Community Hubs in Practice: A Way Forward

Executive Summary

About this report

This publication builds on the previous report by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in partnership with Community Development Cymru (CDC) and the Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales (CREW), Communities First - A Way Forward.

The arguments presented in that report are supported here by practical examples and four detailed case studies of successful community hubs operating throughout Wales.

These community hubs are key vehicles for delivering anti-poverty and community empowerment strategies and should be central to the evolution of Communities First in its next phase as well as having broader traction beyond Communities First areas and programmes. Indeed, many community hubs are already operating in areas other than Communities First.

Background

The first report, Communities First - A Way Forward was informed by discussions and a consultation process involving a large and diverse audience to identify a way forward for the Communities First programme. Contributions to the development of The Way Forward report included Communities First Partnership members, practitioners in the field, members of voluntary and third sector organisations, and Assembly Members.
The initial report sought to chart a way forward which builds upon existing successes, overcomes the limitations inherent in the Communities First programme in the first decade and takes account of the economic and public finance circumstances likely to dominate the life of any successor programme. It sought to create an achievable vision for the future which is:

- More effective
- Compatible with planned public expenditure reductions of 10%
- Less bureaucratic

But to do so in ways which:

- Build social capital
- Enhance community involvement
- Tackle specific determinants of deprivation
- Eliminate duplication

The central argument and conclusion in the Communities First - A Way Forward report was that success has come where good community development has resulted in communities identifying their own priorities and acting upon them. In general, communities succeed when they are in control, as this sense of ownership increases participation, improves prioritisation of local problems, creates community spirit and builds trust and a belief in the delivery vehicle for community change.

These features of community development combined with the growing importance of partnership working highlight the importance of community hubs and in the first report WCVA, CDC and CREW therefore concluded that the way forward for Communities First would be to encourage:

“A network of organisations based in 100 or more of our poorest communities and focused on alleviating that poverty which will act as community hubs, and lead the way in designing and delivering community led services and initiatives”

The report also argued that community led achievements, and there are many across the Communities First programme, need to be recognised, funded and developed in the future. Feedback from our consultation exercises indicated a strong desire from community members to retain the local development support provided by Communities First teams.

This report was sent to Welsh Government Ministers and discussed with officials in advance of the Welsh Government Communities First consultation exercise (5 July - 26 September 2011). Community hubs are mentioned in the
Welsh Government’s consultation document as one of the potential delivery vehicles, though perhaps not to the extent or in as mainstream manner as we might have hoped.

Community hubs in practice

This new report therefore aims to bring to life the recommendations in our first report by selecting four case studies and models of best practice.

The report provides a critical analysis of four case studies: Caia Park Partnership, PLANED, Rhyl Youth Action Group and Valleys Kids. These case studies have been chosen as they represent excellent examples of ‘hub working’. They are geographically spread within Wales, and they demonstrate the ability of community hubs to work in diverse contexts.

They all have slightly different origins, and are at differing stages in terms of maturity and development as a community hub. So in this sense, the report builds a picture of the journey towards hub status or the development of community hubs and we hope that this will inform the Welsh Government in their understanding and appreciation of community hubs as the delivery vehicle for Communities First outcomes, and how community hubs can be nurtured and supported by government.

Whilst all the case studies are good examples of community hubs, due to the nature of community development there is no perfect formula that can be applied universally to all areas. However, by critically analysing the four case studies presented here, we are able to identify common characteristics and can determine the key foundations needed to build a successful community hub.

The report identifies what makes a community hub successful, and compiles a list of prerequisites for success which can be utilised by other partnerships looking to become a community hub. The resulting hub criteria could also be used by the Welsh Government to determine funding allocation on the basis of an organisation achieving hub status, as proposed in the original Communities First - A Way Forward report.

The theoretical approach

The research underpinning this report is informed by a good theoretical grounding and the critical analysis itself is informed by well researched theoretical evidence regarding the core principles which encompass ‘best practice’ in the delivery of regeneration programmes.
In 2005, the Wales Audit Office\(^1\) identified common features of successful regeneration, namely:

- Clear strategies based on need
- Strategic partnerships that have identified clear roles and responsibilities
- Strong leadership
- Effective community engagement

All these principles, although designed as a general framework for regeneration, can be applied to the community development aspect of regeneration. Moreover, many of these principles have been affirmed via influential commentary from the previous Labour Government through its Department for Communities and Local Government proposed regeneration framework, the Parkinson et al report on the *Credit Crunch and Regeneration: Impact and Implications*\(^2\) and the British Urban Regeneration Association report, *More for Less Britain*.\(^3\) Most recently the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) in its response to the Scottish Government's Regeneration Discussion paper has argued that:

> “The community asset based approach to regeneration via local ‘anchor’ organisations, such as housing associations and development trusts, presents significant opportunities for preventative action and more sustainable capacity building processes. This could be the basis of a radically different long term regeneration strategy”.\(^4\)

Using these criteria highlights that our examples represent strategic best practice in regeneration programme delivery and this report aims to identify the best practice aspects of community hub delivery. In order to do this we must consider the inputs, outputs and processes of each community hub, and then identify the common elements shared by these successful community hubs to infer broader lessons.

