



"COMMUNITIES FIRST"

**REGENERATING OUR MOST DISADVANTAGED
COMMUNITIES**

A CONSULTATION PAPER

APRIL 2000

Regenerating our most Disadvantaged Communities

1. Introduction

1.1 The Assembly has set out its long-term vision for Wales in its draft Strategic Plan "Better Wales" published in January. This vision extends to combating poverty and social disadvantage, spreading economic prosperity across Wales and removing inequalities in health, education and social care. The principles underpinning all areas of the Assembly's work are to operate in partnership; to be inclusive; to work in a strategic manner and to produce good government; but to ensure that the way that this is done emphasises the commitment to sustainable development and equal opportunity which are the other two themes which underpin the Assembly's work. Nowhere do these principles need to be more acutely realised than in the way we tackle the needs of our most disadvantaged communities.

1.2 The Assembly publication "Mapping Social Exclusion in Wales", illustrates stark differences in people's health, employment and income levels, educational attainment, material and mental well-being in different parts of Wales, and serves to highlight the urgent need to bridge the gaps which exist between the most deprived communities and the rest. "Better Wales" stresses the importance for targeting our most disadvantaged communities. This was also demonstrated in the motion unanimously adopted by the Assembly in January promoting Social Inclusion in Wales through a new commitment to target integrated action on these communities.

1.3 This consultation document launches a new approach to community regeneration – "Communities First". It does not prescribe a solution but sets out a vision for the future and a route to realising that vision. To make this a reality all

who need to be involved – the Assembly, local government, the voluntary sector, health authorities, the police, business and, most importantly, the communities themselves - must work together to achieve sustainable improvement. This will require the development of long-lasting genuine partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding, to develop this concept into a way of doing things tailored to the needs and aspirations of individual communities; partnerships which will deliver what is needed over a long period of time.

2. The issue to be addressed

2.1 Many Welsh communities have experienced long, slow social and economic decline, leaving them severely deprived by comparison to the rest of Wales. Wales has become divided between developing and affluent areas and localities that are marked by high unemployment, poverty, ill health and social disadvantage. Such division extends to pockets of severe poverty alongside or within very affluent areas. This deprivation is often triggered by loss of employment in a key industry such as mining, manufacturing or agriculture, secondary problems then emerge which have a severe impact on people's quality of life. Basic problems of poverty and low income are worsened by:

- Poor quality housing and external environment
- A lack of public and civic amenities
- An inferior quality of service provision
- A lack of employment prospects and training opportunities
- Poor health, drug dependency, crime, social stigma, low skills, poor education achievement and benefit dependency
- Lack of access to services including advice and information

2.2 The consequences for many individuals, families and communities is a loss of self-esteem, confidence, hope and aspiration and a gradual disconnection from the norms and expectations of the wider society. Traditional routes into adulthood through employment, marriage and family building are lost and replaced by disaffection, delinquency, drug abuse, early unplanned pregnancy and family instability. Wales' socially disadvantaged communities have become routinely stigmatised and socially excluded.

2.3 However, there is another side to this picture and that is the ample evidence of the energy and determination of local people to recover the sense of respect and community which once prevailed. Throughout Wales there are examples of self-starting, community based projects which exist to tackle social disadvantage and recreate communities where people are pleased to live. "Communities First" looks to strengthen this process by seeking to gain the commitment of all who can contribute, from the local authorities, the voluntary sector and a wide range of other public sector bodies to this process of community regeneration. "Communities First" sets out a real programme for social and economic recovery in Wales' disadvantaged communities.

3. What is "Communities First"?

3.1 The work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the evaluation of the Single Regeneration Budget Programme and the findings of the Social Exclusion Units all provide substantial evidence that localised area-based strategies can be a very effective response to problems of social exclusion and disadvantage. Large scale welfare programmes and economic recovery through inward investment cannot address all the problems faced by the most deprived communities, nor can local single issue actions, for example in health. One of the principal problems has been a lack of co-ordination between each of the services delivered at local level, often leading to wasteful duplication of effort and less impact on the ground than should be achieved. The sums of money spent each year through the Assembly and central government are very considerable. The Assembly alone is spending nearly £8 billion each year (an average of more than £6000 per household). To this must be added social security spending and all other non-devolved functions and European funding. Whilst large sums of money are spent there is too often little discernible improvement in the conditions which justified the expenditure.

