

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

22/2018

PUBLICATION DATE:

19/04/2018

Exploring the phasing out of Communities First through the experiences of Lead Delivery Bodies (LDBs)

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Full Research Report: Morrison K & Griffiths L (2018). *Exploring the phasing out of Communities First through the experiences of Lead Delivery Bodies (LDBs)*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 22/2018. Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/exploring-phasing-out-communities-first/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
LDB	Lead Delivery Body
PSB	Public Service Board

1. Introduction/Background

The background of Communities First

1.1 In 2001 Communities First was established as the Welsh Government's flagship tackling poverty programme and since its inception there have been numerous evaluations and critiques of its structure and goals. As a result, in 2012 the Communities First structure was changed in order to deliver services via a "smaller number of larger areas"¹ with the establishment of LDBs. In addition to this it was also to be "delivered and monitored against a nationally consistent Outcomes Framework aligned to the principle of Results Based Accountability"².

1.2 However, many evaluated outcomes of the programme showed a variation of results. In announcing the phasing out of Communities First, on 14 February 2017, the then Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children stated that "[N]o single programme can tackle poverty. We need a holistic approach encompassing the Welsh Government, local authorities and public services boards' members"³. The former Cabinet Secretary clarified that the approach to tackling poverty taken forward by the Welsh Government needed to be adjusted whilst still protecting the good work that Communities First has carried out within the most deprived communities in Wales;

*I will adopt a careful approach going forward, seeking to preserve some of the most effective aspects of the work done by Communities First...I will establish a legacy fund of £6 million, to be introduced in April 2018, which will enable local authorities, in consultation with communities and public services boards, to maintain some of the most effective interventions or community assets developed by Communities First.*⁴

- **Carl Sergeant – Former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children**

¹ Communities First: Process Evaluation Final Report - Executive Summary (2015), Pg. 1: <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150226-communities-first-process-evaluation-summary-en.pdf>

² Ibid. (More information on Results Based Accountability can be found via <https://www.tyf.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/casestudies/english/Communities%20First%20RBA.pdf>)

³ National Assembly for Wales: Plenary 14/02/2017: Point 202: <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/4083#A485>

⁴ National Assembly for Wales: Plenary 14/02/2017: Points 202-203: <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/4083#A485>

- 1.3 The Communities First Transition team was established by the Welsh Government in order to support local authorities in the phasing out of Communities First during 2017-18. The Communities First Transition team also contributes to the development of a new cross government approach to building resilient communities, working closely with colleagues in Communities Division. Supporting delivery partners in making effective decisions for moving forward is of key importance to help minimise impacts on communities, stakeholders and staff.

What we have learnt about Communities First 2001-2017

Key Evaluations

- 1.4 A number of Communities First evaluations have been undertaken since 2001 which have outlined varying assessments of the programme and recommendations for improvement and change. We briefly summarise some of the key evaluations and adaptations to the programme below.
- 1.5 The 2011 Evaluation of Communities First commissioned by the Welsh Government⁵ presented a varied view of Communities First progress, highlighting some fairly positive findings but also raising the issue of the lack of accurate measurement of the impact of Communities First. Findings indicated that when using worklessness as a proxy for overall deprivation, there had been a “positive, albeit limited, additional and attributable impact in the Communities First areas”⁶.
- 1.6 Although this is indicative of a success, the authors do note that “It should be emphasised that this improvement, while attributable to Communities First, does not just comprise direct ‘outputs’ or ‘outcomes of Communities First worklessness interventions’⁷. In other words, it may not have been solely worklessness interventions which brought about this change. Broad positive changes were identified in a number of Communities First areas however and the most frequently observed included “better engagement of residents, the

⁵ The Evaluation of Communities First (2011).

⁶ The Evaluation of Communities First (2011), Pg. 174.

⁷ Ibid.

development of community capacity and the establishment of consultative mechanisms”⁸.

- 1.7 In 2012 the programme was re designed to include a Communities First Outcomes Framework with the aim of enabling better monitoring outcomes of Communities First on a more standardised level nationally. The lack of an outcomes framework had been identified as problematic by previous evaluations. The programme was also restructured at this point into the LDB / Cluster arrangement in which it remained in up until its announced closure.
- 1.8 In light of these national changes in 2012, the 2015 process evaluation of Communities First carried out by Ipsos MORI and Wavehill Consulting⁹ on behalf of the Welsh Government considered more specifically the design of the delivery of the programme and to what extent the design of the programme was achieving its aims. The evaluation outlined a number of positives specifically around the use of partnership working and the Shared Outcomes Framework which helped to aid a “better understanding of the programme externally, and helped focus the design and delivery of activities within the programme”¹⁰. However, a number of issues still remained with the Communities First organisational and delivery structure including perceived lack of guidance in regards to funding allocation and concerns over a lack of expertise in collecting monitoring data within the Clusters. Concerns were also raised surrounding whether or not Communities First projects were reaching those who were in most need of their help. It was noted that knowledge and experience needed to be consistently pooled and communicated effectively if community participation and involvement was to be sustained.

⁸ The Evaluation of Communities First (2011), Pg. 174.