**Style of analysis**

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\(^1\) Notable Practice in Regeneration: A Report by CAG Consultants for the Audit Commission in Wales, Wales Audit Office, 2005
\(^2\) Parkinson, Ball and Blake, The Credit Crunch and Regeneration: Impact and Implications, An Independent Report for the Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009
\(^3\) A Framework for Regeneration in ‘More for Less Britain: Six Key Principles, British Urban Regeneration Association, 17 March 2010
The case studies provided in this report follow the approach developed by the Wales Audit Office report, *Notable Practice in Regeneration: A Report by CAG Consultants for the Audit Commission in Wales.* This approach allows for a detailed case study to be developed, using a logical and user friendly design.

The general layout of each case study follows this formula:

**Summary:** A brief description of how the organisation was formed and its purpose.

**Location and baseline conditions:** To give context and an insight into the challenges faced by the organisation.

**Mission statement, aims and objectives:** To understand what the organisation hopes to achieve, and identify whether it produces clear strategies based on need.

**Partnerships, funding and management:** To understand the organisation's management structure and how it works in partnership.

**Current projects:** To identify what actions the organisation is currently undertaking in the community.

**Outputs and outcomes:** To discover what the partnership has achieved and how it monitors its progress.

**Awards and recognition (Where applicable):** To identify instances of good practice.

**Conditions for success and good practice:** Summary points based on the case study highlighting best practice.

**Sources of information:** Indicates the origin of the information used.

**Conclusions**

This paper brings together case study examples of successful community hubs in operation in Wales. The field research underpinning the report follows the case study format utilised by the Welsh Audit Office’s (2005) *Notable Practice in Regeneration* report in order to provide in-depth analysis of each individual case study. By utilising the framework we have been able to identify

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1 Notable Practice in Regeneration: A Report by CAG Consultants for the Audit Commission in Wales, Wales Audit Office, 2005
certain common features which appear to represent community hub best practice.

The common features identified as representing community hub best practice are:

1. A belief in the potential of the community as a whole. All communities draw on a wide range of people with different talents and backgrounds. Community Development builds on this capacity and potential. Community engagement promotes active citizenship and change happens as a result. This ‘people’ involvement is key to sustainable long term regeneration initiatives.

2. A holistic attitude to regeneration not a narrow focus. This can be written into the organisation’s ethos via its strategic or operational plans. By stating aims and objectives to more broadly improving all aspects of the community, the hub is able to adapt to areas of particular need quickly, as and when they arise. Having a rigid pre-determined focus may dilute a community hub’s ability to adapt quickly to local need.

3. Partnership working is essential; however, a community hub should go beyond simple partnership working and facilitate local partnerships and internal community networks. The four case studies featured provide examples of this.

4. A community hub should utilise effective monitoring techniques and have the capacity to demonstrate, using examples, and its successful track record - this feature is important for three reasons:
   - Utilising effective monitoring techniques allows the community hub to understand its impacts, and allows it to build a knowledge base of what works in the community, thus facilitating the greater success from future project delivery
   - Demonstrating a successful track record is a powerful way to secure funding, and have funding continued
   - Having identifiable and well publicised successes in a community raises awareness, creates a trust in the organisation and could lead to greater levels of community engagement and future success

5. The ability to manage money and a track record of doing so - good accounting practices are often the most simplistic and effective way of achieving this, as it proves that the organisation is professional and diligent.

6. Good governance which represents local key stakeholders - community involvement with management is crucial (including residents, local businesses, public and third sectors). By utilising a management structure that allows for the inclusion of professionals, potentially from outside the community, who possess relevant expertise, prevents skills shortages or implementations gaps from limiting the effectiveness of regenerative community initiatives. It is the expertise and experience of
the users, local residents and the wider community however that is central to the long term sustainability of community hubs by ensuring that their progression and development continues to meet needs as identified by communities themselves.

7. A community hub needs to win the trust and confidence of the community - trust can be built through community involvement, well publicised activities and visible results. This is crucial to the continued success of any community organisation. By increasing the community's awareness, trust and confidence in the organisation, it is likely that participation rates will increase. This gives the organisation a greater knowledge of need in the local community, but also allows them to consider initiatives of a greater scale or scope.

8. Community Development Learning and Training - in order to determine best practice and ensure successful outcomes in relation to the above, Community Development Training and Learning is essential. All stakeholders such as trustees, local representatives, professionals as well as community members themselves should have access to relevant training based on sound Community Development values and principles. This will lead to the enhancement of skills, individual and collective learning, good governance, improvements in operational activities through the promotion of good practice at all levels.