3.2 "Communities First" will establish cross-sectoral and multi-agency methods of designing policy and local service delivery and will involve the direct participation of the community in planning and developing the services delivered to that community. Participative community development, supported by multi-agency partnerships boards, is establishing itself as the most effective mechanism for combating social disadvantage and poverty at area level. "Communities First" will sponsor the creation of partnerships which draw directly from the local authority, other statutory agents, the voluntary and private sectors and most importantly the communities themselves. It will need to recognise and harmonise with the implementation of Objective One funding (in those areas where it applies) as this will make an important contribution to its effective delivery.

3.3 The funding commitment will need to be long-term, perhaps very long term and there will be encouragement for locally determined, innovative patterns of

service delivery which cut across the conventional divisions between education, health, housing, training, employment, planning and all other services which impact on the well-being of individuals and communities. This applies to communities within and lying outside the Objective One area.

3.4 In summary, therefore, it is:

- A new concept in community regeneration;
- Involving long-term commitments for funding and resourcing;
- Targeted at Wales' most deprived communities;
- A non-prescriptive programme designed to meet needs and priorities determined by the community;
- A clear demonstration of a well co-ordinated, "joined-up" and cross-cutting approach in action;
- The promotion of real partnerships at local level for delivering action in the most deprived areas.

4. Why "Communities First"

4.1 In the past, regeneration programmes have provided valuable, but often confusing, opportunities for community development. Problems have included:

- A lack of cohesion between different programmes;
- Difficulty for communities to take the lead in constructing local programmes which specifically met locally determined needs;
- Too many different grant schemes with separate criteria and application routes and timetables;
- Poor co-ordination in setting objectives and monitoring outcomes;
- The majority of schemes only providing short term "pump priming" funding;
- A disincentive to local confidence because of a lack of long-term central commitment;
- Too many separate local partnerships, each for different aspects of development at local level;
- Insufficient attention to preparing communities for involvement through local capacity building
- Questionable sustainability because of lack of concentrated focus of resources and commitment from key players.

4.2 If the Assembly is to make a difference, it must find a new and innovative approach, one that can offer better Value for Money than past initiatives, can

demonstrate effective joined-up working and can be based on collaborative and genuine partnerships. The concentration should be on the outcomes for the communities rather than the inputs and processes.

4.3 The problems of deprived communities are extremely complex, varied and deep rooted and cannot be resolved overnight and without the extended commitment of all players. In the past, these problems have been looked at on an individual basis and short-term initiatives devised to tackle them. Whilst many of these initiatives have been beneficial, they have generally been unco-ordinated and not linked to overall community objectives. Neither have they necessarily represented the priorities for action which the community itself was seeking. In some cases they have been ineffective or even counter productive. Moreover, they have invariably been short-term, yet solving the long term and deep seated problems requires long term commitment. If we are to achieve sustainable communities, it will require support stretching over many years but which will ultimately result in self sufficiency, that is to say communities that do not need constant intervention. To achieve this self sufficiency, we will have to ensure that the people living within the communities have opportunities for continued economic activity provided by good quality secure jobs. We must ensure that the policies and programmes of action are well co-ordinated and fit with the aspirations and the priorities of the community itself.

5. The Basis of Partnership

5.1 Currently, there is a complex array of service providers in all sectors who contribute to the well-being of our communities. Each provider is an essential element in the totality of services required and each has a continuing role to play. "Communities First" will be based on the principle that coalitions of service providers working in close partnership will achieve more than when they work in isolation. The close relationships between housing quality and health, between education and employment, between opportunity and disaffection points to the need for a unified community-based approach to combat social disadvantage. This will require existing agencies to adopt new methods of working, to share and move funding across policy boundaries, to use money and resources innovatively and flexibly and to relinquish direct control of budgets and allocations to partnership boards and policy coalitions.

