



***Sketty Park Communities First Partnership***

***134 Clyne Court, Sketty Park, Swansea SA2 8HY***

***Sketty Park Communities First Partnership's  
response to the Welsh Government  
on the consultation: Future Of Communities First***

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***The Sketty Park Communities First Partnership see benefits and challenges from the proposed changes to the programme. Main points are summarised below:***

- *Work and initiatives, even in addressing national priorities, must respond to locally identified needs. Community leadership must be at the heart of the future programme.*
- *The consultation document seems weak on community development which is fundamental to maintaining strong community leadership.*
- *The proposed structure of clusters and menu of activities may reduce community participation opportunities having a detrimental effect on community development.*
- *A menu system should be for guidance only; not a prescriptive way to deliver top-down objectives.*
- *Clusters may bring benefit by drawing services into areas that are currently not prioritised by service providers, though this is not guaranteed.*
- *Focusing resources within clusters may have a negative effect on some areas in those clusters that are not targeted for development. Especially if those areas were previously classed as Communities First.*
- *Sketty Park has its specific needs and issues. If they do not weigh up as significant when combined with identified needs from other areas within a future cluster, they may be ignored.*
- *Locally identified need and statistics from local partnerships, as well as the WIMD, should be used to inform priorities for the Communities First programme.*
- *The success of the programme should not be based on its impact on national statistics alone, but identified contributions to local priorities. Clear measurable outcomes must be set for all objectives and Results Based Accounting should therefore help in this respect.*
- *Where possible the existing workforce that has proved to be a contribution to the success of the current programme should be retained.*
- *Staff, community members and partners will need training to ensure they work effectively within a new Communities First model, particularly if the focus is on delivery over development.*
- *Community Hubs should be considered for involvement in the future of the programme but, as grant recipients and cluster managers, they may create an additional layer between the Government and the communities.*
- *Regional management teams may be at too great a distance from work on the ground to best manage the delivery of effective and responsive initiatives.*
- *There are other areas outside of the 10% most deprived which should be considered for future inclusion in the programme.*

• **Whole Government Support**

1. How can we best communicate the commitments that are made at a national and regional level to partners to the Communities First programme so that all are aware of the opportunities that arise from these?

*We welcome the Welsh Government's desire to encourage the further development of community initiatives and to ensure the best use of resources of manpower, paid and voluntary, and of money.*

*Communication channels should be robust and established as follows:*

- *Locally based workers should be focused on specific communities to identify local needs and ways to address them through government strategies. Dedicated workers are best placed to maintain a level of trust and effective engagement at the community level. This engagement will help the implementation of government directives in the most effective way.*
- *Elected Council Members should play a significant role as intermediaries between the community and the government regarding Communities First; particularly to inform policy making.*
- *Proposed Cluster Managers should have responsibility for communicating the programme's aims to the community.*
- *There should be regular community based updates, and question and answer sessions by cluster managers, local councillors and Assembly Members.*

*Priorities should be discussed in order to develop local solutions, not dictated by government as their best solution to local issues. Without a mechanism for true discussion and planning there is a risk that the programme may lose sight of the best way to serve communities, thus becoming a top-down government run initiative.*

*The Welsh Government can further the work of Communities First by setting out its vision, together with its points of principle and priorities; then allow each local community to follow the vision and apply those principles and aims, using its own practices and methods to achieve them in ways best suited to its own particular situation.*

## **Shared Objectives**

2. How can we strengthen the balance between ensuring progress toward strategic priorities whilst encouraging and maintaining the community leadership and involvement which is a key feature of the present phase of the programme?

*So far the work in Sketty Park has been based on statistics and the community's own knowledge of itself – its needs and resources. With the help and guidance of the Communities First team this appears to have worked well.*

*Partnerships and thematic groups should continue, as involving local people will effectively translate government led initiatives into meaningful solutions at the community level. The community needs to be fairly represented with its own voice, currently facilitated through the Communities First Partnership. This voice is critical for the success of the programme. However, communities will need continued and consistent support from delivery teams that are linked to them. Delivery teams should not just be there to run initiatives in the community.*

*Government priorities can be implemented through community leaders and local partnerships working closely with local delivery teams. The issues and their related statistics should be analysed and scrutinised with community partners to draw up local solutions. This should be based on local and national baseline data that states current priorities, but must also be responsive to community identified needs.*