⁹ Communities First: a process evaluation (2015): <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150226-communities-first-process-evaluation-en.pdf>

¹⁰ Communities First: a process evaluation (2015), Pg. 91: <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2015/150226-communities-first-process-evaluation-en.pdf>

Communities First Lessons Learnt Report 2017

- 1.9 The most recent report on Communities First has been published since the announcement of its closure. The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee published a report in the summer of 2017¹¹ which outlined a number of recommendations for the Welsh Government in light of the decision to phase out the programme. Derived from the consultation of numerous Communities First stakeholders, the report collates feedback in regards to many aspects of Communities First including perceived successes and limitations and initial views on the beginning of the transitional arrangements. Subsequently, in October 2017¹² a further paper was released by the Committee which included the Welsh Government responses to the recommendations and reflections on the Welsh Government's replies.
- 1.10 The Committee had raised a number of concerns and subsequent recommendations in their report, for example in regards to the accessibility of the initial guidance provided to LDBs for the phasing out of Communities First and the future of community assets that may now be at risk. The report also stresses the need for a consideration of the knock on effect that the closure of Communities First may have on other support services throughout Wales that Communities First currently helps to facilitate.
- 1.11 The Welsh Government was accepting of a majority of the committee's recommendations with the exception of the publication of a "dedicated tackling poverty strategy"¹³. Instead, the Welsh Government highlights the importance of the Taking Wales Forward and Prosperity for All strategies and their sufficiency in outlining the Welsh Government's continued commitment to tackling poverty in Wales within the wider context of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Despite the differences in opinion as to whether or not a new bespoke tackling poverty strategy is required, the Well-being of Future Generations Act has been recognised across the board as being an important factor in helping to shape the basis of a new holistic tackling poverty approach

¹¹ Communities First – lessons learnt (2017): <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11141/cr-ld11141-e.pdf>

¹² Communities First – lessons learnt – full report (2017) <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11238/cr-ld11238-e.pdf>

¹³ Communities First – lessons learnt full report (2017), Pg. 39: <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11238/cr-ld11238-e.pdf>

through new Public Service Boards, well being plans and providing a basis for forming new assessment processes¹⁴.

- 1.12 The report concludes by pressing the importance of community engagement in the formulation of well being plans by the new PSBs and the intention to investigate the PSBs' roles in the new strategy moving forward and the way in which the well being plans are being devised across LAs.

Taking Wales Forward and Prosperity for All: the national strategy

- 1.13 Improving opportunities for work and social inclusion, as well as maintaining support for communities, are all included as part of the Welsh Government's "Taking Wales Forward"¹⁵ programme for government which outlined the Welsh Government's goals for 2016-21 in pledging to make Wales a more prosperous and healthy place to live.

- 1.14 The First Minister in his foreword introduction of the Taking Wales Forward programme outlined how "new ways of working, including joined up programmes which reinforce and build on what people and communities are doing for themselves"¹⁶ are key in tackling some of the fundamental social issues facing the nation and echo the former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children's vision for the future of tackling poverty in Wales after Communities First. The Welsh Government's goals are based around four key areas:

- "Prosperous and Secure"
- "Healthy and Active"
- "Ambitious and Learning"
- "United and Connected"

"Prosperity for All: the national strategy"¹⁷ outlines how the Welsh Government is going to achieve its goals spanning these areas.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Taking Wales Forward: Programme for Government (2017): <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

¹⁶ Taking Wales Forward: Programme for Government (2017): Pg.3: <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/160920-taking-wales-forward-en.pdf>

¹⁷ Prosperity for All: the national strategy (2017): <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

- 1.15 For example, a commitment to fostering an environment of “economic resilience” through a new “employability plan” and “economic contract”¹⁸ for Wales will aim to address individual needs when it comes to employment as well as stimulating growth for Wales. This is considered to be in line with a regional model to avoid a broad one size fits all approach to addressing economic development.
- 1.16 In addition to supporting economic progression and development, Prosperity for All aims to help communities become more resilient and cohesive. The roll out of a “unified volunteering programme” and a commitment to maintain local facilities like libraries and museums¹⁹ all aim to ensure communities have the facilities in place to create a cohesive and socially vibrant place to live. A renewed focus on ensuring early years support is in place for all children²⁰ as well as a sustainable social care system²¹ with a perspective on early intervention and helping members of the community to help themselves will also seek to break the poverty cycle and provide everyone with the opportunity to succeed.

¹⁸ Ibid, Pg.8: <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibid, Pg. 20: <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid, Pg. 23: <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

²¹ Ibid, Pg. 25: <http://gov.wales/docs/strategies/170919-prosperity-for-all-en.pdf>

2. The Research Project

Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The primary aim of this report is to explore experiences of the phasing out of Communities First, from the perspective of LDB representatives and which elements of Communities First's structure and delivery were felt to be effective and which were not.
- 2.2 Although this is a small research project, its aim is to provide insight into:
- LDB representative views on Communities First structures and governance including experiences of partnership working
 - LDB representative views on Communities First and community involvement and engagement
 - The ways in which decisions were made as to what services the local authority will continue to support
 - LDB representative experiences on the support and guidance provided by the Welsh Government Communities First team.
- 2.3 The further aim of the project is to ensure that lessons are learned not only from Communities First more generally but also from the process of phasing out Communities First.

Method

- 2.4 The research consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews asking a range of questions to LDB leads from Communities First areas across Wales. It was felt that in-depth interviews would result in rich information and insight. Due to resource limitations, 8 interviews were undertaken with LDB leads out of a possible 18 LDBs in Wales.

