

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

### **ACTION STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH WALES VALLEYS**

#### **Purpose**

1. The Committee is asked to note the content of this and associated paper on "Community Development" (see Annex) that take forward work, resulting from a plenary debate held in November 1999, on developing an action strategy for the South Wales Valleys

#### **Background**

2. The following motion was tabled by Plaid Cymru for their nominated debate on 23 November 1999. It incorporates the approved amendments to the motion:

" That the Assembly recognises that the Valleys of the south of Wales merit particular attention by virtue of a combination of disadvantages arising from the unsustainable industrial development of the past and the continual neglect of successive governments; recognises also that the correction of these disadvantages and the release of the great potential of Valley communities requires the exploitation of EU structural funds provided by the full match funding for the whole of the Objective 1 programme and integrated initiatives across all policy areas; notes specifically the need for co-ordinated action on:

- economic development tailored to the specific needs of these communities;
- community development;
- appropriate and accessible training and education, provided in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors;
- environmental improvement;
- tackling ill-health and promoting well being;
- high quality and accessible public transport.

The Assembly therefore proposes that the appropriate Assembly Subject Committee, in consultation with our partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, draw up an action strategy which specifically addresses the issues listed above."

#### **Presentation**

3. The draft strategy will also be presented to the South West Wales Regional Committee and relevant subject committees in the new session of the Assembly. It will be copied to the Mid Wales Committee. The committees will decide on how they wish to take forward this work. It is proposed that consultation takes place with the Business Partnership; Voluntary Sector Partnership; the Partnership Council and health organisations.

### **Framework of action strategy**

4. There is no direct funding attached to this draft action strategy. Assembly officials, with responsibility for the specific issue were asked to prepare a paper, looking in particular at existing and proposed programmes and initiatives tailored to the needs of Valley communities. However, most programmes are implemented on an all Wales basis, although it may be the case that the benefit to the Valleys is proportionally higher than other areas simply because they are the areas of most need. Where possible, examples of specific projects are contained in the papers.

### **Cross cutting themes**

5. Each paper covers a particular subject, but the very nature of the issues involved and the efforts being made to address those issues, result in a certain amount of overlap.

### **Better Wales**

6. For ease and simplification it is proposed that this exercise should link with work being taken forward under "Better Wales". This will involve adopting, for the Valleys area, and in each of the subject areas, as many as is possible of the 100 action points and targets for the Assembly for the period 2000-2003.

### **Objective 1**

7. Objective 1 will be the biggest driver of regeneration in the south Wales Valleys. The Single Programming Document for Objective 1 suggests seven priorities for the Programme, subdivided into measures, each having a budget. These very much have a read across to the six areas of the action plan. Targets and outputs are based on the west Wales and the Valleys. A view will need to be taken as to whether to split the area for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation of the programme. The priorities are:

- **Priority 1.** Includes an enhanced range of support for SMEs, with a focus on tradable services including software businesses. There is to be a new investment fund; a major thrust to foster enterprise and the formation, survival and growth of new businesses; a focused system of business advice; an upgrading of vocational and managerial skills and the provision of quality premises and workshops for SMEs.

- **Priority 2.** This seeks to tackle low levels of innovation and of R and D; ICT infrastructure and promotion of the use of ICT; development of science parks etc.
  - **Priority 3.** This focuses on Community Regeneration.
  - **Priority 4.** There will be substantial funds for training to help the unemployed and the economically inactive and to prevent people slipping into long-term unemployment.
  - **Priority 5.** A rural priority to bring out the links with the Rural Development Plan.
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- **Priority 6.** This focuses on infrastructure - transport development, including roads, the provision of large, strategic employment sites, energy infrastructure - including renewable energy - and environmental infrastructure.
  - **Priority 7.** Technical Assistance budget to help finance programme administration.

8. The Objective 1 Programme Monitoring Committee will take forward all or part of the programme through formal Action Plans. Plans drawn up by partnerships will allow a more strategic approach to the delivery of structural Fund programmes, help achieve the objectives and targets set; secure greater partnership working at regional, sub-regional and local level, and maximise the opportunities for integration between European activity and domestic regeneration programmes.

9. Action Plans, which may be implemented over a number of years, may be proposed at various spatial levels:

- a. Regional, covering the whole of the Objective 1 area;
- b. Sub-regional, not Programme- wide but extending beyond the boundary of a single local authority;
- c. Local, related to a single local authority area (or a part thereof).

## **Consideration**

10. There are no recommendations set out in this paper. The views of the Local Government and Housing Committee are sought as part of the process of taking forward the action plan.

## **Compliance**

11. There are no issues of regularity and propriety and nothing that is novel or contentious. Assembly Compliance Office has been consulted about this submission and is content.

## **Financial Implications**

12. The purpose of this committee paper is to provide information on an action strategy which pulls together existing programmes. All expenditure will be accommodated within budgets approved by the Assembly. Financial Planning Division has been consulted about this paper and noted that there are no additional financial implications for the Assembly.

