

COMMUNITIES FIRST LESSONS LEARNT



The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the National Assembly's website: **www.assembly.wales**

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Online: **www.assembly.wales**
Email: **Contact@assembly.wales**
Tel: **0300 200 6565**

We welcome calls via the Text Relay Service.

© National Assembly for Wales Commission Copyright 2017

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the National Assembly for Wales Commission and the title of the document specified.

National Assembly for Wales
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

COMMUNITIES FIRST LESSONS LEARNT



Chair's foreword



John Griffiths AM

Communities First has been the Welsh Government's flagship anti-poverty programme for over 15 years. It has carried out a wide range of activity in the most deprived communities across Wales. In February 2017, the Welsh Government announced the phasing out of the programme following the decision to adopt a new approach to tackling poverty.

We know just how valued Communities First projects are within their communities. As Assembly Members, we have seen the positive impact on individuals and that the announcement to close the programme was met with considerable concern. Staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to deliver valuable projects and support local people. Community centres are important focal points providing facilities and activities and to varying extents they are aided by Communities First funding. We therefore decided to examine the decision to end the programme, but more importantly consider the lessons that could be learnt from Communities First for future anti-poverty programmes.



This inquiry is one strand of the Committee's work looking at poverty in Wales and builds on the reports of our predecessor Committee in the last Assembly. All of our work is inter-connected, and we will continue to consider the evidence we received for this report for our inquiry on making the economy work for people on low incomes, and any further work we do in this area.

This report is slightly different to the standard Assembly Committee approach. Usually, reports provide a narrative of the evidence received, before outlining the Committee's views. However, in this report we focused on our conclusions. This has enabled us to compile and publish our findings as quickly as possible, given the transition from Communities First is happening now. As with a standard Committee report, our conclusions are based on the evidence we have received and heard. This is all available on the Committee's webpages.

We will be producing a more comprehensive report which will summarise the evidence we considered and go into more detail on the elements of Communities First which worked and those that didn't in the autumn.



Committee's recommendations

Recommendation 1.

We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities identify all programmes currently delivered by Communities First which should be delivered by other statutory bodies, and that responsibility for those programmes which are successful and are valued by local communities is transferred to the relevant statutory body.

Recommendation 2.

We recommend that the Welsh Government clarifies how long the legacy funding will be available for as soon as possible, and communicates that to all local authorities and other relevant statutory bodies.

Recommendation 3.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that all advice and guidance to local authorities is available in written form to supplement support provided in person or orally.

Recommendation 4.

We strongly recommend that a clear tackling poverty strategy is published, which brings together the many strands of poverty reduction work to help provide clear direction and to help the Assembly scrutinise the Government's approach. The strategy should include clear performance indicators to ensure effective performance management, as well as setting out a broader evidence base to help underpin effective evaluation of different approaches to tackling poverty.

Recommendation 5.

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes the broadest view of employability, and in guidance to local authorities, makes clear that employability support should encompass all stages of the employment journey, including any necessary support needed once a person is successful in gaining employment.

Recommendation 6.

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers removing barriers to families accessing support through the Flying Start programme. If funding is available, there is a capacity and the support is needed, Flying Start programmes may be able to support families who are ineligible simply because of their postcode.

Recommendation 7.

We recommend that the Welsh Government makes clear what empowerment means in terms of priorities for local authorities during the transition period of Communities First and beyond.

Recommendation 8.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that performance indicators are consistent across the whole of Wales, are publicly available, broken down by local authority and are made available to the Committee to aid scrutiny.

Recommendation 9.

We recommend that the Welsh Government develops a dashboard of poverty indicators alongside an organisation such as the Bevan Foundation or Joseph Rowntree Foundation to ensure that progress is measured.

Recommendation 10.

We recommend that the Welsh Government explores the feasibility of establishing a longitudinal study into poverty in Wales.

Recommendation 11.

The Welsh Government needs to consider and assess the impact of the closure of Communities First on other Welsh Government programmes and make adjustments to the relevant programmes to mitigate any unintended consequences resulting from the closure.

01. Summary of our findings

The Communities First Programme

Communities First was established in 2001 working in 52 of the most deprived areas of Wales. Its effectiveness was variable from one area to another and was subject to a major reconfiguration in 2012. The Cabinet Secretary announced the decision to close the programme in February 2017.