Sample

- 2.5 The sample we had the capacity to interview was much smaller than the total number of LDBs that are part of Communities First. Due to operational constraints it was necessary to devise a list of criteria from which to source our sample. The research aimed to gain as representative a sample as possible given the resource limits and ethical implications.

- 2.6 The sample of interviewees was developed based on key criteria:
- Geography (to ensure a broad coverage of Wales)
 - Length of time in post (ideally a minimum of 3 years in post in order for interviewees to be able to provide an insight over the last few years of Communities First).
 - For ethical reasons, the research team took the decision not to interview any individual who was facing potential redundancy at the time of interview.

Interviews

- 2.7 An email was sent to all LDB main contacts provided by the Communities First Transition team notifying them of the proposed research project. A subsequent email was sent the LDBs drawn as interviewees to invite them to arrange an interview during an initial period of two weeks in November 2017. The research team endeavoured to accommodate requests or suggest alternatives when necessary. All interviews were conducted between 15th November 2017 and 11th January 2018.
- 2.8 Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 8 LDB leads in order to fully understand their experiences and perspectives of the functioning of Communities First as well as the phasing out process. Each interview lasted 25 to 45 minutes.
- 2.9 Using a semi-structured interview format meant the interviews covered set topics but still allowed interviewees to discuss connections to topic areas that weren't explicitly queried. It also allowed the interviewer to query answers further and ask for points to be clarified which contributed to the richness of the data. The discussion schedule was centred around five broad topics:
- Structure of Communities First
 - Partnership working
 - Community engagement
 - The phasing out of Communities First
 - The Communities First Transition team and guidance

A copy of the discussion schedule can be found in Annex A.

- 2.10 Interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with the full consent of participants via Dictaphone and then manually transcribed in order to gain the depth of detail and experience. Verbatim comments from the interviews are included illustrating key points made in respondents' own words however participants and LDBs will not be identified in the course of the report.

3. Findings

- 3.1 Interviews with the LDB representatives were insightful in terms of overall lessons learnt from the programme itself in addition to the transition/ phasing out process and guidance provided by the Communities First Team. All views reported on within the findings are subjective opinions of the LDB representatives interviewed. As a result they may not be wholly representative of views across LDBs in Wales or within the LDB itself. However they do present a number of recurring themes and topic areas across the interviews that reflect the first hand experiences of those working within the programme.
- 3.2 Unfortunately it is not possible to report on every transcript in detail. Therefore, findings have been reported in the corresponding order of the discussion schedule and organised in terms of prominent themes that have emerged in analysis of the transcripts.
- 3.3 Overall the discussion points are kept general so to avoid directly identifying any particular LDB and any information which could directly identify an LDB has been omitted from the report.

The structure of Communities First

- 3.4 Overall themes derived from this section of the discussion included simplification and consistency being ideal for an effective structural set up. This was in conjunction with meaningful community input being maintained as much as possible within the programme structure. Benefits and disadvantages of the pre 2012-13 structure and the move to LDB and cluster working post 2012-13 were discussed at length although current organisational arrangements varied across the LDBs interviewed.
- 3.5 The shift to LDB and cluster working as part of the 2012-13 structural changes that took place within the programme were highlighted as a positive move amongst interviewees for a number of different reasons. One LDB believed that having one centralised, consolidated main LDB for partner bodies was a benefit because it saved time being spent liaising with numerous different contacts about projects. As a result this saved on labour and resources that were previously required for travelling or communicating with a number of senior programme contacts.

...they [the partners] were going to one senior person rather than having to meet with various different people, so it maximised their resources.

In addition to this, the LDB and cluster working restructure was noted as having helped to foster a more consistent approach to delivery. It was easier to deliver the same service to service users across the cluster areas.

I do think it was a positive sort of move because when there were different LDBs, things were being delivered differently across the communities.

- 3.6 The specific set outcome measures were cited by some representatives as having helped foster consistency in what was being delivered. This was because the programmes across the cluster areas could ultimately be assessed against consistent quality benchmarks that the outcome measures provided. However there was not a consensus on this view across the interviews. Some representatives felt outcome measures had presented a barrier to some forms of community engagement and reduced flexibility by being overly prescriptive.

...we had our outcomes which I think were a good idea but ultimately then people didn't have the flexibility... You know we had to be more prescriptive so it was more difficult then for them to have total buy in because they wanted what they wanted rather than what the need was.

- 3.7 Another LDB noted that a benefit of the restructure was an increased ability to work collaboratively within one overarching LDB and also better utilisation of expertise amongst individuals across clusters in comparison to the pre 2012-13 structures.

It was very difficult because it became very localised and there wasn't a lot of collaborative working so to speak - since it's been brought into local government it's much better ... The governance around it is much more substantial to be able to support a programme like this.

This feeling was echoed by another interviewee who felt that pre-2012 there wasn't enough expertise within the individual communities and partnership boards to manage the programme. The move to the governance being overseen within their LA was felt to have strengthened the structure of Communities First.

3.8 Further to this, LDBs that had opted to change their governance arrangement to a “one plan” or “single plan” way of working noted a number of benefits of the restructure which allowed them to submit a single delivery plan as opposed to multiple plans from each cluster. Interviewees felt that the opportunity to further pool resources and consolidate teams resulted in strengthened and streamlined governance structures.

