

**PLAID CYMRU RESPONSE**  
**TO CONSULTATION ON COMMUNITIES NEXT**  
**26.04.08**

Plaid Cymru welcome the 'One Wales' Government's commitment to develop the Communities First programme into Communities Next. We agree with a bottom-up community led approach to community development and supported the initial Communities First scheme on that basis.

Plaid Cymru believe that regeneration should be seen as cross-portfolio issue and should be delivered as such and responsibility should be put on different departments and service providers to report on how they are working to this agenda. It is important to reinforce that funding for regeneration and Communities Next is not funding for public services which are a statutory duty, but funding for our most deprived areas over and above these services.

Communities First was a £131million anti poverty initiative that used the Welsh index of multiple deprivation to identify the initial 100 electoral wards that would receive support, but in 2005 the way deprivation was measured through the Welsh Index of Deprivation was changed and it is very difficult therefore to compare current figures with the original indicators to determine how successful the programme has been.

In order to assess the success of Communities Next, measurable and realistic targets must be set for the programme at the start of its term.

For example, creating jobs was set at the outset as an aim of Communities First, but 7 years later figures are unavailable. This reinforces the point that the targets need to be measurable, agreed and achievable. This is not to say that the set targets should not be ambitious, as there is a clear need for regeneration in our most deprived areas as defined by the WIMD. We agree with the concept of SMART targets as set out in the consultation document.

It is also important to avoid artificial outcomes, especially in terms of providing for young people. Meaningful opportunities are sometimes not measurable, and local Partnerships and the WAG need to be realistic on what can be achieved. There should be a timetable in place to agree local strategies or action plans. These should be set locally and agreed nationally.

If the vision framework is revised by adding child poverty, income generation and economic inactivity as is stated in the consultation document, then clear examples must be provided to the Partnerships of how they can achieve these goals. Also these targets should not be allowed to abstractly claim to reduce crime or anti social behaviour.

With regards to child poverty, there is concern that to include the new theme of child poverty within Communities Next could create the possibility for disjointed delivery of the WAG's child poverty agenda across Wales. Questions arise with regards to how the Government will administer its One Wales child poverty agenda in parallel to the new child poverty Communities

Next theme. We don't want to see those people in one area receiving differing advice and information with regards to child poverty to people in areas outside the Communities Next programme. It must be remembered that over half of the children living in poverty in Wales live outside Communities First/Next areas. Child poverty can't be ring fenced, and the agenda is much wider than these areas.

There is a need to streamline how partnerships across Wales record and judge their projects. Ensuring consistency of data is essential in order to correctly plan, monitor and evaluate. We need to have confidence in the programme, and consistent accurate data will contribute to this. Support is also needed to professionalize the programme— both in partnerships and in projects. There is a clear need for better management of performance.

Plaid Cymru agree with changing to 'Communities Next' in terms of administration in order to show a distinct change of direction and progression from Communities First. We also agree in keeping the name of 'Communities First' at local level, it is imperative that money isn't spent on unnecessary re-branding, but there is also a need to ensure that confusion is avoided and that partners are aware of the change in emphasis and delivery.

Sufficient capacity should be built in the programme to facilitate partnerships working together if there are mutual benefits in doing so. It is important to acknowledge that there are many examples of good work within various partnerships, and need plenty of capacity to share good practice.

Each partnership needs to be aware of good examples of work from across Wales, and have the ability to access relevant material and expertise. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. This needs to be done through more than just a temporary website.

We acknowledge that partnerships develop at different speeds but now 7 years in, there should be a minimum standard set, and monitored on yearly basis. The Communities Next partnerships are able to benefit from the initial start up investment during first few years of the Communities First programme.

There is a real need to ensure that citizen engagement is meaningful and not merely a ticking the box exercise, but is a means to enable local people to be part of the solution. Young people need to be more involved in the Partnerships as involvement figures at the moment are very low.

Communities of Interest have worked reasonably well and we support the idea of looking at themes. Community First Trust Fund has also been an useful tool.

Difficulties have emerged that need to be addressed on programme bending. It is simply not happening in many areas, and many partnerships do not know how to 'programme bend'. There is a need to develop incentives to get statutory organisations to the table and focus on regeneration. There should

be a duty placed on local authorities to pull everyone together, as it is currently too easy for local authorities to opt out of involvement in Communities First. Local Authorities should also provide Partnerships with a checklist of services that are current and could be offered locally within and accessible to the Communities Next areas. The outcome fund will only be a success if all agencies are signed up to its implementation, and is backed by the service providers.

There is a clear need to ensure that Partnerships have the right emphasis. Currently many are top heavy in terms of administration and light on project money. This has massive consequences on how much these Partnerships can achieve.

Citizens Advice Bureaux needs to be included into the Communities Next programme as it was excluded from communities first. It is a voluntary and independent organisation that can provide effective support and advice for those within Communities First areas. We should remember that the Bureaux is not a National organisation, but a series of locally run charities. Citizens Advice is best placed to assist communities with income generation, financial capability and training people to go back to work through the Advice Training Network. With the centralisation of DWP services and diminishing local presence, CAB could play an effective role in ensuring that these communities thrive.

100 Communities First areas will remain as Communities Next areas. There is concern therefore that there is no incentive for areas to seek to progress or develop, as they will always be applicable for support under Communities Next. This does not lead to a fluid system, whereby new areas may apply for Communities Next monies, or current areas develop to such an extent that they do not need WAG support anymore. We need to construct a system with clear outcomes for Communities Next areas, and a way to mark success and progress. Allowing the 100 areas to eternally remain Communities Next areas does not help those areas, or the rest of Wales.

Many of those working within Communities First structures believe that the emphasis on social enterprise in Communities Next is to be questioned. While they agree with the sentiment behind the change in emphasis, they express concern that Communities First areas, by their very nature, will find it hard to sustain such enterprises, and ensure that they are sustainable- without additional support. For example, one Communities First Centre has a nearly new Shop but it has only made a minimal amount of money during its first year. The centre must now close the shop and rent the space out to a local business- undermining the concept of creating community space, and community actions. They also believe that soft loans for community groups are unworkable as part of the social enterprise agenda for Communities Next. Community spaces must be protected.

Social enterprise must be developed on a scale that is sustainable. Partnerships should have the ability and opportunity to work together to create businesses, to share ideas and expertise.

Despite problems that have occurred during the Communities First programme, Plaid Cymru is committed to ensuring that Communities Next is a success.

**Nerys Evans**  
**Plaid spokesperson on Regeneration**  
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