We acknowledge the significant work done by Communities First staff, volunteers and members of the community to help tackle the stubborn effects of poverty across a wide range of diverse places across Wales.

Their expertise, enthusiasm and sheer hard work has led to real improvements in the lives of people living in Wales' most deprived communities.

In a number of places, it is clear that Communities First projects were delivering services that should have been provided by other public services. It is essential that this work is now picked up by their local authorities, health boards or other statutory bodies. This will help ensure the Communities First transition and legacy funds are used for projects that can only be delivered by Communities First.

The Communities First approach

Communities First was set a near impossible task. One single programme, especially one with a community development focus, never had the ability to make significant in-roads into poverty reduction on a local or national scale. The approach of influencing individual circumstances in an effort to improve the outcomes of an entire area has no proven evidence base.

It is unclear how effective a place-based approach is to reducing poverty. Though

the Welsh Government considers such an approach unproven, it maintains other place-based programmes such as Communities for Work and Flying Start.

The decision to wind down Communities First

The decision and announcement of the closure of the programme should have been better managed, with more effort to minimise the likelihood of staff finding out from the media. The timing of the announcement was highly problematic for local authorities who were approaching local elections, and had to draw up transitional arrangements without clear political leadership in place pending the election result.

Transitional planning would have been more effective if the Employability Plan had been published before or shortly after the announcement to close down the Communities First programme.

The on-going uncertainty around the programme's future has been detrimental to the programme, its staff and the people who access the services.

The expertise, relationships and trust within communities that have been developed over the course of the programme are being damaged and will not be easily repaired. This could undermine the aim of the transition funding and support that is being provided by the Welsh Government.

Transitional management

We welcome the Welsh Government's intention to provide a 'soft exit', but are concerned that the lack of coherent, timely and sufficient guidance is having a significant impact on local authorities' ability to manage the transition in the most effective way.

While we agree that decisions on transitional arrangements should be made at a local level, the Welsh Government should make it clear to local authorities that they are being empowered to make these decisions, and clarify their relationship with the Local Delivery Boards.

The role of Welsh Government in poverty reduction

One of the successes of Communities First was that it operated within a policy framework which those involved understood and could apply to their work and decision making. We urge the Welsh Government to develop a refreshed Action Plan to confirm its commitment to reducing poverty in Wales and provide a framework for activity.

While we welcome the Welsh Government's more holistic approach to poverty reduction by mainstreaming responsibility across Government departments, we are concerned that this could lead to a lack of clear ownership and strategic leadership.

In future the approach to tackling poverty should be built on a sound evidence base. The Welsh Government should set specific, achievable and measurable aims, underpinned by clear actions as to how they will be achieved.

The cross-cutting nature of the approach to poverty reduction makes Assembly scrutiny of the approach more difficult, and the Welsh Government should ensure that poverty reduction can be scrutinised in a coherent manner; for example, facilitating requests from committees to take evidence from more than one Cabinet Secretary at the same time if required.

The three Es: Employability, Early years and Empowerment

While recognising that the three Es cover important elements of helping to reduce poverty, this limited view of poverty could avoid addressing vital issues such as reducing household costs and maximising household income.

The Welsh Government has set a clear direction during the transition period to stay focussed on employability and early years. The focus on early years should provide an opportunity to support services that transcend the postcode lottery issues which affect people wanting to access Flying Start services. For example, when families are refused support, despite living close to Flying Start and needing the services.

The road to employment has many steps; beginning with supporting people to have the skills, confidence and ability to start applying for jobs and extends beyond that first day in a new job. Employability needs to be defined in the widest possible sense, with people being able to access the support they need at all stages of this journey, including after they have secured a job.

It remains unclear to local partners and our Committee what the 'empowerment' element means in practice, and how this should be reflected in transitional arrangements. The Welsh Government should be clearer in terms of guidance as to what empowerment translates into for transitional planning.

The three Es also leave significant gaps in terms of projects and people who are currently supported by Communities First: for example 5-16 year olds; older people; people without children and people who are a long way from the job market and need significant help with basic needs before they can move onto projects that will get them job-ready. Where statutory services could be supporting such work, they should be encouraged to fill the gaps.

Performance management and evaluation

One of the weaknesses of the Communities First programme has been insufficient performance management. There are significant lessons to be learnt from this.