... so when the Welsh Government made the offer of being able to switch to one plan we very much saw that as an opportunity to be able to put all the projects into a pot; assess the projects look at what's working – really put a focus on what contributes to the journey towards employment.

The LDBs which had adopted a single plan highlighted how more flexible working practices across clusters aided the partnership working within the programme. These further benefits of the single plan ways of working are discussed later in the report.

3.9 However, despite positive aspects of the structural organisation of the programme, there were concerns raised by some that the LDB and cluster set up had resulted in processes that were “cumbersome” and “prescriptive” particularly surrounding issues of community involvement and also financial / procurement matters. As a result there were concerns of a lack of ability to react efficiently to changing needs of the community. For example, those who reported good levels of strategic community engagement pre-2012, raised concerns around what was felt to be a more prescriptive approach post-2012:

We've always had good representation from the community, especially in the earlier days, probably before 2012. I think once we had the teams [clusters] in place people felt it was more prescriptive.

Furthermore, restrictions in the movement of budgets were also flagged as an issue by some LDB representatives. Although it was acknowledged that there needed to be procedures around the allocation of funds, the turnaround time of the Welsh Government in making decisions was perceived to be problematic. One LDB representative felt this had improved over the years through a fostering of a good working relationship between themselves and the Welsh Government:

...we built quite a good relationship with Welsh Government and I think that's probably the key – building that good relationship with the team.

- 3.10 However, another respondent highlighted how they felt a key issue in their mind was striking a “hybrid” model where there is a balance between flexibility and regulation to ensure that services are reactive to the needs of their communities.

...something that's in between would be probably more ideal where again there's ability to move finances quicker, avoid some of the necessary red tape but it is cumbersome red tape within the LA because communities are flexible, ephemeral things – changes happen quickly.

- 3.11 Further to this point surrounding restrictions and “red tape”, there was a perception from some of the LDBs interviewed that the change from Communities First being a programme that was solely based on community involvement to the focus on the programme being outcomes based and LA controlled, created a disparity between what the new set up was intended to be and what the communities who had previously been involved in Communities First were still expecting it to be:

...communication of what it was and what it is was quite hard to manage through the change – people still expected the same things that Communities First had done 10 years before.

Difficulties in holding onto engagement from the community were also cited as an issue that has arisen with the modification of the programme in 2012-13.

I think it has been much more difficult to engage people in a programme that's council run compared to something that has local momentum.

Partnership working

- 3.12 The overarching theme that ran through most of our interviewees' experiences of partnership working was the importance of communication. There were varying examples provided by the LDBs which illustrate what they felt makes for successful and effective partnership working in practice.
- 3.13 Firstly, ensuring there was cohesive partnership working in the very early planning stages of projects was felt as an important factor. Some interviewees felt that early involvement and communication from the very start of a project

enabled any issues around resources and other matters to be raised openly early on in the project. Consequently it could be made clear what individual partners' priorities were at the beginning of the programme – this would then be less of a potential obstacle further along in the process.

- 3.14 The notion of common goals and joint priorities was a strong theme that ran through a number of interviews. Clear goals in conjunction with honest communication were flagged as key features for effective partnership working because a complete mutual understanding of the programme's remit was felt to be an important issue:

I think it's about identifying common goals ... no programme on its own is able to support everybody's complex needs. It becomes easier to support partnership working when there is that very clear understanding about the boundaries of programmes and what their objectives are...what they can and can't do.

- 3.15 This need to have a mutual understanding of the programme's scope, limitations and purpose was echoed by another LDB. It was their view that Communities First had ultimately been trying to capture too many things within its remit and as a result a situation had arisen where Communities First was struggling to meet its original targets.

I think it was seen as a bit of a "will solve all problems" you know? And that wasn't the case and I think that has been part of the downfall of the programme really - that it was seen as the answer to everything and it could never ever tackle the wider poverty agenda.

- 3.16 Just as the 2012-13 restructure was cited in the earlier section as an issue for the community engagement aspect of the programme, another LDB felt that a hindrance to partnership working had been the "changing sands of what the programme is intended to be"; initially as a community generation programme, then a tackling poverty initiative and finally a programme more primarily focused on employment. There was a perception from more than one LDB that the scope of the programme had shifted to a predominantly employment-based initiative. The employability outcome measures were perceived by one LDB representative to have made it difficult to maintain the involvement of

some partners because their areas of work “weren’t necessarily seen to be contributing to the anti poverty agenda”

- 3.17 However, another LDB felt that a greater focus specifically around employment support had actually assisted the programme and it addressed earlier concerns around the programme trying to be too many things to too many people:

...we’d really narrowed down over the past couple of years to try and focus everything around supporting employability and not so much about trying to be everything to everyone.

- 3.18 In addition to this, the concern with reporting against hard outcomes measures required by the Welsh Government had also been raised by another LDB as a key factor in ensuring “delivery is aligned to the right partner” and how “when you have set outcomes and a framework to work towards it’s quite restrictive”. This wasn’t necessarily framed as a criticism but it was felt that the prioritisation of hard outcomes measures could mean that the programme was more limited in what it could provide as a result.