## **Action**

13. The Committee is invited to comment on the papers.

## **Local Action Plan Division/ Welsh European Funding Office**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PAPERS**

#### **1. Economic development tailored to the specific needs of the Valley communities**

The paper looks briefly at the main causes of economic decline of the area and at ways of reviving the economy. Without jobs and businesses creating wealth, it is impossible for any area to turn itself around. Economic regeneration depends on providing the environment to attract companies and for indigenous companies to grow, both increasing the number and quality of jobs. Helping people to compete for jobs is taken forward in the two papers on provision of further and higher education; and appropriate and accessible training. Areas mentioned are opportunities under Objective1; local regeneration funding; the work of the WDA in land reclamation, site and property development schemes, and urban development projects; support for business and enterprise; New Deal.

#### **2. Community Development [full paper at Annex]**

The paper details the People in Communities Programme where three of the eight areas of operation are in the south Wales Valleys. It takes further, explanations of why the Valleys is unique, in terms of the **extent** of problems of multiple deprivation and social disadvantage caused by industrial decline and restructuring. In many ways these compounded problems have prompted the approach taken by "Communities First" ie. it is to be targeted at the most deprived communities, with action plans developed by, and focusing on, the needs and priorities of the communities themselves through effective partnerships at the local level with long term resources. Communities First will, through its partnership approach both at local and wider levels, provide the integration and strategic co-ordination which previous programmes and initiatives targeted specifically at the Valleys have failed to do so.

### 3a. Appropriate and accessible training

A key part of the solution for many individuals and for communities as a whole is to have in place, hand in hand with economic measures designed to increase the supply of jobs, a comprehensive menu of training, advice and guidance programmes that will help people obtain those good jobs. The paper details the low levels of skills and inactivity rates prevalent in the Valleys (35% in Merthyr - the highest in Wales). It outlines how the Skills Task Force will recommend action that will feed into a comprehensive skills action plan that will form part of a National Economic Development Strategy. Initiatives based on helping the transition from school to work such as the Youth access Initiative; Youth Gateway; Learndirect and training for young people, falling into the two levels of Assembly-funded initiatives and initiatives reserved to the UK Government are detailed.

### 3b. Further and Higher Education in the south Wales Valleys

Linking to Better Wales, this paper identifies some of the key results wanted by March 2003 across Wales as a whole; the requirements needed to achieve sustainable improvement in the Valleys and the wider focus of development of a skilled workforce. It outlines the provision of **further education** and concludes that throughout the south Wales Valleys region provision is available across all programme areas; a balance of general and vocational training is available; it is well served for education and training in programme areas associated with traditional industry; there is a widespread availability of programmes across qualification levels; strong growth in IT programmes and widespread availability of basic literacy and numeracy programmes especially at outreach sites. But despite the many venues and extensive provision the valley communities have the lowest **participation rates** in Wales and among the worst levels of basic adult literacy and numeracy in Western Europe. Annex A to the paper outlines the efforts being made by providers to engage the disaffected and Annex B the specific activities undertaken by the Valleys based further education colleges.

Information is provided on the provision of higher education, within three colleges and the efforts made to recruit and widen access, together with helping to improve qualifications and skills of the employed. Annex C details the percentage of entrants from low participation neighbourhoods and part-time provision.

## 4. High quality and accessible public transport

The paper, using the framework of "Better Wales", sets out the results we wish to have by 2003 and the things we will do to develop a better co-ordinated and sustainable transport system to support local communities and the creation of a better economy within the

framework of sustainable development and helping to alleviate social disadvantage. Details are included of specific initiatives such as concessionary travel and passes; bus subsidy grant scheme; community transport and Assembly support for transport measures in the south Wales Valleys.

## **5. Improving health and well being and reducing inequalities in health**

The paper examines the interrelated and interdependent factors influencing the state of health and well being. It explains that while some factors which influence health are amenable to change e.g., poverty, deprivation, social class, poor housing, unemployment, others such as gender, race and genetic factors are not. Almost all health indicators confirm the relationship between the prevalence of ill health and poor social and economic circumstances. This means that action to reduce inequalities must be an integrated part of targeted economic development and community regeneration. Better health and well being is one of the five priorities in the Assembly's strategic plan "Better Wales". There are few quick fixes to improving the health of Wales: attitudes and structures take time to change. Most policies and programmes are geared to action across Wales. The paper does detail action specific to the south Wales Valleys - Health at Work, a three year pilot project, specific to Merthyr Tydfil and Cynon Valley areas; the piloting of the World Health Organisation's Verona Initiative seeking to benchmark investment in health; Class Moves whereby new materials to promote exercise for primary stage children are being trialled in six schools; and the Smokefree Class Competition.

