

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

### INTERIM EVALUATION OF THE PEOPLE IN COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

#### Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of the interim evaluation of the People in Communities programme and the action being taken by the Welsh Assembly Government in response to it.

#### Summary

2. The main findings and recommendations of the evaluation are attached at Annex A, together with an indication of the way in which they are being implemented.

3. Whilst the findings applaud the experimental nature of the programme, a number of shortcomings have also been identified. These are being addressed in the context of the Communities First programme.

#### Background

4. The People in Communities programme was launched in eight areas

across Wales in Summer 1998. It was designed to demonstrate ways in which disadvantaged communities could achieve positive change. The key features of the programme were the appointment of an area based Co-ordinator, the allocation of funds for specific projects, the establishment of a Partnership Board, made up of community and statutory representatives, and the development of a regeneration Action Plan.

5. The interim evaluation of the People in Communities programme was

commissioned in October 2000 as part of the action plan on social inclusion endorsed by the Assembly in January 2000. The evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Policy Consultants. Its aims were to explore in detail how the programme was being implemented in the eight pilot areas, its design, the support structures in place, monitoring arrangements and impacts to date. The study was intended to inform the design of any future approaches to community renewal, including Communities First.

6. The evaluation found that the objectives of the programme were appropriate, in that they looked beyond the limited design of traditional regeneration programmes, by seeking to affect the delivery of mainstream services and levels of community involvement. There were also major successes, such as catalysing a learning process for local authority officers and others, enabling those already moving in this direction to go further, bringing people together for the first time, especially senior people on local Boards, attracting substantial amounts of European and other funding and supporting activities that have begun to engage with local residents.

7. However it was felt that a number of key elements of the programme – including the bidding process and guidance issued, the contractual arrangements and the support and management structures within the National Assembly – did not adequately support this new approach.

8. The findings of the evaluation (which officials saw in draft form prior to

Publication) were taken into account in the development of Communities First.

9. Existing People in Communities projects which are in Communities First

areas are eligible for funding. A "bridging" facility has also been arranged for People in Communities projects which are not yet in a position to draw down funding and will be looking at ways of supporting those projects

which are not in Communities First areas.

#### Cross cutting themes

10. Tackling social disadvantage is one of the Welsh Assembly Government's major cross-cutting themes.

## Recommendation

11. The Committee is invited to note the action that has been taken in response to the evaluation.

Annex  
A

## MAIN FINDINGS OF THE PEOPLE IN COMMUNITIES EVALUATION REPORT

The consultants recommend a number of changes to future community regeneration approaches particularly for Communities First; the key ones are as follows:

**1. The focus on community regeneration should be on developing People in Communities type programmes, namely those that aim to change the way mainstream services are delivered, building local capacity through the development of trust and networks.**

### Response:

Communities First aims to change the way in which services are delivered locally and focuses on building capacity and networks. These are identified in the guidance. For this approach to be successful there needs to be changes in attitudes, delivery arrangements and organisational structures and this will only be achieved by involving statutory sector representatives with the power and authority to deliver this change.

Building the capabilities of local people, and within voluntary, community and statutory agencies is a vital aspect of the programme. So far funding of £1.2million (£3.9 million over 3 years) has been allocated under the programme this financial year for a wide range of capacity building and preparatory activities.

**2. There should be an emphasis on demonstrating effectiveness by experimental and pilot activities, taking risks and learning lessons and removing the stigma of failure.**

### Response:

Communities First encourages new ways of working including innovation and risk taking. We will bring together Partnerships and Co-ordinators to discuss progress, successes and failure so that everyone has an opportunity to learn from each other.

**3. The short term impact of lessons which are appropriate to the Initiative's objectives should be measured, such as identifying barriers and good practice solutions rather than outcomes for deprivation indicators.**

### Response:

We will help to ensure best practice is shared and has given a commitment to the provision of further guidance arising from experience and lessons learnt. In addition we will evaluate the programme's progress nationally, against recognised deprivation indicators, and at a local level, through monitoring that is meaningful to communities themselves.

**4. The co-ordinator should develop a local network of frontline professionals to deepen cross-cutting understanding of issues and potential solutions.**

### Response:

The guidance acknowledges that it is unlikely that Communities First Co-ordinators working in isolation will be successful. They will be expected to form links with existing community development workers, organisations and projects within their own area and across neighbouring communities. This will offer opportunities for information and sharing of best practice.

The Welsh Assembly Government is providing funding £0.4 million in total over the next three years to Community Development Cymru (CDC) to support community development workers and local community development networks to engage with Communities First

Partnerships. CDC will also work to promote community involvement in Partnerships and produce and disseminate good practice guidance and research for the programme. In addition we are providing funding of £1.97 million over the 3 years to the Communities First Support Network which includes Community Development Cymru, the Wales Co-operative Centre, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Groundwork Wales, Menter a Business, Community Action Network and the Development Trust Association.

**5. Behind the work of the co-ordinator (or equivalent) 'on the ground', the role of the Social Inclusion Champion should be broadened to develop proactively networks of senior management including local authority departments and other agencies.**

Response:

The responses to the consultation on the Communities First programme and on the guidance were not wholly supportive of the role of "champion" within the process. The guidance therefore recommends that Partnerships themselves consider the need for a champion and advice is provided on this role. The Welsh Assembly Government considers that it is the role of Partnerships to ensure that key decision-makers in the main statutory agencies are engaged with the Communities First process.

**6. An ongoing monitoring framework should be established that is supported by written guidance, focused on process change and learning lessons and embedded by involving the designated schemes in its design.**

Response:

The recommendations of the evaluation are being taken into account in the current development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for Communities First. A working group involving the Welsh Local Government Association, representatives from the Communities First Support Network, Wales European Funding Office and the Community Development Foundation has been established to develop the evaluation and monitoring arrangements of Communities First.

**7. Across all aspects, the Assembly needs to be fully involved if the programme is to be supported effectively and if lessons are to be learned – to achieve this, more resources will need to be made available within the Assembly.**

Response:

We are now closely involved in monitoring the People in Communities and Communities First programmes. The level of resources available to support Communities First within the Assembly, in the new financial year and beyond, is currently under consideration.