- 3.19 LDBs who had moved to a single / one plan integrated way of working within their local authority noted how this had assisted in better engagement with partners and partnership working. This was because their management structure and consolidation of some teams enabled more flexible working across clusters.

... because we’ve put in the single plan we were able to go to partners and put in commissioning arrangements across the whole of the programme which from my point of view has been much better for the most strategic partnership working arrangements than we had previously in the programme.

...with the one plan we were finding it easier to engage with partners because it made it simpler...

Community engagement

- 3.20 The interviews explored LDB experiences of two types of community engagement. Firstly, in terms of the community helping to set the **strategic level direction** of projects and programmes - so the way in which the community can be encouraged to help shape and plan what services will be

delivered. And secondly **individual participation** in services - the ways that community workers can facilitate local people accessing services.

Strategic level engagement

3.21 Most respondents reported that the community does influence the strategic direction of the programme in their LDBs although a general consensus highlighted this was a stronger feature of the programme prior to the restructure in 2012-13 when the structure of Communities First was very much communities-led. However, community involvement at the strategic level was indicated as an ongoing feature of the programme in a number of forms including cluster boards, forums and consultations, focus groups and evaluations.

3.22 Some LDBs felt it was important to manage the expectations of the community regarding what could be achieved within the remit of the programme and therefore the scope of the strategic direction. This was mainly centred on balancing what the community want and what is able to be provided within the practical and financial constraint of the funding.

....being realistic with people is about being upfront and telling them what is achievable and what isn't...generally people appreciate and they understand if you say "we only have this to do this, or we can only do ABCD because of the parameters of what we've got money wise or whatever.

3.23 The recognition that the programme cannot force people to engage with it was mentioned in more than one conversation. There was also a point raised that different people in the community may want to take on different roles as part of their engagement – for example some people might want to get involved in volunteering on the ground whereas other people want to be involved at a higher strategic level. Ultimately however, there needs to be recognition that some people may simply not wish to engage in the programme and that needs to be respected also. Despite this however there was a feeling that it is important to keep communities informed about what is going on in their area and offer them avenues for empowerment if they wish to contribute in the planning and delivery of projects:

It's about engaging them right at the start and empowering them to deliver things within their own communities - and communication. I think there's nothing worse for a community than finding out there's something going on in their street from a local newspaper etc. without being involved.

- 3.24 The importance of connecting with the local community when it comes to direction setting was echoed in a number of conversations which outlined the importance of securing the involvement of those actually using the services.

What was always my frustration was that people sitting around that table weren't in receipt of the services or the delivery so we'd have people sitting on a partnership or cluster board making decisions about what they wanted in those plans but they weren't actually in receipt of any other the services in that area that we were delivering so I think for me it's more about working with our service users to help shape what we're doing.

One LDB cited the inclusion of a clause in commissioning contracts which states that individuals who will be using the particular service **must** be involved in the planning of the project:

...we've built that into some of our contracts for example if we commission in the voluntary sector to deliver some youth activities it's built in there that they have to plan with those young people during the year what those activities are going to look like...

Individual level involvement

- 3.25 The second type of community engagement the interviews explored was at an individual level, namely the ways in which local people can be successfully engaged and motivated to use services provided by Communities First in their area. A number of key elements were outlined by interviewees in regards to what they felt fostered effective individual level community engagement.
- 3.26 One point raised in regards to active engagement with the community centred on taking opportunities to go out to established groups and networks to raise awareness of Communities First services. Examples of these included older person's networks and events and forums for people with accessibility needs such as individuals with physical disabilities. LDBs who mentioned this felt it was a useful proactive approach that helped to avoid duplication.

Take it to them, they already have structures in place and we take what we want to do and talk to them there, in their process, in their meetings, in their events instead of putting on something and expecting them to come to us.

- 3.27 Programme staff being visible and accessible within a community was mentioned as a vital component in building trust and having a physical presence that people can approach. This can be aided through the use of buildings and hubs (community assets) where service users are able to come along to an environment that is welcoming and has a sole purpose of being a somewhere that they can come and seek information.

...they know there is a building, there is an environment that they feel welcome in, they are able to go in and they are able to ask for any type of support and whether it's something we can give or whether it's something we can signpost to that facility is there and we recognise the importance of that.

Having one-on-one conversation with members of the community was also felt to be a valuable aspect of individual engagement.

...we openly have individual meetings with members of the community. Last week for example one of the community members came in, had a cup of coffee with myself and one of the senior officers and spoke to us about the projects and what they feel could be done to improve the environment further... I think within this locality they've had that consistency in that they know they can pick the phone up.

Further thoughts in regards to community assets within the communities and the future of community assets are discussed in the next section on the transition / phasing out of Communities First.

- 3.28 A recurring point mentioned by a number of interviewees was the approach needed to avoid making community members feel explicitly "targeted" for an employability or anti poverty programme in the course of trying to engage them in services. Interviewees highlighted the following aspects as imperative for securing community engagement: the process of building up genuine relationships and trust with the community, understanding what matters to them in their area and ensuring participants feel as though they are being listened to and their contributions valued by the partner organisations.

It's communication – it's making it accessible for people ... I think just having things that people can get involved in just like events so they don't feel like they're specifically being targeted – they're just coming along as part of a family event – I think the community events side of things is very important.

