

John Griffiths AM  
Chair of Equalities and Local Government Committee National  
Assembly for Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

18<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Dear John

Thank you for your letter of 15 May in which you request an update on a number of recommendations following the Committee's enquiry into the closure of Communities First.

Please find below responses to the questions and updates requested.

- **The number of projects that are no longer continuing as a result of the closure of Communities First. This should include details of the geographical distribution and the types of programmes which have been discontinued**
- **Which projects have been sustained by support from the Legacy Fund, and an assessment of the longer term sustainability of these projects once the Legacy Funding comes to an end**
- **Which projects are being continued in some form by other organisations.**

Communities First was established in 2001. In April 2012 it was renewed as a community-focused tackling- poverty programme building on the achievements of the original programme and working in 52 cluster areas across Wales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

After careful consideration during 2016-17, it was found that while the programme had done much for individuals, overall poverty levels remained stubbornly high and no single programme could be expected to remedy this.

Phasing out the programme over twelve months rather than opting for a sudden closure, together with the mitigation measures put in place such as the legacy fund and funding for Communities for Work Plus has provided opportunities for staff redeployment and the continuation of some of the most effective aspects of Communities First.

As a government, we have emphasised the need to ensure that we deliver for those with the greatest needs and act to tackle the root causes of poverty. In addition to the mitigation measures that were established, organisations were encouraged to work together with their partner organisations to respond to local need.

Communities First projects were delivered across 52 Communities First areas in 19 local authorities. During the transition year ending 31st March 2018 there were a total of 323 projects operating in Communities First areas across Wales. A geographical breakdown of these by local authority can be found at Annex 1. During the transition year, the majority of projects focused on helping people towards employment such as jobs clubs, improving skills, addressing low level mental health issues and improving people's confidence. Other projects included improving IT skills and digital inclusion, financial inclusion and improving physical health and well-being.

Employment and employability themed projects included in the above continue under the Welsh Government's legacy fund. The 19 local authorities in receipt of Communities First have since submitted Legacy Fund plans outlining 87 separate projects and a continuing focus on community engagement and partnership working. 64 of the 87 projects, almost three quarters, are a continuation of former Communities First work. The Legacy Fund plans reflect local priorities, well-being assessments and the involvement of Public Service Boards, the local community and other key partners and stakeholders.

In some local authorities much of the support previously provided by Communities First has been reviewed and since reflected in different ways of working. In one local authority, Newport, Communities First projects were phased out gradually whilst a new 'Neighbourhood Hub and Spoke' model was developed. This will see the co-location of services and staff teams working together enabling a strong alignment with other Welsh Government programmes. This streamlined and customer-focused model will identify the most effective way to help individuals into employment.

Newport City Council is also developing this place-based approach alongside other Welsh Government early intervention and prevention programmes including Families First, Flying Start, Supporting People and Communities for Work. The Legacy Fund projects will be working in partnership with other ESF-funded provision, Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus thus providing a tailored package of support to those individuals facing multiple barriers to employment such as housing, finances, food poverty, access to IT and so on.

Other Communities First projects which will continue to be run directly by local authorities include the Creative Engagement project in Swansea which will receive support from the Council's Adult Learning team and in Torfaen the County Borough Council will fund the financial inclusion project. Also in Torfaen, the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board will use Neighbourhood Care Network funding to ensure the social prescribing project continues.

In terms of projects being continued by other organisations, officials met with health boards and education consortia to ensure they were aware of the changes taking place to Communities First. In Pembrokeshire, for example, the Lead Delivery Body engaged closely with the Local Health Board to incorporate the Communities First approach around healthy eating into the Local Health Board's general service delivery. Additionally, a local GP surgery was facilitating the work of an action group that supports people with additional needs to live in the community. These examples demonstrate how projects previously delivered by Communities First continue to develop through partnership working.

The Citizens Advice shared outcome project which had operated in 42 Communities First clusters is also continuing alongside the Better Advice Better Lives project and Front Line Advice Services Grant, which are overseen by the Welsh Government's Communities Division's Financial Inclusion Team. To ensure all future funded advice services within a locality are better integrated, work is progressing to merge the current three advice service funding streams into a single fund.