There should be a consistent level of data collated across Wales to allow programmes and approaches to be evaluated against each other and on a pan-Wales basis.

There is a significant risk that the weaknesses of Communities First will be repeated: policy developed in the absence of evidence; and performance monitored in the absence of data, as our predecessor Committee stated in its 2015 report into poverty. The design of performance indicators and a performance management framework should be considered at the outset of planning a new programme or approach.

All performance information and data should be publicly available and routinely shared with the Assembly to enable effective scrutiny of

the Welsh Government.

The National Indicators for Wales, introduced by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, are not detailed enough to support an in-depth understanding of whether individual programmes or approaches are working; although we do acknowledge that they will help provide an idea of the direction of general trends.

The Welsh Government should work closely with external bodies to develop a dashboard of poverty indicators.

A longitudinal study into poverty in Wales is needed to help assess the effectiveness of Welsh Government policies and programmes.

The relationship between the Well-being of Future Generations Act and poverty reduction

We are concerned that there is a risk of a disconnect between the members of Public Service Boards (PSBs) and people who



currently access Communities First services.

PSBs should build on the positive work undertaken by Communities First to engage meaningfully with communities across their area, to ensure their views and experiences are reflected in the development of well-being plans.

We fully support the Future Generations Commissioner in robustly challenging any Well-Being Plans that do not fully reflect the needs of the local community. This includes the omission or lack of focus on poverty reduction throughout Wales.

Community assets

There is a significant risk that valuable community assets will be lost without Communities First funding. While Welsh Government capital funding is welcomed, more needs to be done to audit community assets in the interim to ensure they do not close until funding can be secured. It is unclear who will decide how the additional capital funding is used, and on what criteria.

The Bevan Foundation's proposal that the most successful Communities First projects should be provided with direct support; funding to move towards a sustainable charity or social enterprise model should be explored.

Links with other programmes

Communities First was often the 'glue' holding together a jigsaw of other programmes. The loss of Communities First risks having a significant impact on the effectiveness of other programmes such as Communities for Work, Lift, Flying Start, Families First and other programmes. The Welsh Government in providing support, guidance and funding to local authorities needs to ensure that this does not happen or that the impact is minimal.



02. The Communities First Programme

Communities First was launched in 2001, and was the Welsh Government's flagship tackling poverty programme. It worked across 52 of the most deprived areas in Wales (according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation). Some £432million has been spent on the programme since 2001. The Cabinet Secretary reported in October 2016 that he was minded to phase out the Communities First programme, and following some consultation, announced in February 2017 that the programme was to be wound down.

Throughout this committee inquiry, we have heard and seen examples of the life-changing impact that Communities First has had on individuals, and the great work that it has done in communities across Wales. Against a backdrop of challenging economic and social changes, Communities First projects, staff and people living in these communities achieved much in difficult circumstances.

We want to acknowledge this, and thank everyone who has been involved in those projects which have helped to change people's lives for the better, by helping them gain new skills, get work, or volunteer within their community.

However, the total cost of Communities First over the lifetime of the programme, some £432 million, is a significant amount of public money. It is concerning that despite this investment, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the success of the programme. At best, we are left with the sense that there have been both effective and less effective interventions. It is to no-one's benefit that we cannot fully evaluate and identify both the successes and the failures of the programme.

We acknowledge that the Welsh Government did seek to address some of the concerns arising about the management and effectiveness of the programme with its reconfiguration in 2012. The significant re-organisation of the programme led to the establishment of the cluster model and increased performance management. However, we heard mixed views of the effectiveness of these changes.

The economic, social and political climate has changed dramatically since the inception of the programme, and what might have been appropriate in 2001 may not necessarily be right for Wales in 2017.

03. The Communities First Approach

The Communities First programme was set the near impossible task of reducing poverty, which could never be achieved through one single programme. The aims of narrowing the economic, education/skills and health gaps between the most deprived and more affluent areas, while also ‘contributing to alleviating persistent poverty’ were laudable, but now look optimistic.

“*...the underlying premise of the programme that it was possible to improve area characteristics by influencing individual-level outcomes – was (and remains) untested*

Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, written evidence.

In addition to the broad aims of the programme, it remains unclear and un-evidenced as to whether interventions to improve individual circumstances lead to changes in a geographical area’s characteristics. This was accepted by the Cabinet Secretary in his written evidence.