2. Local authorities will have a crucial role in this approach. They are in a key position to encourage, support and help co-ordinate the development of community regeneration plans and in the leadership of Local Health Alliances. This is particularly the case given the proposed duty on local authorities in Wales to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. Their leadership role in developing community planning in its broader sense – that is, to

foster a shared strategic approach between all the key players across the whole local authority area – will be important in creating the right climate for local communities to be able to develop and implement plans which address their local needs, regardless of organisational boundaries.

2. The voluntary sector has grown in the post-war period to become a major agent of policy delivery and in disadvantaged communities often plays a critical role not fulfilled by statutory agencies. Increasingly, community based development groups are fulfilling an essential function and are often best placed to deliver locally sensitive programmes which raise capacity and participation, without suffering from some of the barriers which disadvantaged communities perceive between them and traditional public and voluntary sector agencies. "Communities First" will bring all these agents together in a common approach to the challenges facing a community. It will promote individual and community capacity to respond positively to the opportunities for community renewal and will unlock the potential for self determination in seeking solutions to tackle poverty and exclusion.

6. The Vision

6.1 People in Wales expect a lifestyle that is appropriate for the beginning of the twenty-first century. Many enjoy the advantages of a full education, the benefits of employment in a modern economy, and the skills and capacities that new technologies have brought to the home and the workplace. "Communities First" will ensure that all these benefits are experienced by everyone living in Wales, regardless of where they live or their economic status. "Communities First" will promote equal opportunity in the full range of economic, housing, education, health and social services. It will do so by adopting methods that promote individual and community empowerment, equality of opportunity, participation and sustainability.

6.2 To achieve these objectives a wide-ranging and cross-cutting agenda of community development will be pursued in the communities needing support. The strategy will be long-term and provide sustained support through the full range of services for the development process. Specific community programmes will be determined by and with the community itself and a grouping of local agencies, but will be likely to include actions which address:

- poor educational and skills outcomes
- poor acquisition of vocational skills
- employment opportunities
- ways to engage with young people
- poor housing conditions
- health inequalities
- crime reduction and community safety

- environmental renewal
- community and individual capacity building
- widening access to mainstream services
- tackle the underlying issues which inhibit economic regeneration
- support the creation of new businesses which involve local people

6.3 "Communities First" will seek to contribute to the redevelopment of local economic activity through small business development, community enterprise and intermediate labour market activity. The local economic and training structure will provide a springboard for the long-term unemployed to re-enter the mainstream economy, by first participating in local activities where they will acquire the skill and capacity necessary for the modern workplace. "Communities First" will match the social needs of the disadvantaged communities with the people living in those communities who are currently denied opportunity to contribute to the recovery of their locality.

7. Action for the Assembly

7.1 We emphasise that this consultation document is about presenting a concept and not about prescribing a uniform solution. However, the Assembly recognises that there is a need to set the strategic framework in which local partnerships can operate effectively. What we will be doing is:

- Ensuring that this consultation process is fully inclusive and comprehensive
- Acknowledging the long term commitment which will be required if our vision is to be realised
- Looking for ways to rationalise and reduce the existing Assembly programmes and those of Assembly sponsored public bodies in order to provide the flexibility needed to match the programmes to the needs
- Streamlining the processes to provide easier access to funding programmes
- Creating appropriate mechanisms to define and identify the communities to be targeted and also involving local authorities, the voluntary sector and the communities in this process
- Creating and agreeing targets and milestones and providing appropriate ways for measuring the outcomes
- Ensuring that there are close and continued links to other Assembly policy areas – economic development, education and training, children, health and community safety, planning etc..
- Looking for ways to link with the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency
- And most importantly ensuring that the opportunities provided by European programmes are effectively taken
- Considering the lessons learnt from past initiatives

