

Briefing paper

November 2016

Resilient Communities / Communities First

1. Background

In October 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Children and Communities, Carl Sargeant AM, announced that he was ['minded' to phase out Communities First](#).

In a speech in plenary at the Welsh Assembly, he said:

'I firmly believe it is time for a new approach to building resilient communities.

While Communities First has supported people in some of our most deprived areas over the last fifteen years, I am not convinced that continuing to focus on 52 small areas is the most effective way to deliver for Wales.

'I am minded to phase out the Communities First programme while establishing a new approach to meet the challenges of the future.

'Beginning now, we will engage internal and external stakeholders on our future approach, including the proposal to phase out Communities First and how we continue to deliver Communities for Work and Lift.'

This engagement will take the form of a [digital survey](#) in order to find out directly from people what they would like.

2. The key issues

The Cabinet Secretary has described this potential new approach as focusing on the areas of employment, early years and empowerment. This includes

- ensuring communities have access to jobs and the skills and support to fill them;
- protecting children from Adverse Childhood Experiences and developing Children's Zones for Wales which will allow organisations to collaborate to improve children's lives;
- piloting Community Learning Centres, 'extending community access to services, including childcare, parenting support and family learning';
- asking Local Authorities and Public Service Boards to step into a leadership role to allow communities to have a strong infrastructure and inclusive leadership;
- Introducing measures to prevent unnecessary closures of community assets and help for communities to take ownership where appropriate.

You can find more information on Welsh Government's proposals [here](#).

However, there is of course much concern about the potential loss of Communities First and the impact it may have on communities across Wales. Also, there is considerable uncertainty over what any replacement programme may look like and how it could positively affect deprived areas. This process of engagement is not being referred to by Welsh Government as a consultation, therefore there is no consultation document.

3. WCVA statement

Following the announcement from the Cabinet Secretary, WCVA released a statement, highlighting the positive impact Communities First has had over the years, and repeating our points from a 2011 paper that any attempt to tackle poverty locally should strongly feature community and third sector design and input. Quality engagement with communities is vital to help them achieve their goals, and the trust built up over the years between Communities First teams and their communities cannot be replicated by government programmes.

You can read the full statement [here](#).

4. Engagement

Welsh Government's digital survey, under the banner of Talk Communities, is available now in two different forms:

[For people with experience of Communities First](#)

[For people without experience of Communities First](#)

Both surveys ask about support to help people find work, how you affect local decisions in your community, and support for parents when children start school.

The first survey also asks for people's views and experiences about Communities First, such as which areas of support you have received and which areas could be improved

There is currently no set deadline for either survey. The engagement period is being referred to as having two phases: pre and post-Christmas. Carl Sargeant will provide an update in the Senedd during January.

WCVA held a workshop with members of the Equalities and Human Rights Coalition on 25 November 2016 regarding Communities First and building resilient communities. It was run by the Communities First Support Service, managed by WCVA. The workshop focused on:

- The extent to which people with specific protected characteristics have successfully engaged with and benefited from Communities First

- The impact on people with specific protected characteristics of the phasing out of Communities First
- What do resilient communities look like for people with specific protected characteristics?
- How might people with specific protected characteristics contribute to a new approach to building resilient communities?

Input from this workshop will help WCVA feed into its response to the survey.

In addition the Communities First Support Service has been tasked with working with the Equalities sector to convene focus groups of people with protected characteristics, which will inform the wider Equalities Impact Assessment into the decision to phase out Communities First. The Service is also helping the Communities First workforce share its views and supporting it with local activities that clusters wish to undertake with local residents, customers and groups.

5. Other views from the sector and beyond

'Moving forwards it is vital that Welsh Government ensures that capacity, social capital, trust and respect developed through the Communities First programme is not lost during a transition or through gaps in funding - vital if people are to have the skills and opportunities to develop a genuinely community-led successor programme.' Cardiff Third Sector Council - more [here](#).

'The time to end Communities First has come. Yet scrapping it would be a big loss. There are many excellent schemes run by Communities First, and closing them down would be a further blow to communities that are already reeling from cuts to public services. It's unlikely that large-scale government schemes that offer similar services will have the reach or trust of people in deprived areas.' Victoria Winckler, Bevan Foundation - more [here](#).

'If we want resilience we need to start with what is already there and we need to develop processes of consultation and engagement that will build the services that truly matter to people struggling with poverty and its effect in their communities.' Dr Eva Elliott, Cardiff University of Health and Wellbeing.

'Community members have been devastated at the news it could go. If it goes, people will feel the impact of that loss.' Su Wade, Communities First STAR Cluster.

6. Call to action

WCVA will be responding to the survey.

If you would like your thoughts to be considered as part of our response, please email David Cook, WCVA Policy Officer, on dcook@wcva.org.uk by Tuesday 6 December 2016.

Following the closure of the survey, WCVA will disseminate further Welsh Government communication on Communities First and resilient communities, informing, engaging and consulting with the sector where necessary.