

Mid Wales Regional Committee

Communities First – Consideration of the way forward in the light of responses to the initial 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.

4. 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.

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. 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 underway. '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 31st 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.

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.
3. At Annex A is a summary of information on the approach to community regeneration being taken in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

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.

Background information on approaches to community regeneration in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England

1. Community Regeneration in Scotland

The Scottish Executive set out its vision for a socially just Scotland in "Social Justice: A Scotland where everyone matters", which was published in November 1999. This report outlines the vision for achieving a nation that is fairer, where there is equality of opportunity for all and where no-one gets left behind. It makes clear that this commitment to social justice sits at the heart of the Executive's programme. The Social Justice report set out 10 targets and 29 milestones designed to monitor progress towards the goals. The Executive is committed to reporting on them annually, and Scotland's first Annual Social Justice Report will be published in the next few weeks. Three commitments characterise this vision:

- Ending child poverty within a generation;
- Achieving full employment in Scotland; and
- Ensuring dignity and security for all in old age.

As part of this agenda, the Executive wants to ensure that its deprived neighbourhoods have the capacity and confidence to lead their own regeneration. **Some** of the ways this will be delivered include:

- The Social Inclusion Partnership programme encompassing a network of 48 partnerships covering urban and rural communities throughout Scotland. These partnerships have funding of £150m over 3 years. Those in the partnerships – from voluntary agencies, the public and private sector – work together to find sustainable solutions to local needs and priorities. Community involvement sits at the heart of this.
- Working for Communities – under this £10m programme, 13 pathfinder projects are testing out new and innovative ways of bring local services in line with local needs. Again, community involvement in the pathfinders is crucial to their success.
- Listening to Communities – this £3m programme aims to develop the potential of local communities to participate in regeneration partnerships and identify new ways of testing community needs, aspirations and opinions. This includes a £1m skills programme, Working Together, Learning Together, which is designed to help all those working in partnerships, as well as the £1m People's Panels and Juries Programme.
- Taking forward an empowering communities agenda
- Community planning – which will aim to put the community at the centre of decisions

made about the local area with the result that public policy will deliver services that match the needs and priorities of those that use them and help to renew communities.

- Locality budgeting – the Executive is looking to develop locality budgeting in Scotland. Local communities should be in a position to influence the expenditure of mainstream public funds in their area. The continued development of Community Planning should help facilitate this.
- A Better Neighbourhood Fund will invest an additional £90m in developing strategies to improve services to Scotland's most deprived areas.

2. Community Regeneration in Northern Ireland

Over the past 20 years the financial resources applied to urban problems have included a mix of mainstream public funds, European Commissions Structural funds and contributions from the International Fund for Ireland. Regeneration mechanisms have included the Development Corporation model, Urban Development Grant, Comprehensive Development Schemes and Environmental Improvement Initiative. These measures were developed to deal with involving problems and while they point to a number of successes over a period it is recognised that they share a weakness in that they are both demand-led and fragmented in response to need. In spite of worthwhile achievements, there is now a need to update and upgrade schemes and processes, to establish priorities for scarce financial resources and to address current and anticipated issues of concern relating to urban living, particularly the needs of those whose lives do not benefit adequately from modern services and opportunities.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) is therefore developing a new strategy for urban regeneration across NI, the key components of which are to:

- put the tackling of the most acute deprivation and disadvantage at the heart of all regeneration activity;
- place regeneration at the centre of the work of mainstream Government Departments, public agencies and programmes;
- greater focus of regeneration activity at the neighbourhood level;
- empower communities to shape and then drive regeneration activity; and
- commit to a seven to ten year planning and implementation timescale.

3. England: The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is aimed at tackling the unacceptably bad condition of England's poorest neighbourhoods where the gap with the average has widened over time. Public sector failures have been one cause of the phenomenon, which has had high economic and human costs. The strategy has been developed with the input of experts from a range of fields in and outside Whitehall, and residents of deprived neighbourhoods.

1. Background

The concept of a National Strategy was launched by the Prime Minister in September 1998, prompted by the evidence in the Social Exclusion Unit's first report on deprived neighbourhoods. This showed that poor neighbourhoods had far worse levels of crime, and lower standards of health, skills, employment and physical environment than the rest of the country.

The report showed that the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the average widened over the 1980's and 1990's. The disparity is marked between the most deprived local authority areas and less deprived ones, but is even sharper when smaller areas - wards or neighbourhoods - are compared.

2. Purpose

The Strategy is designed to arrest and reverse the wholesale decline of deprived neighbourhoods, and to prevent it from recurring.

3. Action

A table illustrating the Key Milestones of the National Strategy is overleaf.

4. Goals and Targets

The following three-year objectives have been set:

- More people in jobs
- Less crime
- Better educational attainment
- Improved health
- Better housing and physical environment

National Strategy: Key Milestones

Year	Month	Action	Whitehall Lead

2000	November	Establishment of Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU).	DETR
2001	January	First ever dataset of ward-level information available.	DETR/ONS
	April	National Strategy takes effect. First Neighbourhood Renewal Fund payments made.	Various, overseen by NRU
		Steps toward the establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to have been taken by the 88 most deprived authorities.	NRU
		Centre for Neighbourhood Renewal becomes operational.	NRU
	October	Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies to have been agreed by LSPs in 88 most deprived areas <i>[or LA sets out how NRF to be spent to support NRS, which will come later]</i> .	NRU
	November	Local Authorities (88 most deprived) eligible for NRF commit themselves to fulfilling conditions.	NRU
2002		Review progress of National Strategy.	NRU
2003	April	Fully geo-referenced neighbourhood statistics likely to become available (to be updated annually).	ONS
		A method of measuring the gap to be developed	ONS
	July	New 3-Year Targets for 2004-7 to be set in 2003 Spending Review. Geographically-Specific targets will be set at ward/ neighbourhood level for the first time.	HMT/All
2004	March	3 Year Targets to have been achieved (Except crime, which is a 5 year target).	All

2005	March	No local authority district to have more than three times the national domestic burglary rate, with the latter to have fallen by 25%	HO
2006	March	New 3-Year Targets for 2007-10 to be set in 2006 Spending Review.	HMT/All
2010	March	Gap between most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of England to have narrowed in terms of the seven key outcomes.	All