Although it is unclear how well a place based approach works and it remains the approach for some other programmes such as Communities for Work, Flying Start, Lift, and others. The Welsh Government must keep these schemes under review to ensure they are working to optimum benefit. Place based approaches could usefully be the subject of further research and evaluation.

It is clear that in some places, Communities First programmes have been delivering services that could, or should, have been provided by other public bodies. For a range of different reasons, they were delivering projects and support in important areas, including health and education. While we understand why this may have happened, it is now vital that statutory bodies step in to deliver those programmes that have been effective and are valued by local communities. This will help ensure that the limited amount of transitional funding can be directed at supporting those elements of the programme which are best delivered by Communities First.

Recommendation 1.

We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities identify all programmes currently delivered by Communities First which should be delivered by other statutory bodies, and that responsibility for those programmes which are successful and are valued by local communities is transferred to the relevant statutory body.

04. The decision to wind down Communities First

Even before we started this inquiry, we were aware of concerns about how the announcement to end Communities First was made when we met some 30 members of Communities First staff from across Newport in March 2017. They told us they had discovered that the programme was being wound down on a television news programme.

“ “ *When the announcement was made....the first time that many people [including lead delivery bodies and cluster managers] heard about the phasing out of Communities First, and it seemed definite, was from the announcement on the BBC.....It created a lot of upset.*

Dr Eva Elliot, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences, Cardiff University¹

In light of the evidence we heard that the key strengths of the Communities First programme were the expertise, enthusiasm and experience of the staff, the impact for staff and service users finding out about the closure of the programme on the news should not be dismissed.

The Welsh Government should have taken a more pro-active role in the management and communication of the announcement, and ensured that those affected had the opportunity to get further information and to ask questions about the implications of the decision.

We welcome the Cabinet Secretary's regret and apology. We also appreciate the complexity and difficulties of ensuring that a disparate range of staff who work across all areas of Wales are told about this sort of decision. However, for any future decisions of this scale and importance, we believe the Welsh Government should consider managing an announcement more effectively, and sensitively communicating it to staff and service users.

Timing of the decision

The timing of the announcement was unhelpful in the context of local elections (which were expected), and a general election (which was unexpected and could not have been planned for).

“ “ *The timescales or the timing from a local government perspective has not been ideal....we had a local election.....*

Tina McMahon, Senior Community Regeneration Manager, Caerphilly County Borough Council²

¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2016, Record of Proceedings [191]

² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [10]

This led to challenging problems for local authorities, who were being asked to make decisions in a political vacuum. We address some of the practical implications of this in section 5.

Aside from the impact of local elections, the timing has caused further difficulties because the Welsh Government's Employability Plan has not yet been published. This has meant that local authorities have been making provisional decisions about transitional arrangements for Communities First employability projects without the full picture of what is expected of them.

Relationships between staff and service users



Often, at community level, the face that [people] see come through the door is quite important to them, and losing those faces may impact on delivery across the board in quite a distinctive way.

Gareth Davies, Performance and Outcomes Manager, Torfaen County Borough Council³

The end of Communities First has been the subject of speculation for years. This has created a lot of uncertainty for staff and service users. It has also been to the detriment of the important work that Communities First staff deliver. Some employees have left for other, more certain, jobs. Many employees have been made redundant, while others remain at significant risk of redundancy.

The impact of this continual uncertainty has considerable impact on staff and people using Communities First services. It has also affected the ability to plan services in a coherent and effective way. We urge the Welsh Government to learn the lessons for the future.

As noted earlier, one of the key successes of Communities First is the relationships staff have built up with communities throughout the duration of the programme. These were relationships that cut across more than one generation, and were vital to the programme's ability to help and support people, sometimes in the most challenging circumstances. This sort of trust takes years to establish, especially with people who may not trust traditional public sector bodies or officials.

These relationships are not something that can be easily measured or quantified, yet are at the heart of the work that Communities First does. Much of this is being lost, and will not be easily replaced. While some of this might have been unavoidable, we believe with better management of the announcement, some of the negative impacts could have been mitigated.

³ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [126]

05. Transitional management

There is still confusion at a local level about the transitional arrangements. Some of this confusion has been on quite fundamental issues, such as the levels of legacy funding. It was helpful for the Cabinet Secretary to confirm to us that the legacy fund is £6 million each year for two years. The Cabinet Secretary added that there was the potential for a further two years of funding and it would be helpful if this could be confirmed as soon as possible.⁴



We have a very clear view in Caerphilly about how we'd like to go forward, but I think we need to know that that is what the Welsh Government agree....If it's locally determined, then that's fine, but we need to be given the mandate.....

The transition plans, from our perspective, are a seamless move from Communities First into what will be next, because it has to be. If that's ratified by Welsh Government, then that gives us the mandate to go out and talk to our communities. But at the moment, we're sort of stuck in limbo.

Tina McMahon, Senior Community Regeneration Manager, Caerphilly County Borough Council⁵

Recommendation 2.

We recommend that the Welsh Government clarifies how long the legacy funding will be available for as soon as possible, and communicates that to all local authorities and other relevant statutory bodies.

⁴Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 21 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [112-115]

⁵Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [27]

We acknowledge that the Welsh Government has established a transitional team, which we welcome. It was encouraging to hear the Cabinet Secretary explain the pro-active approach the transitional team is taking, but we are concerned that it is not enough.

We heard that a lack of written guidance from the Welsh Government is making decision making harder at a local level, because councillors are, understandably, asking for guidance in writing which officers have only received orally. This is not helpful and does not enable effective and coherent decision making. These difficulties are compounded because following the elections, councillors may be new in post and are being asked to make significant decisions about the funding of projects in a hurried manner.

Recommendation 3.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that all advice and guidance to local authorities is available in written form to supplement support provided in person or orally.

We have seen the transitional guidance. We note that it was quite short and light on detail, which is surprising when considering the wide range of different ways in which Communities First programmes operate across a diverse range of communities. We heard directly from those involved in planning the transitional arrangements at a local level that the guidance is not sufficiently detailed to enable them to draw up robust plans.

While we welcome the level of flexibility that the Welsh Government is giving councils to determine what is needed for their own communities, we believe it is vital that the Welsh Government provides a clear steer and guidance to local authorities. Otherwise, there is a risk that local authorities, with the best of intentions, will make decisions that may not help deliver the Welsh Government's broader approach to poverty reduction.

We heard that at a local level there are concerns that local authorities will communicate to communities what the future will look like for these programmes, only for the Welsh Government to contradict this. We were told local determination is fine, but if that's the case Welsh Government needs to clearly give local authorities the mandate to make those decisions. There is a sense of 'limbo' at the moment, and lack of clarity as to whether local authorities have this mandate.

We feel it would be helpful for the Welsh Government to make it clear where the mandate for decisions lies. Considering the evidence we have taken, it seems as if the Welsh Government's position is that all decisions will be made at a local level (either by local authorities or PSBs), with the Welsh Government providing the overall policy framework in which these decisions can be made (in the form of a Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, or Taking Wales Forward). If that local determination is the case, it needs to be clearly communicated to all those involved in informing, shaping or deciding on priorities for transitional funding, including elected members and the communities.

06. The role of the Welsh Government in poverty reduction

Since 2016, the Welsh Government has shifted its focus to the economy, skills and employment in relation to poverty reduction. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure is now the lead Minister, and the issue has been mainstreamed across all portfolios. This, possibly, reflects the fact that significant progress can only be achieved through a broad range of Government policies, actions and interventions. It also sits within the broader context of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.



The Welsh Government has a key role to play in providing a clear strategic direction and robust guidance to local authorities.

The Bevan Foundation, Written evidence (CF02)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children talked convincingly of how the Welsh Government has become more joined up at Ministerial level in terms of ensuring a co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty, and how all the possible policy levers can be used to enact positive change. We welcome this cross-Government approach. However, we are concerned that without the focus of an overall strategy which brings together all the strands of work from across the Welsh Government, there is a significant risk that it becomes both everybody's and nobody's problem.



The importance of a clear strategy and policy framework is particularly important in relation to poverty reduction, where there are so many different players involved, including local delivery bodies, local authorities, public service boards, and the private sector, as well as non-devolved bodies such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

After we finished taking oral evidence, we sought clarity from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure as to whether there were plans to develop and publish a National Poverty Action Plan. In correspondence, the Cabinet Secretary stated that it would not be prudent to publish a bespoke national poverty action plan at this stage. While the Committee acknowledges the Government's position, we still believe that there is a clear need for a specific Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Recommendation 4.

