

CF 03

Ymchwiliad i dlodi yng Nghymru: Cymunedau yn Gyntaf – yr hyn a ddysgwyd

Inquiry into poverty in Wales: Communities First – lessons learnt

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru

Response from: Welsh Local Government Association

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee – Inquiry into Communities First – lessons learnt

Following the Local Elections held on the 4th of May, we are currently awaiting the outcome of individual Local Authorities' Annual General Meetings prior to the WLGA AGM to be held on Friday the 23rd of June to determine our political make-up, including the nomination and approval of the Association's political leadership and spokespeople.

However, we wanted to respond to your request for evidence to inform the work of the committee so this submission is an officer view of the Communities First programme.

What worked and didn't work about the Communities First programme

There are many positive aspects of the Communities First programme. The relatively long term financial commitment from Welsh Government has enabled Communities First staff and partner organisations to focus on specific areas across Wales and build up a strong brand, well known in the communities and amongst professionals from a wide range of organisations in the public, private and third sector.

The 'ask' of the Communities First programme by Welsh Government was considered by some to be too great given the multiple deprivation existing in the Communities First areas. At the outset the programme objectives were not clear – was the programme about people or places, capacity building or job creation or community development or economic development? It could be argued that this lack of clarity and unrealistic expectations surrounding the programme has been counterproductive leading to a negative perception of the programme and criticism that the programme has not "turned around" these areas of deprivation. Communities First staff have come from a range of different backgrounds which has had an influence on the CF work programme at a local level. This factor also impacts on the success of some projects as there will be officers that have a natural ability to engage with individuals and communities with multiple needs whereas others less so.

That said, the initial 10 year funding commitment resulted in Communities First becoming a programme supportive of the community with an in-depth understanding of issues. The CF programme relies heavily on the relationships between communities and CF staff. Importantly a trust has been built up over time between CF staff and the communities in which they work. CF staff has the ability to engage with hard to reach groups and are a key source of referrals into other services. The knowledge that CF staff have of the available provision being delivered by a range of service delivery bodies gives Communities First staff a unique role matching the needs of individuals and groups to resources.

The geographical focus of first CF programme promoted a place based approach to deprivation based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. The refocus on the themes of Prosperous, Learning and Healthier Communities saw key features of the initial programme such as CF partnerships and empowering communities and individuals

becoming less important. This approach has been more restrictive way of working for CF staff.

The impact of the Communities First programme has been difficult to quantify and therefore difficult to justify continuing funding. The work of Communities First staff has been incredibly varied across Wales which makes measuring results complex. There have been improvements to the performance reporting framework in recent years including capturing individual case studies which has been welcomed. However, reporting against the KPIs created a performance led programme with little room for flexibility.

Not all local authorities (with CF areas) are the Local Delivery Body for the CF programme. Where this is not the case, co-ordination of CF activity and the work of the Local Authority across departments has taken place but this co-ordination has perhaps been more focused at the project level rather than at a strategic level. This may have resulted in lost opportunities for joint working on strategies and plans.

How local authorities will decide which projects continue to receive funding after June 2017

Future funding through the Legacy Fund is limited at £6 million in 2018/19 and 2019/18 and distributed in proportion to the current CF budget. Therefore, it is likely local authorities and partners will need to identify additional funding to retain many of the CF operations.

Many local authorities are working through their Public Service Boards and working through a process to identify the unique role that CF has and what will subsequently be lost and cannot be picked up by another organisation – this should be the starting point for consideration of Legacy funding.

To enable options to be presented to the PSBs, local authorities are facilitating discussions between partner organisation's to understand what is important to retain.

Welsh Government has issued transition guidance. The document refers to planning for the cessation and phasing out of projects and the staff implications. Whilst it suggests LAs should look at transitioning key staff to other parts of the organisation there is no recognition of (i) the lack of resource in LAs and (ii) the fact that some staff (probably the best ones) could leave for other jobs, impacting on the ability to deliver in the wind-down period which is a common 'end of programme' problem and the continuation of Legacy projects.

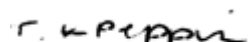
The potential impact on CF team morale should not be underestimated. The Legacy Fund and other funds may help to address this to an extent by providing some certainty for some staff but staff need to understand future employment opportunities at the earliest opportunity to prevent the loss of staff together with their years of experience. Local authorities have requested further details from Welsh Government regarding Legacy funding and Employability grant as a matter of priority to assist their workforce planning.

The new Employability grant will be available to those local authorities that do not currently have Communities First – Monmouthshire, Ceredigion and Powys. These local authorities do not have a CF scheme to build upon so it is important that they are properly supported and resourced to enable them to take advantage of available funding.

How different poverty reduction programmes (Communities for Work, Lift, Flying Start etc.) will change as a result of the end of Communities First

Many of the poverty reduction programmes came into being after the start of the CF Programme and have benefited from having in place the CF networks and CF signposting. Once CF is phased out the important role played by CF will become clearer. The CF programme has links with so many different networks in so many different ways that the remaining programmes and new initiatives need to be flexible to ensure that any critical gaps (due to the phasing out of CF) can be plugged swiftly.

Yours sincerely



Tim Peppin
Director of Sustainable Development and Regeneration