Streetgames, another of the shared outcome projects has also continued to be funded as part of wider legacy arrangements following Communities First closure. They continue to work with Communities First cluster areas and have built relationships with a number of local authorities to continue the work in this area.

### **The implementation of recommendation 7, and which projects that are continuing have been assessed as supporting 'empowerment'**

Through the publication of *Prosperity for all – the national strategy (2017)* we provided further clarification on the importance of empowering people and communities, and how the Government's role is to support and empower those who want to make a difference in their communities. Our commitments under the strategy, and in particular the *United and Connected* theme capture many of the actions the government will take to deliver our aim to build a nation where people take pride in their communities. Our national strategy represents a new way of working, acknowledging that "how" we deliver is just as important as "what" we deliver, and recognises the need to do things differently and involve people in shaping the services they use every day. The strategy clarifies how empowering communities will need to be a cross-government and cross-sector effort with many key actions taken across portfolios. Collectively these actions will foster environments for deeper links between people, within families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and wider communities, which give us our sense of belonging and well-being.

With regards local authorities I made clear my commitment for discussion and debate about how we strengthen and empower communities and councils across Wales in the Green paper *Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People* (March 2018). A key part of this approach is delivering stronger, more powerful Local Authorities with the ambitions, skills and flexibilities to support communities to be empowered and engaged; prosperous and successful; and, represented and influential.

In terms of the continuation of projects that support empowerment, the legacy fund was made available to continue the best aspects of the Communities First programme. Local authorities have used the legacy fund to develop and deliver a range of support to communities, not necessarily to simply deliver individual projects. Within the legacy fund applications, local authorities were asked to demonstrate how the most successful aspects going forward supported the empowerment agenda within their applications. For example, a number of applications included the empowerment of young people. One local authority is working with young people to develop and build resilience, focusing on skills that promote positive wellbeing and develop confidence and self esteem.

As part of the project children and young people will be offered the opportunity to become involved in either Youth or Junior Forums, where they can be involved in local and national decision making and access opportunities for learning associated with Active Citizenship and Children's Rights.

### **An update on the exploratory work the Welsh Government was undertaking on the feasibility of a longitudinal study (recommendation 10)**

Developing a new survey or 'boosting' (funding additional interviews) an existing survey, both of which have been previously considered by Welsh Government would be cost prohibitive but more pertinently would still not provide sufficiently detailed information for analysis down to the kinds of small geographical levels required or for relatively rare population groups such as some of those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

The top priority recommendation to the ESRC of the Longitudinal Studies Strategic Review 2017 was that longitudinal studies, in order to deal with diverse and changing populations need to "develop and maintain a longitudinal administrative data spine with maximum population coverage that can be used as the basis for data linkage." The ESRC, in response, reported they were developing a strategy to build a "UK Population Laboratory" to ensure the strengths of longitudinal survey data, administrative data, big data and new forms of data are recognised and supported in a way that facilitates the combination of different types of data for different research purposes.

It is an approach aligned to this that Welsh Government is exploring for a potential longitudinal study into poverty. This would build on separate data linkage studies already underway in Wales (covering Supporting People, Flying Start and Fuel Poverty) and be structured in a similar way to the current Housing Stock Analytical Resource for Wales (HSAR) which offers a data 'spine' to which data sets or indeed surveys can be attached. This essentially ensures that the anonymised data pertaining to one individual, household or dwelling is all held in one place in a linkable format for research or statistical purposes, subject to the correct information security and governance procedures.

A feasibility study has already been approved focused on developing our understanding of deprivation at an individual or household level, using linked survey and administrative data. This will supplement our area-based understanding – provided by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) – with an understanding of the deprivation of individuals and households. It also seeks to bring together data from a number of key sources including Department for Work and Pensions, DVLA, Valuation Office Agency, SAIL.