We strongly recommend that a clear tackling poverty strategy is published, which brings together the many strands of poverty reduction work to help provide clear direction and to help the Assembly scrutinise the Government's approach. The strategy should include clear performance indicators to ensure effective performance management, as well as setting out a broader evidence base to help underpin effective evaluation of different approaches to tackling poverty.

From a scrutiny perspective, without an overall strategy, and with the different policy levers sitting with a number of Cabinet Secretaries, it becomes very difficult to get an effective overview of the different interventions that are being made, what the intended outcomes are and how they all fit together. To help aid effective scrutiny of the Welsh Government's overall approach, it would be helpful if the Government responded favourably to requests from Assembly committees for Cabinet Secretaries to give joint written and / or oral evidence.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

07. The three Es: Employability, Early years and Empowerment

There are as many different approaches to reducing poverty as there are definitions of poverty. Since 2016, the Welsh Government has changed its focus to one of 'building resilient communities' and reducing poverty through employability.



I think the empowerment, employability and so on are important, but it's not clear why those three have been chosen above others. I think they point to a problem that has been evident in the Communities First approach right from the beginning, which is that they're characteristics that are deemed to be a good thing for deprived communities, but in fact, they're a good thing for everybody.

Victoria Winckler, Director, The Bevan Foundation⁶

We note the work that the Bevan Foundation and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) have done, and the framework for tackling poverty, which was published in November 2016, which contained a number of recommendations for Wales about how best to reduce poverty, which focussed on:

- Reducing costs;
- Maximising income through work and benefits; and
- Improving skills

In announcing the closure of Communities First, the Government said that transition plans should focus on the 'three Es': employability, early years, and empowerment. We would not question the importance of these areas in relation to poverty reduction. However, we believe that the Welsh Government must take the most effective and evidence-based approach to poverty reduction, and must consider other issues such as ways of reducing household costs and maximising household income.

We note that the 'three Es' could cause significant gaps in service provision, as projects which support groups that fall outside of these areas may be cut. In particular this may impact on 5-16 year olds, older people, people without children and those the furthest away from the job market. As noted in chapter 3, there should be a renewed focus for other public bodies to consider whether they can support projects which have been proven to work, and which will not be taken forward as part of transition plans. The approach to employability and early years seem clear, with local authorities telling us that they understood what should be delivered by these two priorities.

We urge the Welsh Government to ensure that it takes the broadest view of employability, and that local authorities are supported to continue programmes which help people at each stage during

⁶ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [275]

their journey into work. It is essential that employability support does not end when someone is successful in securing a job; if necessary, continuing assistance should be available to help people maintain employment and progress in that work.

Recommendation 5.

We recommend that the Welsh Government takes the broadest view of employability, and in guidance to local authorities, makes clear that employability support should encompass all stages of the employment journey, including any necessary support needed once a person is successful in gaining employment.

The support for early years could enable local authorities to remove barriers to people accessing services that they would benefit from, but which they are unable to access because of their postcode outside a targeted area. This was highlighted to us during our visit to services in Newport, where Flying Start funding was available; there was spare capacity, and staff knew of people who would benefit from support which was not offered because of the family's postcode.

We are aware of the Welsh Government's childcare offer, to introduce 30 hours of free childcare a week for working parents of three and four year olds, and note that there are opportunities for the Welsh Government to ensure that existing provision, such as the Flying Start project which we visited, and others across Wales, could be used to help deliver this pledge.

Recommendation 6.

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers removing barriers to families accessing support through the Flying Start programme. If funding is available, there is a capacity and the support is needed, Flying Start programmes may be able to support families who are ineligible simply because of their postcode.

While local authorities seem clear on what employability and early years means, in contrast, it is unclear what the Welsh Government means by empowerment and how this links to building resilient communities. The Cabinet Secretary said in his oral evidence that he wants to 'empower people out of poverty'.⁷ Without a clear definition, local authorities are uncertain what work they should be supporting during this period. It is essential that the Welsh Government clarifies how empowerment should be translated into priorities for this period.

Recommendation 7.

We recommend that the Welsh Government makes clear what empowerment means in terms of priorities for local authorities during the transition period of Communities First and beyond.