3.29 Another element of securing consistent community engagement raised by a number of LDBs was that requests for feedback sought from the community in regards to the programme had to be genuine and not “tokenistic”. It was felt that if feedback was going to be sought it needed to be listened to and not simply conducted as a “box ticking” exercise.

3.30 One interview raised an example that illustrated how strategic and individual level involvement can be intertwined. Community influence is not always derived through a direct, formal route and instead can come through engaging with people via more informal routes and learning through listening to peoples' experiences and understanding what will help them move forward:

With the health projects we were doing a lot of cooking classes and we learned that the cooking activities were really good for engaging people in the programme that wouldn't come and engage to get something that's a bit more employability type support. Or they don't have the confidence to take part in something that's a little bit more formal in terms of learning and whilst we were measuring and reporting to Welsh Government outcomes around health that wasn't actually our interest because we learnt the cooking activities were really really good for engaging with new people that wouldn't otherwise engage...so that affected our strategic thinking.

Transition / Phasing out

3.31 Interview questions regarding the transition and phasing out of the Communities First programme covered issues such as decisions about service provision during the process of moving on from Communities First and the way in which these decisions had been made. Specific queries were made about the plans LDBs were making for the future of community assets and the delivery of the Legacy Fund.

3.32 LDBs across the interviews described the varying methods which they had used to consider which aspects of Communities First were most vital to preserve in light of the announcement. Interviewees outlined a number of ways

in which they were assessing information including stakeholder / community interviews and consultations, surveys, impact assessments and evaluation exercises. In addition to this, the use of performance management systems and various forms of administrative data were cited at length by one LDB.

We collated all the data together and we used the data we've got locally so the stats on employment figures, stats around universal credit – benefits data and then we started to align what we were doing against what the strategic outcomes were, so we then prioritised where our services were needed.

- 3.33 All LDBs utilised various methods to begin a process of analysing where “gaps in delivery” would be left in the absence of Communities First services. This involved a consideration of where key services could and could not be picked up by other Welsh Government programmes or partner organisations. Partner organisations were able to pick up delivery in some of cases, thus relieving the pressure on the LDB to allocate Legacy Funding to these projects.

...who could we work with for them to be picking up this delivery if we think it is worth while? We worked with lots of partners...schools and found that well actually people did want to invest in this service because they valued it.

It also considered where there were currently duplication of services whereby similar initiatives were being run that were delivering similar services as Communities First. One LDB outlined a situation in which there were a number of different initiatives in one area that were all providing the same kind of service in regards to opening up opportunities to health and fitness in the community. The Communities First initiative was not experiencing many people accessing the service because of pre-existing services. Consequently Communities First was able to phase out their programme and sign post users and prospective users to the alternative services.

- 3.34 Some LDBs highlighted how they had taken into account direct one on one conversation with members of the community when making decisions about services. This helped them to understand the impact that the removal of services might have on members of the community whilst trying to understand what the capabilities are from partners moving forward.

... a lot of the evidence is down to your sort of one to one informal conversations with people who have accessed the programme and the benefits it's made to them. Within this particular programme we've had some quite hard hitting outcomes where individuals have said the programme has had a massive impact on their wellbeing when they've been in quite a dark place ... So we base the continuation on obviously the clients and what they've identified as the need but also the speaking to partners and looking at services within the area and identifying that this was potential gap.

- 3.35 Other considerations that LDBs mentioned included how they could assist in ensuring that services delivered by other providers were sustainable after Communities First funding had stopped:

...who might be able to pick up on some of that work – which of our partners might be able to support this to move forward? Or how in the meantime this year can we support community groups to become sustainable so we can step away? So we have where possible looked at sustainability of projects and how we're able to support valuable work to continue even if it's not us doing it or not us leading on it.

Examples of this were provided by some LDBs and included supporting partner organisations to grow their skills and self sufficiency:

...we try and support capacity, we've been trying to lever in consultancy and professional support to do things like business planning, funding application , mitigations and things like that.

- 3.36 The interviews also queried community assets and how LDBs were going to manage these in light of the phasing out / transition. A number of respondents felt that community assets were important in their areas and valuable to the community.

We recognise that one of the strengths of our delivery of a community based programme is that you're based in the community. People that live in communities

...recognising the fact the services are also sometimes not as important as the infrastructure so the ability for people to walk through an open door and not get turned away – have someone listen to their issues and signpost them direct or just listen to them – so we've tried to keep our infrastructure in place.

- 3.37 More than one LDB described their management of their community assets in the transition period as a “rationalisation” of community assets. This involved a deliberation around buildings being taken out of use in light of staff reductions, lack of use or because funds would be better placed delivering the service in a different area where it could be provided alongside other services,.

What buildings can we sustain? Are there any other ways we can generate income? – Maybe co-location? These sorts of questions...

- 3.38 In contrast to these thoughts, one LDB had reported trying to adopt a more flexible approach in regards to community assets as there was a feeling that they weren't the best use of finances. Instead they would prioritise the use of buildings that were free of charge or using partners' building where necessary. They felt this was advantageous to be more flexible and spread out in comparison to being based in a set number of locations. The importance of being accessible to the community was echoed by another LDB who were rationalising their own community assets but still felt it important to be based in locations that would be of more ease for the community to access.

