and community renewal should meet the needs and priorities identified by those communities themselves in order for renewal to be sustainable; and
- that long-term commitment from the National Assembly, local authorities and other key agencies is required to promote real partnerships at local level.

4.3 The Assembly has consulted widely on this framework, and has involved a broad range of participants in the process of policy development through developmental seminars and discussion sessions across Wales. In addition, 160 written replies were received in response to the initial consultation document. These have been analysed thoroughly, and the ideas and comments they contained have helped to form the proposals which will be set out in the second consultation document. A detailed summary of the responses we received and a list of those who responded in writing will be annexed to the published consultation paper.

## **5. Compliance**

5.1 There are no new issues of compliance and no new issues of regularity or propriety.

## **6. Financial implications**

6.1 Financial Planning Division has been consulted about this paper and has noted that budget provision for the programme for the next 3 years is being considered as part of the current budget round.

## **7. Cross-cutting themes**

7.1 'Communities First' will make a major contribution to the Assembly's commitment to tackling social exclusion.

**Social Disadvantage Branch,**