⁷ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 21 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [77]

08. Performance management and evaluation

This will not be the first report to comment on the lack of robust performance management and evaluation of Communities First. Following repeated criticism, the Welsh Government introduced a wide range of performance indicators as part of the reconfiguration of the programme in 2012.



Baseline data was not identified by WG or by partnership areas at the programme inception, therefore programme evaluation was almost impossible.

Measuring the long term impact that the programme had on the individuals was not carried out in the initial years of the programme. As a result, there was limited recording of statistics and outcomes achieved during this period.

Carmarthenshire County Council⁸

However, we were told in very stark times by a witness that having 102 performance indicators, means in practice you have no performance indicators.⁹

In addition, because it was up to local clusters to decide which indicators they would use, the result was very different performance management frameworks across Wales. There has not been comparable data to help effectively identify both success and failures from one cluster to another. There are also gaps in the data that is publicly available. For example, when we looked at the performance data for the indicator: number of participants (in CF activities) entering employment, we were only able to secure data for the dates 2014-15 quarter 2, 2014-15 quarter 4 (full year) and 2015-16 quarter 2 (half year) and this was not disaggregated in any way to enable analysis of outcomes in different areas. It is clear that many working in this sector are keen to have such data to identify good practice that can then be shared and replicated across Wales. The lack of comparable data does not just hinder effective performance management; it prevents sharing of good practice.

It is regrettable that when the Communities First was launched as the flagship anti-poverty programme, it did not have baseline data against which its success or failures could be assessed. This basic flaw at the very start of the programme has persisted throughout its life. We urge the Welsh Government to learn lessons for the future.

We heard that the 2012 reconfiguration was a missed opportunity to enable clusters to have established independent baselines¹⁰ which would have led to improved performance management. The 2012 baseline statistics were not updated, and the performance indicators used by clusters were not based on this data, so progress could not be measured.

⁸ Written evidence, [CF19](#)

⁹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [129]

¹⁰ Vale of Glamorgan Council

We questioned the Cabinet Secretary on the lessons that will be learnt about the lack of robust, consistent and on-going performance management, and how this will help inform future programme design and evaluation. He stated that the areas that the Welsh Government would be investing in would all have indicators attached to them, and would continue to do so.

Recommendation 8.

We recommend that the Welsh Government ensures that performance indicators are consistent across the whole of Wales, are publicly available, broken down by local authority and are made available to the Committee to aid scrutiny.

Our work on Communities First has been hampered by our difficulties in being able to get the data that is collated by the Welsh Government. For example, on the day that it was announced the programme would definitely be ending (14 February 2017), all performance measurement data was removed from the Welsh Government's website.

The Cabinet Secretary also talked about the importance of the National Indicators, which were introduced by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Whilst we acknowledge the importance of these indicators in terms of providing a picture of overall trends, they are far too broad for effective performance management of programmes such as Communities First.

Recommendation 9.

We recommend that the Welsh Government develops a dashboard of poverty indicators alongside an organisation such as the Bevan Foundation or Joseph Rowntree Foundation to ensure that progress is measured.

In light of this work and the other work we have been doing looking at poverty in Wales, we are persuaded of the merit of the Welsh Government funding a longitudinal study into poverty in Wales to rectify the paucity of established data from Communities First.

In correspondence to the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children outlined two studies which the Welsh Government support that can provide further data and information to help inform policy making. He also stated that the Welsh Government are currently considering the feasibility of constructing an individual deprivation measure in Wales using administrative data. We welcome this work, but do not feel that it goes far enough. We still believe there is a merit in the Welsh Government exploring the feasibility of a specific longitudinal study into poverty in Wales.

Recommendation 10.

We recommend that the Welsh Government explores the feasibility of establishing a longitudinal study into poverty in Wales.

09. The relationship between the Well-being of Future Generations Act and poverty reduction

Throughout our work on poverty, it has become increasingly clear that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act will have a significant impact on how all parties involved prioritise and shape their approaches to poverty reduction. This will be particularly important at a local level.

“

...I think the Well-being of Future Generations Act gives you a really good framework to assess projects and certainly, the regional work that's going on now, where they're developing their assessment frameworks, they are using the Well-being of Future Generations Act as part of their assessment process...I think there's a lot more that needs to be done, but I think we can be quite positive that there are signs that the Act is starting to influence practice

Dr Tim Peppin, Director of Regeneration and Sustainable Development, WLGA¹¹

¹¹ Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [101]



We would welcome further clarification on how the Well-Being Plans that all public service bodies must produce will ensure that the experiences and needs of people living in poverty will be captured. We have concerns that there is a real risk of a disconnection between the senior managers who sit on PSBs, and the lived experiences of those in the most disconnected or deprived communities.