...what we're trying to do is use the community buildings –some of, not all because it's not possible, but use them still as surgeries so people can still be based out there periodically once a week, twice a week – so have those surgeries with people in the community.

- 3.39 The interviewer queried whether the legacy fund will be delivered in the same way as Communities First. Some interviewees interpreted this in terms of how they will allocate the Legacy Fund finances and others answered in terms of the mode of delivery, i.e. whether it will be delivered via 3rd sector / LA etc. One particular theme that emerged in regards to the allocation of legacy fund finances centred on not viewing the legacy fund in isolation from other forms of funding and services. Instead some LDBs were trying to view the funding in alignment with other programmes supporting the building of resilient families and Well-being of Future Generations Act agenda.

A number of respondents highlighted in various ways, how a priority for them was to make effective use of the Legacy Fund by ensuring it would interlink with other programmes and support them moving forward in the longer term.

... so what we would do would be to commission in some of the voluntary sector that currently deliver family type activities for us now. We would continue to commission them in to do some family engagement for us going forward – so generate referrals onto our programmes but also as that early intervention or early engagement before they need to be referred onto more evidence based parenting programmes and things such as flying Start and Families First.

As described earlier in the section, a number of representatives described ways that they were assessing where potential gaps in delivery would be left and how the Legacy Fund could help to mitigate these in the most sustainable and economically viable way.

- 3.40 There was little consensus as to how the legacy fund would be delivered. However of those that did mention this there was variety reported ranging from the same, some similarities and one LDB noting a number of changes will probably happen because of new ideas of how to effectively deliver the funds.
- 3.41 Overall the questions that asked about transition and phasing out plans provoked insightful responses that demonstrated a desire to preserve the best aspects of Communities First and ensure steps taken in the transition period strategically will help foster sustainability for the future of anti poverty initiatives in Wales.

Communities First Transition Team

- 3.42 The final section of the discussion schedule queried the experiences of LDBs with the Welsh Government Communities First team. The questions were designed to gain perspectives on elements of support that LDBs felt had been useful and also what could have been improved throughout the process of working with the Communities First team. Interviews also sought to gain feedback on what LDBs felt was imperative for effective transition from their experiences on the programme.

- 3.43 Overall the LDB feedback on Communities First team itself was felt to be positive. The accessibility of the team and the approachableness of its members was seen to have greatly aided the transition and phasing out processes: “I know that someone’s there I can speak to the whole time which is great”. A number of LDB leads also felt they had a good working relationship with the Communities First Transition team:

I think we’ve got an excellent relationship with the transition team ... if ever I’ve got any queries I just pick the phone up and speak to them, they email me back, I know they’re always there for any support.

- 3.44 Many LDBs felt that the regional LDB network meetings facilitated by the Communities First Transition team were helpful and provided a good opportunity to share best practice and find out how other areas are managing their phasing out and transition processes. There was also positive feedback in regards to the bilateral transition meetings that LDBs were able to have on an individual basis with the Communities First Transition team.

The regular transition meetings are a really good thing and give me an opportunity to discuss my delivery on a one to one basis or with the team. The LDB meetings - the regional LDB meetings I think have been really good for me because I understand what other people are doing and where they’re coming from and we can share best practice.

I think having the meetings is an excellent approach if you have any queries or question and then having the joint meetings is also a good mechanism because you get to speak to other areas.

- 3.45 However, some LDBs highlighted how they felt the speed at which they had received information from the Welsh Government had been slow. Whilst the indicative legacy fund amounts were issued in March 2017 and the principles, which had been drafted in partnership with LDBs issued in September 2017, the finalised guidance was not issued until December 2017.

I think some of the principles and the guidance; if they could have been available a lot earlier they would have made the direction of travel a lot easier to go down...

At the same time the LDBs were awaiting financial details and guidance on the new employability grant which was also delayed:

We know how much funding we're getting for the legacy grant...and the other one then is the employment support grant...but we haven't had a bottom line figure agreed.

- 3.46 Generally, there was also a concern that the activities involved in the phasing out of Communities First added an extra burden on staff. . This had presented a challenge to the LDBs during the final year:

I think there is support there to find innovative ways to spend the money to have the best impact on people, but I think being almost expected to deliver the programme as normal when it was anything but normal was a bit different and a bit of a challenge up front because we're still expected to deliver outcomes but actually our staff are having to spend a huge amount of time winding things down.

- 3.47 Another point which was made highlighted the way in which the legacy fund principles were perceived by some to be too broad and not specific enough in order to help the LDBs make effective funding allocation plans prior to the legacy fund guidance. One LDB in particular felt the legacy fund principles could have been an opportunity to push for a bigger change:

I do think the Welsh Government ...just covered everything trying to please everybody... this was an opportunity to be really specific with the legacy fund... its about meeting our duty within the Future Generations and building resilient communities and all the rest of it, so it isn't about saving a project in one little pot because how's that going to benefit?

...we've had the principles the principles don't really direct – they give us all the tools we need because they don't really rule anything in and they don't rule anything out.

- 3.48 Despite the problem of timeliness being a perceived issue by many LDBs it was acknowledged at various times that this wasn't necessarily something that they thought the Communities First Transition team had a great deal of control over. Many LDBs also voiced an understanding that the processes around

getting documents signed off could be a laborious one and they understood this was often a feature of working in Government.

