



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

Executive Summary

1. Research aims and Methodology

- 1.1 In September 2017 the Communities First Transition team asked the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services to carry out a piece of work exploring the experiences of the phasing out of Communities First from the perspective of a sample of LDB representatives.
- 1.2 The aim of the research was twofold. Firstly to understand the experiences of LDB representatives in terms of the running and phasing out of the programme and also the key lessons to be learnt from these experiences.
- 1.3 A semi structured format was used to ensure we gained in-depth and detailed feedback from LDB representatives, but still allowed interviewees to expand on their answers and elaborate on points made. Due to resource limitations, 8 interviews were undertaken with LDB leads (out of a possible 18 LDBs in Wales).

2. Key findings

The structure of Communities First

- 2.1 The key themes to emerge as regards the structure of Communities First included the importance of simplification and consistency in terms of reporting and management structures for the programme. These features were mentioned in conjunction with meaningful community input being maintained as much as possible within the programme structure.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 It was noted that collaborative working across clusters was made easier by the restructure and outcome measures made it easier to track progress. However, 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.

Partnership working

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 LDB / Cluster working was generally seen as a positive aspect of the 2012 organisational restructure of Communities First and helpful in fostering partnership working. However community involvement was perceived to have become a less prominent feature of the programme in regards to strategic direction setting post-2012.

Community engagement

- 2.6 The interviews explored two types of community engagement. Firstly, in terms of the community helping to set the strategic level direction of projects and programmes, this includes 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 projects can facilitate local people accessing services.
- 2.7 Factors involved in securing strategic engagement included early communication of the opportunities to be involved but interviewees also pointed out the importance of managing expectations of what the Programme can do/achieve. Interviewees also reported the need to respect different levels of engagement and to accommodate people at the level they wish to be involved. This could include high level strategy planning or volunteering on the ground.
- 2.8 The participation of local residents in the Programme had been secured in a variety of ways, but awareness raising and a visible, accessible presence within communities were both cited as important. This was in addition to not making people feel explicitly “targeted” by interventions and genuinely listening to local resident’s feedback on the services they were receiving.

Managing Phasing Out of Communities First

- 2.9 LDB representatives fed back on how they were planning the futures of services. Respondents reported a variety of methods including the use of various forms of data, consultations with partner organisations and members of the local community to determine the likely gaps in provision upon the closure of Communities First.

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 The impact of service closures was considered by LDBs and some reported working with external or third sector organisations in considering the future of services, specifically to cover any potential gaps.

Welsh Government Support for the Phasing Out of Communities First

- 2.13 The Communities First Transition Team received favourable feedback in a number of areas, most notably both in their approachability as well as their availability to be on hand to support and assist with any queries.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 A recurring criticism of the phasing out process was the perceived slowness of Welsh Government guidance whether this was guidance for the Legacy Fund or Employability Grant (now called Communities for Work Plus) funding. LDBs perceived that their management of the process would have been easier if all related guidance had been finalised and published earlier.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 This report is based on the views of a small sample of eight LDB representatives (of a possible 18). However it is important that the "on the ground" knowledge that has been acquired during the lifetime of the Programme is captured with a view to informing other initiatives. This feedback is valuable for learning lessons from the phasing out of Communities First.
- 3.2 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. There was positivity

about the structure of CF and the experiences of partnership working, although some felt that the strategic involvement of communities lessened after the 2012 restructure.

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 Throughout the lifetime of CF, LDBs developed their understanding of how to involve communities at both a strategic level as well as the importance of building trust and taking small steps to get individuals engaged with services.
- 3.5 LDBs have utilised data and consultations to develop their understanding of services after Communities First and many have already built on partnerships with 3rd sector to try and fill some of the gaps in provision.
- 3.6 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 helpful. However, interviewees felt that the publication of all finalised guidance and funding allocations from Welsh Government, whether relating to the Legacy or Employability Grant, were not as timely as they would have hoped and this had caused some difficulties when local authorities had to be planning many months ahead.
- 3.7 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.

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 researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Katrina Morrison
Social Research and Information Division
Knowledge and Analytical Services
Welsh Government, Cathays Park
Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

Email: Katrina.Morrison@gov.wales

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