*There is a need to continue work that responds to local interests and issues, which helps to develop community identity and participation. The programme should not just deliver government directives as this may undermine community leadership. A middle ground must be found to balance government priorities and community needs. Assembly members need to play more active roles in becoming aware of and understanding the work locally; this will help them to direct strategies and policies more appropriately. Currently, local councillors are very active and this should continue. The success of local work in the proposed model will depend greatly on the cluster manager and their need to fully understand the differences within areas and communities. What could destroy what has been achieved is having 'experts' come in from outside to tell communities what they need and how to achieve it.*

## **Effective Partnership-Working**

3. Do you think that the cluster approach would work in the area/s that you work in? Do you have any idea how many clusters there might be in your area and what the most effective management structure might be – based on the local and regional models outlined in this document?

*There is concern that the independence and effectiveness of the local partnership will be jeopardised through clustering, especially with Sketty Park being a smaller area than neighbouring areas. Management of the cluster will no doubt take place from another larger area so community participation and planning activities must still take place within the local community, if we are to ensure some level of influence. The characteristics and demographics of Sketty Park are quite different from other Communities First areas and it is felt that a one size fits all method of delivery may dilute the impact in meeting local need. When clustering and reducing resources, community priorities should not be forsaken because the area fits geographically within other areas. Community identified needs and demographics should be a part of the consideration.*

*Community involvement is paramount, to ensuring local knowledge, manpower and support is maintained for the programme. This gives rise to the argument for dedicated workers that will continue to engage with the local community to encourage the high levels of participation we currently experience.*

*The current programme is seen by the partnership as working effectively, even though it is less than three years old, and there is concern that changes will undermine this partnership and group work in favour of a programme managed more centrally. Why fix that which is not broken. The proposed staffing structure suggests a greater level of administration than is currently experienced with fewer 'on the ground' workers seen. Sketty Park currently has a low-cost office base and this should be maintained as a local base for delivery teams and an information point, relating to local work, regardless of future cluster formations.*

*It is expected that a natural cluster may involve Castle and Townhill. There is recognised benefit in becoming a part of a large cluster. For instance, difficulties are experienced because Sketty Park does not hold up as a priority when compared to neighbouring areas, with examples such as Sketty Park's exclusion from the Strategic Regeneration Area in Swansea and a lack of involvement from employment agencies in supporting local endeavours to attract employment support initiatives to the area. Being a part of the 'higher priority' areas may help ensure a greater voice for the community, in relation to provision to meet needs common with other areas. It is also recognised that communities are usually concerned with their own issues over the wider geographical needs and cluster formations will help address this isolated viewpoint.*

*Concern has been raised that Sketty Park may no longer be included in a future Communities First programme and it is felt that the area has not had sufficient time to be fully developed. Therefore there is strong opinion that Sketty Park should remain within the programme and not to have the 'rug pulled out' at this early stage of community development.*

### **Targeting of Resources to Support Disadvantaged People**

4. What other evidence of need (as well as WIMD) do you think might be used to determine the geographical areas which will be the main focus of the programme?

*If we just focus on the WIMD, we will get 'expert' knowledge from the government without critical 'on the ground' knowledge from communities. Therefore a mechanism needs to be in place for ensuring national statistics are applied to areas in the light of locally identified need. This mechanism currently includes the Communities First Partnership and its workforce, PACT meetings, Police, Housing locally elected members and other partners. This should be maintained. Data from Local Authorities, South Wales Police, Local Health Boards and the Local Education Authority needs to be included for ongoing dynamic measurement of change, and this data will need to be considered alongside the WIMD when identifying the focus of the program.*

*Statistics don't reveal underlying problems – local consultation and participatory work must therefore continue, to ensure 1) there is a local listening ear, 2) there is involvement from local people in delivery, and 3) national priorities are translated into local solutions. The process of community development over time, builds up a catalogue of local successes, a greater level of trust amongst stakeholders and an irreplaceable local knowledge base. Community development must continue to be a core element and 'informant' of the future programme.*

*Local issues and needs change more quickly than statistics reflect. Ongoing consultation and engagement events are vital to establishing changes in need, particularly when in relation to specific pockets within communities. The Communities First Partnership in Sketty Park has proved that organisations coming together to address issues brings significant opportunity for sharing vital information and work practices. The Partnership should continue to ensure local organisations continue to combine their experiences and findings, not just numbers on paper, into building a picture of actual need.*

*The information that is currently in existence is not always so easily available and that which is available is not localised to specific LSOAs such as Sketty Park (mainly Sketty 4). Local organisations, local authorities and agencies carry out ongoing analysis of work in relation to need and they should work closely in sharing the information and findings they have to build more accurate pictures of priorities relating to deprivation within our communities.*

5. How can the programme at the local level balance the geographical targeted approach with the focus on individuals and groups experiencing deprivation?