If all the information was available from word go, the process would have probably been easier but that's not the case and I recognise that and that's not the fault of the Transition team.

As I said earlier I understand how things and how time scales are because we've worked in this field for so long I get the political element. So as I said earlier the only issue is the timescale stuff and the time it takes.

- 3.49 All LDBs we spoke to reported having utilised the Communities First Training and Support Contract at some point and found this useful. One LDB hadn't used the contract because they felt the support hadn't necessarily been relevant to the services they had been supplying in their area. Others reported using the contract and finding it a help particularly in helping build elements of sustainability within their third sector partners. In contrast however, there was a feeling expressed by one representative that the time taken for the WCVA to develop an understanding of how each LDB operates can present a challenge.

I find it quite frustrating that we use a contract to come in and it takes them quite a while to understand the way we're delivering before they can come to a resolution to be able to support us sometimes I think it's a little bit slow.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Overall, the eight interviewees provided useful insight into their experiences of being involved in Communities First and what they felt both the positive and negative aspects of the phasing out / transition period have been. While this report is based on the views of eight LDB representatives as opposed to all, it provides an opportunity to capture learning.
- 4.2 It is important the “on the ground” knowledge that has been acquired during the lifetime of the programme is captured with a view to informing other initiatives. Elements of the support given by the Community First Transition team were praised but were not without suggestions for improvement. This feedback is valuable for learning lessons from the phasing out and transition period of Communities First.
- 4.3 Feedback on the structure of Communities First governance was mixed despite the LDB / Cluster structure being perceived overall as an effective way to run the programme. One of the main issues was felt to be the perceived change in emphasis of Communities First after the 2012 restructure, which some interviewees felt made it difficult to strike a balance between prescriptive guidelines and allowing communities to shape their own projects and programmes.
- 4.4 Consistent communication and a focus on having joint goals and priorities were felt to be important by many of the LDB representatives in achieving effective partnership working. Research with partner organisations was not within the remit of this report but could be considered in future qualitative research; with a focus on partnership working within new governance structures post Communities First.
- 4.5 The LDB representatives interviewed were able to share a wealth of knowledge in regards to what key elements they felt were able to secure both strategic level and individual level community engagement. Overall many interviewees felt that strategic community engagement was an important element of their programme and they endeavoured to keep the community involved in direction setting as much as possible within the remits of the governance structure. Interviews also uncovered experience of securing individual level engagement in a variety of ways. Many felt that key

components to this included building up trust with members of the community and avoiding making individuals feel explicitly targeted by “anti poverty” interventions.

- 4.6 A number of methods were mentioned when discussing how LDB representatives and their wider teams have been making decisions on the future of services in their areas. Some of these involved the use of data and a consideration of outcome measures. Other methods included consultations with partner organisations and members of the local community in order to understand what the impact of closing services might be on the local population. Many interviewees described how much of this deliberation centred on whether or not “gaps” would be left by the removal of services. Where partner organisations couldn’t support provision or similar services were not already running in an area, this is where the use of Legacy Funding would be considered.
- 4.7 Overall there was a feeling across the interviews that it was important to preserve the best elements of the work Communities First had been carrying out in local communities and pave the way for sustainability in the future once Communities First has been completely phased out. A number of respondents cited that the Communities First Training and Support contract had been used for this by assisting in the training of members of partner organisations.
- 4.8 Feedback on the Communities First Transition team was positive in a number of respects. Many LDB representatives felt the members of the team were approachable and that they endeavoured to be as helpful as they could. However, interviewees felt that the publication of finalised guidance and funding allocations, whether for the Legacy Fund or Employability Grant were not timely and had caused some difficulties when local authorities had to be planning months ahead.
- 4.9 Network meetings with other LDBs and the regular bilateral with the Communities First Transition team were felt to have been useful by most interviewees. This was because they felt it gave them an opportunity to share knowledge and discuss other area’s phasing out and transition plans as well as feeling they had a chance to address concerns on a one to one basis with a member of the Transition team.

4.10 While the findings of this report are based on a small sample of LDB representatives, it provides useful insight into their experiences of Communities First over the lifetime of the programme as well as providing valuable feedback to Welsh Government on the process of phasing out Communities First and the support received to do this at a local level.

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Annex A

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your role and your involvement in Communities First?

Structure of CF

2. What has been your experience of the governance structure of CF? As regards the LDBs, clusters etc.
3. What is your experience of partnership working as part of CF?
4. What do you feel are the most important elements for effective partnership working?

Community Engagement

5. In your experience, has CF been successful in securing community engagement at the strategic level?
6. What lessons have you learned in this aspect?
7. How do you think genuine community participation can be achieved?
8. What do you feel are the best ways of encouraging participants to engage in specific services?"
9. What do you feel are the 3 most important elements of engagement?

Phasing out of CF

10. In the phasing out of CF – how have decisions been made in your area regarding services/community assets?
11. Will you be delivering the Legacy fund in the same way as CF (i.e. whether directly by LA, by a grant scheme, or a contract with a third party to deliver the projects/activities.)?

Transition

12. What is your experience of the transition support received from Welsh Government?
13. Which elements of it have worked well and been useful?
14. Which elements require improvements?
15. What do you think is key for effective transition?
16. Have you utilised the CF "Training and Support contract?" – what were your reasons for using it / not using it?