

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

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

#### **Purpose**

1. The Committee is asked to note the responses to the second consultation phase on 'Communities First' and to offer any further observations.

#### **Summary**

2. Over 130 written responses were received from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. Generally, these welcomed and supported most of the implementation proposals. The key issues raised were:

#### **Selecting Communities:**

There were concerns about:

- the possibility of small areas of deprivation being excluded;
- lack of consideration of the gypsy population and traveller sites;
- local authority responsibility for nomination of communities for inclusion in the programme; and
- possible inclusion of areas not identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation reducing the funding available for the most deprived areas.

#### **Funding**

- The commitment to long term funding was welcomed, although there was a view that the money available is insufficient to reverse the decline of social deprivation.

- Flexibility in the use of funds and tolerance of risk taking was considered essential.
- Procedures for obtaining funding should be as simple as possible and communities need to be supported in accessing funds
- There have been a number of representations against the proposal for local authorities to be fund-holders.
- It was suggested that there should be an upper spending limit for each local authority and time limits for the support.
- Concerns were expressed about the possibility of Communities First money not being used imaginatively, but simply as match funding for Objective 1.

### **Establishing and Supporting Partnerships**

- There was a view that too many partnerships are being created and it was proposed that partnerships should build on existing arrangements, whilst ensuring community involvement.
- Flexibility in the composition of partnerships was requested, provided arrangements ensured that community interests dominated.
- The private sector should be involved from the early stage.
- Comprehensive guidance on Partnerships was called for and there were concerns expressed about the proposal for Champions.

### **Building Capacity and Participation**

- Agencies and organisations will need support for significant cultural change and to learn how to work differently.
- The guidance should be clear on the issue of accountability to the community and active community involvement should be a key funding criteria.

## Measuring Progress

- A useful measure of community confidence would be a benchmark related to a community overcoming a poor reputation.
- There were calls for comparative evaluation and giving communities responsibility for evaluating the impact of implementation of their plans.
- It was suggested that Communities First benchmarks could be cross-referenced to Better Value.

## Other Issues

- The absence of a National Community Development Strategy for Wales was raised.
- There was a call for a Community Development Agency for Wales.

## Comment

1. The Assembly has consulted widely on the Communities First framework, and has involved a broad range of participants in the process of policy development through developmental seminars and discussion sessions across Wales. 160 written replies were received in response to the initial consultation document. The second document detailing our proposals for implementation issued in December 2000. [A copy is attached]. The 130 responses are being carefully considered together with the outcome of a major consultation seminar attended by over 200 representatives from agencies and community groups, which was held on 31 January.
4. Overall, the responses received have been favourable and supportive of the programme proposals. These will be used to design the final shape of the programme and to draw up the guidance for partnerships and preparation of local delivery plans.

**Contact Point: Community Regeneration and Social Inclusion Unit**

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