*The priorities of Sketty Park, that are not shared with other areas within a future cluster, may fall by the way and community development work may diminish as a result. Also, the differences between the areas outweigh the similarities and Sketty Park may lose its identity in the programme if managed through structures that currently exist in other areas. More work needs to be done to analyse needs, at the*

*community level, to be able to define what work should take place and specifically who the target groups are.*

*Local and ongoing engagement and consultation activities, when carried out in partnership with local service providers and agencies, will help inform the ongoing work. As is currently done, community based work programmes/plans should be implemented to direct effective delivery of projects. Clear communication within the community and amongst partners should be a high priority for the programme, future cluster managers and partners.*

*The community needs to be involved in the running and delivery of the programme, to ensure we continue to address locally identified issues, which inevitably reflect the needs already identified in government priorities. It is recognised that strength may come from managing the local programme through clusters, but there must be prominent workers, as with councillors, dedicated to each geographical area within the cluster, to maintain community involvement. The delivery team should where possible include the current workers because of their familiarity to and local knowledge of the communities. The partnership and groups set up as part of Communities First should continue to play strong roles in the implementation of the programme locally. These groups and existing structures have proved successful in Sketty Park and should therefore be maintained.*

## **Demonstrating the Impact of the Programme**

6. Is the proposal for distinguishing between the **contribution** of Communities First to national priorities and the **overall outcomes** in terms of reducing poverty (which will be affected by many others factors) clear?

*Potentially yes. However, the definition of poverty is not clearly understood within the existing programme and partners often have varied interpretations of its meaning, depending on their role in targeting poverty. It is suggested that Communities First's role is to take people to the services provided, to facilitate access and raise awareness. Much of the work of Communities First has been to increase participation and this is making an impact for individuals in areas such as life and social skills,*

*learning, financial inclusion, energy saving, Credit Unions and access to benefits. These are outcomes seen in Sketty Park with potential long term benefits such as increased job skills and employability. Not all activities outlined in page 17 of the document will result in an immediate reduction of economic poverty but should improve the quality of life for each citizen.*

*There is a lack of clarity from government on the expectations of the programme, made worse by the impression of what was a 'bottom-up' model of community regeneration now becoming a 'top-down' process for delivering services.*

*Communities First Partnerships do not have the level of influence originally intended, when it comes to government priorities and policy making, and they need more opportunity to put forward their ideas for initiatives and solutions.*

7. Are the suggested Key Indicators set out in Section 6 the right ones against which to measure the impact of local work and what other Key Indicators should we include in the developing three Strategic Outcomes Frameworks?

*Partly. These indicators do seem to address all appropriate issues and will help develop a strong level of accountability for the programme. However there needs to be consideration given to developmental outcomes and some of the softer outcomes. They cannot be ignored in a programme that may only measure hard outcomes.*

*Statistics are not always localised to the areas targeted and therefore may distort the local picture of need. Also these indicators will generally take a significant amount of time to change in response to any Communities First initiatives. Statistics that measure national circumstances and areas wider than the target areas will not necessarily change and this may suggest no benefit comes from the programme. Of course there is a need to be accountable with public funds but the measures must be realistic and reflect the actual work that takes place. For example, much of the work currently carried out affects social inclusion and wellbeing, even mental health, but where will this be recorded and how can it be measured? These soft outcomes should be given equal value in addressing the needs of communities faced with*

*deprivation. Existing initiatives should be considered when setting out indicators, when these initiatives may have already established some baseline data that can be used to monitor progress in the continuation of these initiatives.*

*Time will need to be given to truly measure the impact of the revised programme, which must be considered using agreed baseline data. Time and consideration must also be given to establish appropriate indicators that will capture all elements of success and failure of the future programme.*

8. Section 6.4 suggests a menu of activities which could form part of local Communities First Delivery Plans. Are these suggested activities correct and what other local activities should be included?