The feasibility study will explore issues and considerations vital in taking forward a longitudinal study of individual deprivation and would provide a starting point for a potential longitudinal study on poverty in Wales. It is seeking to bring together the relevant administrative data sources as well as the National Survey for Wales and to this could be added specific programme data (Flying Start, Supporting People, Fuel poverty schemes etc.) so that people could be 'flagged' when they use a WG programme. From this 'spine' we could build an understanding of poverty over the life course and look specifically at whether there is evidence that WG interventions have an impact.

The findings of the feasibility study will need to be fully considered before commitment to a fuller study could be sought. At present, the study has secured access to Census 2011 data is awaiting delivery of data from DWP. The study will commence once the data has been acquired for the SAIL Databank.

**What adjustments have been made to other relevant Welsh Government programmes, such as Communities for Work, Lift, Flying Start and Families First (recommendation 11)**

Following the closure of the Communities First and successful completion of the Lift programme, Communities for Work Plus was launched as a £12 million per annum programme introduced from 1 April 2018. This supports the continued delivery of Communities for Work and will embed the learning from Lift. It has been possible to transfer the expertise of Communities First staff in many of the local authorities now delivering Communities for Work Plus. This has enabled relationships and expertise to remain with communities.

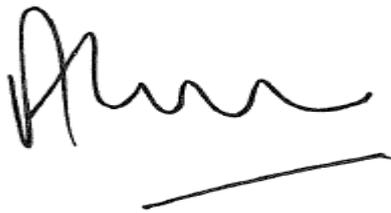
Communities for Work Plus is enabling employability support to be provided to people who are not eligible for Communities for Work, Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE) or other regional ESF Programmes, including those who live outside the former Communities First area postcodes. In addition, Communities for Work Plus funding has now also been awarded to Powys, Ceredigion and Monmouthshire County Councils which now ensures there is support to all local authority areas. As detailed above, a number of employment related projects have continued as part of the legacy proposals to compliment the delivery of Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus.

The refocus of Families First, detailed in the original response to the Committee took place after a review which considered evidence collected during the three year independent evaluation of Families First, as well as evidence collected from the Families First Coordinators responsible for the commissioning and delivery of services. During this process, it became clear that the programme was highly valued and performed well in a number of key areas, most notably through the Team Around the Family approach. However, there were concerns around the wide range of commissioned services which had become increasingly broad, leading to concerns over sustainability, should this continue. As a result, the programme continues to maintain a focus on providing bespoke, multi-agency support to whole families will have a key role in helping parents to create stable and nurturing environments in which children and young people can thrive. Importantly, it retains the key elements of the successful Joint Assessment Framework for Families (JAFF), Team Around the Family (TAF) and disability focus.

The decision was taken to refocus the strategic projects to ensure the programme can develop services which are more able to address the needs of parents, children and young people and link the work of the programme clearly with the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Local authorities are still able to commission a range of services and retain the flexibility to design commissioning models which are suited to local arrangements. The projects which are commissioned should now focus on equipping families with a range of skills to build their confidence and resilience and support them to achieve long term positive outcomes. It is also important that services for parents and young people are not delivered in isolation, bringing a greater emphasis on local authorities ensuring services are linked together and coherent to enable families to receive the breadth of support they need. Families First programme guidance was revised in collaboration with key delivery partners and published in April 2017. All local authorities began operating under the new arrangements from 1 April 2018.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Alun Davies AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus  
Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services

## COMMUNITIES FIRST TRANSITION YEAR 2017-18

### NUMBER OF PROJECTS BY LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

Anglesey	5
Blaenau Gwent	28
Bridgend	17
Caerphilly	17
Cardiff	47
Carmarthenshire	9
Conwy	7
Denbighshire	6
Flintshire	6
Gwynedd	10
Merthyr Tydfil	72
Neath Port Talbot	9
Newport	14
Pembrokeshire	11
Rhondda Cynon Taf	24
Swansea	9
Vale of Glamorgan	14
Torfaen	5
Wrexham	13
	323

The above projects were in receipt of Communities First funding during the 2017-18 financial year. Communities First funding for the 323 projects ended 30 March 2018 however not all projects ended.