8. Which Communities will be targeted?

8.1 One of the major difficulties the programme will face is in identifying the communities for action. Wales has no shortage of communities experiencing acute social disadvantage. In partnership with Local Government in Wales the Assembly has commissioned Oxford University to establish a new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and the outcome of the study will be a clear picture of disadvantage. This Index will establish levels of deprivation at electoral division level and this will represent the starting point for the identification of the most deprived communities. However, to this must be added local knowledge, both to define the boundaries of coherent communities and to establish the precise patterns and consequences of social disadvantage. The experience of professionals and practitioners engaged on the ground in service design and delivery will play a key part in deciding which communities are included. A crucial part of this consultation exercise is to help determine the way that their expertise can be best drawn on. Criteria will have to be established to identify those communities in most need and therefore requiring of additional investment and support. However, "Communities First" will also seek to establish principles for policy and service delivery which will apply to all disadvantaged communities and redirect current spending in the most effective and targeted ways to the point of most need. "Communities First" is to establish a new ethic of service to communities throughout Wales.

9. The Consultation Process

9.1 We have stressed throughout this document that "Communities First" is a concept to realise our vision for the long-term improvement and sustainability of what are currently our most disadvantaged communities, ensuring that resources are effectively used. The Assembly wants to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to contribute to the development of this ground-breaking policy. As it requires a long term commitment to support the needs of identified communities it is vital for this process to be fully inclusive. Having said this, the sooner that an agreed approach is achieved, the sooner we can move to implementation and start to make a real and lasting difference to the quality of life of the people who live in these areas.

9.2 To aid this process we have set out in the Annex some fundamental questions which we believe need to be answered as part of the development of "Communities First". Respondents are invited to comment or offer answers to some or all of these.

9.3 To achieve inclusive policy development we are proposing the following

stages:

- Initial consultation document Responses 31 May
- Developmental Seminars April

(one in North Wales; one in South Wales)

- Community Focus Group Sessions April/May
- Local authority area based discussion groups

(to include; LAs Health professionals; education;

police etc.) May/June/July

- Discussion at Assembly Regional Committees June/July
- Second consultation document setting out the

detailed proposals for implementation,

Issued August Responses 30 Sept

- Assessment of responses and further discussion

with the Partnership Councils and with

WLGA & WCVA October/November

- Final Scheme and implementation timetable December

9.4 Further details about the seminars and focus groups will be provided in the near future. In the meanwhile if you have any comments or suggestions about the concept or the approach to the development of "Communities First" please:

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ANNEX

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS RELATING TO COMMUNITY REGENERATION

A The National Context and the Overarching Principles

1. What should be the Assembly's objectives for disadvantaged communities?
2. What principles should be central to the Assembly's approach to intervention in disadvantaged communities?
3. How should responsibility for management and delivery of community regeneration be undertaken between the Assembly and other statutory agencies?
4. What is the role of non-government organisations?
5. Which structures and supports are required for effective community regeneration?
6. At what level is it appropriate to set targets for tackling disadvantaged communities – national, regional, community or all of these?
7. How can we ensure that we do not duplicate or override existing community action?

B The Basics

8. What do we mean by disadvantaged communities, how many are there in Wales, do we tackle them sequentially or have much wider coverage?

9. What are current programmes and area based initiatives delivering?

10. What does each of the mainstream programmes currently deliver in disadvantaged communities?

11. What will happen in disadvantaged communities if we continue with the existing approach?

12. How does welfare reform fit including the roles of the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency?

C Funding Area Based Initiatives

13. Where does Lottery funding fit into the picture?

14. Are there too many area based programmes and is there potential benefit in merging some of these to create a more flexible approach?

15. If we continue with multiple programmes how can the co-ordination be improved?

16. Who should be responsible for targeted programmes at community level?

17. What sort of targets and milestones should we be setting for tackling disadvantaged communities?

D The Role of Mainstream programmes in tackling the problems of disadvantaged communities

18. How can we make mainstream programmes more effective in deprived communities?

19. How can we simplify structures to achieve effective links between community partnerships and strategic multi agency partnerships at local authority and health authority level?

20. Should there be better targeting of mainstream funding by , for example local authorities and health authorities towards deprived communities and what are the implications of doing this?

21. Does mainstream funding take account of the relevant disadvantage of communities?