We echo the comments made in our predecessor Committee's report that it is essential that the experiences of people living in poverty inform the decisions made at the highest level. We acknowledge that this may be a strand of work that will arise from the focus on 'empowerment', but are concerned it will be patchy and variable across Wales. We feel it is time for the Welsh Government to revisit that Committee's recommendation on establishing a 'Poverty Truth Commission' which brings together decision makers and people experiencing poverty.

PSBs should build on any good practice within their area by Communities First clusters, to ensure that they engage with all communities in the development of their Well-Being plans.

We strongly urge the Future Generations Commissioner to challenge any PSB who submits a Well-Being plan which is not underpinned by wide reaching engagement with deprived communities within their area and does not reflect the importance of poverty reduction.

This is an area of work which we will revisit in more detail in the autumn, looking at how the PSBs are working, and how effectively they are engaging with communities in developing their Well-Being plans.



10. Community Assets

During our considerations, we visited a range of community assets where Communities First activities were based. These included in Newport, Caernarfon and Cardiff. We saw how a diverse range of projects and programmes run out of these centres, and how valued they were by the communities they served. We thank the staff, volunteers and service users who gave us their time to talk about their experiences of Communities First.

“

...some form of core funding needs to go into these organisations to allow them to continue to exist, because their existence, in and of itself, is of benefit to these communities, and the other apparatus and the programmes that Government, local government and colleges, et cetera, want to develop

Russell Todd, Communities First Manager, Wales Council for Voluntary Action ¹²

Many of these centres across Wales are reliant on income from Communities First and we heard concerns about the impact the loss of Communities First funding will have on these important community assets.

¹² Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 7 June 2017, Record of Proceedings [312]



We are aware that this fear was realised in some places following the 2012 reconfiguration. We are also aware that there are examples of community assets which were supported and able to secure other funding income streams, and are now fully funded from other non-Governmental sources, such as Cwmni Bro. We also heard of a similar approach that was taken on Anglesey, with Môn CF now receiving over 50% of its income from sources other than the Welsh Government.

Both the WCVA and Bevan Foundation have floated the idea of providing core funding to such community assets to enable them to continue, and to support them in identifying alternative funding streams. We can see significant merit in this approach, and think the Welsh Government should do all that it can to help support local authorities to enable community assets to stay open and available to communities.

We are concerned that there is a risk that without creative thinking and some additional support at this stage, some of these much valued community assets will be lost. The combination of the loss of community assets along with the loss of long established relationships with staff, which we have discussed earlier in the report, may have a significant adverse impact on communities.

As with much of the Communities First projects that are at risk, we share witnesses' concerns that the value of what will be lost will not be apparent until it is too late.

We feel that this is an area where the Welsh Government may wish to give a clearer steer to local authorities and lead delivery bodies to ensure that where valued community assets are delivering a wider range of work, everything possible is done to help ensure their continued survival.

We are aware that this is something that Communities First programmes are themselves thinking about; Newport, for example, told us how they have centralised offices for staff to reduce accommodation costs, which enables saving to be used to help ensure community centres can remain open.



11. Links to other programmes

As we have mentioned previously, there is a significant risk that the closure of Communities First will adversely affect other programmes that were dependent on Communities First, either as a host organisation or helping bring together different organisations to provide services. One of the most significant impacts will be the loss of the relationships and trust developed within the community, who view Communities First as an effective and trusted sign-poster to other, often statutory services.



It's like an enormous jigsaw puzzle...

Tina McMahon, Caerphilly County Council

One of the at risk areas is the work a number of Communities First projects do to help those furthest away from the job market to become 'job ready'. We heard that there is often a lot of preparatory work which is done before someone is in a position to access support offered by programmes such as Communities for Work and Lift. It is essential that the Welsh Government provides sufficient support, guidance and funding to local authorities to ensure this work continues.

Recommendation 11.

The Welsh Government needs to consider and assess the impact of the closure of Communities First on other Welsh Government programmes and make adjustments to the relevant programmes to mitigate any unintended consequences resulting from the closure.