*In principle no. A programme that addresses poverty and its effects on a local community should not be governed by a menu of activities. Work should not fit a national menu but should arise from local need, using local resources to help deliver initiatives. The programme may suffer from becoming a menu of work that is prescribed to a community and delivered by a regional delivery team.*

*Communities First was built in part on the strength of communities playing a role in delivering solutions and local initiatives. This menu system should be maintained as guidance, not a set of rules, otherwise the local resource may fall away with many initiatives becoming stifled. Much of the work done locally, even now, will fit within the menu (e.g. youth work and financial inclusion) because it is so far reaching. Maybe a local menu of activities should be developed within communities and clusters, in response to locally identified priorities – i.e. an adaptation of the current work programme.*

*Whatever activities are undertaken, they should include a progression from current developments which have proven to be successful.*

9. How can we maintain the present knowledge and skills base of the current workforce employed within Communities First in moving toward a new structure?

*There must remain a local dedicated presence – i.e. workers and partnership. Continuity is needed; new staff in a new structure will require time to establish contacts, knowledge and experience. The existing programme is in its third year in Sketty Park and we can see the benefits from this programme which has needed the time to develop. We don't want to lose ground on our achievements to date.*

*We see issues with the need to retrain staff and retain existing knowledge under proposed changes. If existing staff are kept, there must be time given for the staff and the partnership to adapt to new ways of working within a different structure. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring we maintain the community support for the programme, including the valuable resource of volunteer time. This is at risk of being lost if we switch the programme to be something unrecognisable from its current model with new staff and less focus on partnership work at the community level.*

*The programme will not continue effectively if it is not supported by the appropriate levels of Communities First personnel. We need to ensure a sufficient level of commitment is made to each community with local delivery teams having time and focus dedicated to the area.*

10. What are the additional skills needs of the workforce proposed in section 5?

*The new model suggests nearly a 2:1 ratio of administrative staff against development staff. Staffing commitment needs to be increased in relation to on the ground work. We cannot see the need for duplication of monitoring and finance officers within the cluster; it appears that the cluster model has not reduced the administration overhead for the programme.*

*The loss of staff seems to come from delivery and this is not acceptable. The more statistically deprived pockets within clusters will command greater attention from workers putting other areas in a position where they may be neglected. The solution must involve dedicated staff time and resources for each area. Additional skills will need to be developed amongst workers who seem to have to deliver more and develop less. Existing skills within the communities and amongst paid staff should be mapped with training and development plans established.*

### **Simplified Management Structure, Co-ordination and Support.**

11. Section 5 sets out the proposed roles for Communities First Central Teams at the local authority or regional level. Do you think that these are appropriate – for example are the proposed activities comprehensive or are there additional activities which would need to be considered?

*Central teams proposals seem to be appropriate to the needs however, on the surface, there may be a level of duplication with administrative staff in clusters. There is a great risk that the programme will be controlled from a distance with managers and strategists being too far removed from the actual work that takes place within the communities. There needs to be community involvement, through partnerships, in the planning and management of work and initiatives.*

12. Section 4 sets out a potential role of Community Hubs. Do you agree that in certain areas community hubs could be considered an appropriate mechanism to manage the programme and employ staff at the individual cluster level?

*If we have one local authority based finance and administration department, with locally based development workers then the structure should work. The administrative and financial concerns should be centralised with delivery and planning of work managed within clusters.*

*Hubs can be considered to be a part of the structure, but we are concerned that Sketty Park may become lost in the process with its voice going unheard at the hands of hub managers outside of the community. A lot of good work which has been done in the area can potentially be undone. Local interest may fail and this can jeopardise future work to maintain or build upon current successes.*

13. What national support would be required by the workforce? Are the items listed in section 4 sufficient support to help communities and the workforce achieve their goals and measure progress?

*The items listed are sufficient in theory but can only be evaluated over time. We need to see direct funding and full support from government, without the complications of multiple grant recipients within the communities. Hubs may add further complications if they act as grant recipients.*

*Sketty Park has benefited from the support of local councillors and would be confident with them holding a greater role in evaluating the progress of the programme.*

14. Section 5 refers to the Communities First Trust Fund and the importance allocating funding based on the Cluster Area. What are your views on how this should be managed at Local Authority/Regional and National levels?

*The Communities First Trust Fund is currently effective except for when organisations outside of the area apply for funds without the partnership or staff's awareness. Currently a referee outside of the geographical area can be contacted with the money awarded to the applicant in complete isolation to the local programme or work. Cluster managers and partnerships should therefore be involved in the management and award of funds to ensure bids fit within the work of the programme or at least develop local participation. The process does however need to be simplified.*

*Heather Elphick*

Partnership Chair