## **6. Environmental Improvement**

Sustainable development is one of the three key themes running through the Assembly's strategic plan. Planned action to tackle environmental problems includes the work of the Environment Agency Wales who have prepared, in consultation with local communities and organisations, Local Environment Agency Plans for all areas within the south Wales Valleys. The plans identify key environmental issues for each area and set out actions to solve them. The paper looks at issues of Air Quality; Waste; Land Reclamation; and Water Pollution. The Valleys will be a major beneficiary of the programme to improve 1000 sewage discharges by the end of 2005. This will lead to improved rivers and enable economic development of the most deprived areas. A remediation programme to tackle minewater pollution is also in place. One of the major beneficiaries is at the site of the former Taff Merthyr Colliery where the largest wetland system to be constructed by the Coal Authority is taking shape at the hub of the Taff Bargoed Millennium Park.

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## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Tackling social disadvantage is one of 3 major themes which the Assembly has adopted in its strategic plan 'Better Wales'. The plan emphasises the Assembly's commitment to developing better communities where people want to live, work and play; have access to economic opportunities and a pleasant and safe environment.

Better Wales commits to promoting greater equality, creating more jobs, reducing gaps in health, education and social care, improving housing and environments and encouraging partnership and sustainability.

There are no quick fixes. Many communities suffer concentrated and long standing deprivation and are a long way from economic sustainability.

Work has been carried out to put in place comprehensive strategies to tackle social disadvantage:

- The People in Communities Programme is a small scale, intensive programme of community action. It has been operating in eight areas in Wales since May 1999 of which three are in the South Wales Valleys (Rhymney, Caerphilly; Gurnos and Galon Uchaf, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhiwgarn, Trebanog, Rhondda Cynon Taf). £240,000 has been provided through the Programme in these areas. The second phase of projects will shortly be announced and is likely to include more Valleys communities.

People in Communities recognises the need to promote community participation in policies to regenerate deprived areas

The problems of multiple deprivation and social disadvantage experienced by communities in the South Wales Valleys region of Wales are not unique in terms of the broader Welsh, UK or European experience. Industrial decline and restructuring have left populations throughout Europe stranded in areas of high unemployment with a limited capacity to adapt to new economic conditions or to create alternative paths to social and economic recovery. What is unique about the Valleys is:

- The scale of the problem, both in population terms and in the number of communities affected.
- The degree of poverty and disadvantage and related patterns of social exclusion

- The concentration of problems in a geographically defined area
- The persistence over an extended period of time of a pattern of social disadvantage
- The resistance of the problem to orthodox policy approaches

'Communities First', is the Assembly's vision for the future of the most deprived communities in Wales and the concept of how they can be regenerated. Communities First will target the most deprived communities with action plans developed by and focussing on the needs and priorities of the communities themselves. Commitments to long term resources, support and funding to promote effective partnerships at local level will be required.

A widespread consultation and participative policy development exercise has been embarked upon and firm proposals for the scheme will be published in the autumn

In many ways these compounded problems have prompted the approach to disadvantage in Wales to be established by the Communities First strategy. Whilst applicable to all communities in Wales, the Communities First approach will have a strong resonance in the Valleys where the community development sector is already well advanced. This is already clearly demonstrated by the number of Development Trusts that have emerged to tackle social deprivation in Valleys communities. The South Wales Valleys have already proved a fertile ground for the area-regeneration strategy which lies at the heart of the Communities First proposal. Whilst not pre-judging the extensive consultation exercise which is underway, it is evident that the formation of multi-agency partnerships in which community members play a key and critical role will be at the centre of the Communities First approach. Valleys culture enjoys a legacy of community and civic participation which ensures that contemporary communities have significant capacity to be involved in the design and delivery of the solution to the problems faced in those communities.

Communities First will consequently, through its partnership approach, provide the integration and strategic co-ordination which previous programmes and initiatives targeted specifically at the Valleys have failed to do so. Whilst not every community in the Valleys will be participating in the Communities First strategy directly, the patterns of deprivation and social disadvantage in Wales will ensure that significant number of communities will be involved. These will form a critical mass which will change the general pattern of service delivery in the whole region. As a result of the Communities First strategy, the Local Authorities, the Voluntary Sector, Health Trusts and the communities themselves will be engaged in a partnership approach to the regeneration of the Valleys which cannot be contained within designated Communities First localities. The strategy will also ensure connection and harmonisation with other Assembly policies in health, economic regeneration, education and training to promote an integrated policy platform to serve the needs of the Valleys.



Other action which will assist Community Development:

- An exercise to identify, assess and where possible rationalise Assembly led programmes which impact on social disadvantage is underway. The aim is to streamline programmes to make them more accessible and flexible and to deliver services better.
- A directory of existing community projects in Wales is being established. Approximately 700 organisations, many of which are based in the South Wales valleys, which have a clear focus on community development and regeneration have been identified. A paper version of the directory will be produced in early Summer with a CD and web site soon afterwards.