

CF 10

Ymchwiliad i dlodi yng Nghymru: Cymunedau yn Gyntaf – yr hyn a ddysgwyd
Inquiry into poverty in Wales: Communities First – lessons learnt

Ymateb gan: Diverse Cymru

Response from: Diverse Cymru

Organisation Background

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payment, self directed and independent living support for both adults and children in Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion; a BME mental health befriending and community support service in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan; family support, welfare benefit, income maximisation, tribunal, and general advocacy in the Vale of Glamorgan and for families with a disabled child in Cardiff.

We produce information resources on a wide-range of equality issues, including for people affected by inequality across all protected characteristic groups and information for organisations and service providers; provide a conduit for service user voices to decision-makers throughout Wales through our engagement work; run citizen involvement projects for people from protected characteristic groups and carers; provide consultancy services on integrating equality in organisations and equality impact assessments and deliver a range of equality-related training courses. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access to equality impact assessments.

This submission focuses specifically impacts on people from protected characteristic (equality) groups. We would welcome any opportunity to assist with the development of specific work programmes and actions, and with engaging service users in future. We are happy for our response to this consultation to be published.

Inquiry Submission

Summary

1. Deprived communities in Wales will be adversely affected should the Communities First scheme be phased out without services being put in place to

substitute the scheme's programmes and activities. In particular, those from protected characteristic groups, will be negatively impacted.

2. Diverse Cymru recommend that the Welsh Government:
 1. Continue existing projects where possible and projects are valued by participants or communities.
 2. Fund future tackling poverty and community resilience schemes.
 3. Provide activities with specialist support available, for example personal assistants/carers.
 4. Targeted support and services should be available for people from each protected characteristic group.
 5. Increase awareness of what facilities and schemes are available.
 6. Provide support and services to people living in poverty wherever they live in Wales.
 7. Tailor services and schemes to local areas.
 8. Use service users' views to take positive steps to improve the services provided.

Involvement

3. Diverse Cymru held a focus group with 15 participants from diverse communities in Cardiff to discuss the impacts of potentially phasing out Communities First. The recommendations in this paper are framed around what the Welsh Government could do to ensure that people from protected characteristic groups are not negatively affected.
4. We also held an engagement event involving 34 individuals and 4 organisations across the protected characteristics and carers on 21st February 2017. Some views gathered in this event are particularly relevant to the future of Communities First and tackling poverty and have been included in this response.

Negative impacts of ending Communities First

5. There was a real concern expressed by Communities First service users that the removal of scheme would cause negative impacts for all age groups, and especially for different protected characteristic groups.
6. This included:
 - Increased levels of isolation, boredom, and violence in the community.
 - Withdrawal of funds from areas of deprivation would make activities too costly for the local people.
 - Detrimental impacts on the mental health of those no longer receiving community support or services.
 - The trust and relationships that have been built up with diverse members of the community will be lost, especially those from protected characteristic groups.
 - There would be a decrease in promotion of the Welsh language.
 - Loss of tailored and targeted employment support to the community.

- A lack of activities such as training, self-help groups, seminars, community education, exercise groups, social activities, transport, accessible transport and other services which are currently provided under Communities First.

Conclusion

7. The concerns of the communities in Communities First areas must be addressed. Safeguards, new opportunities and services should be put in place in order to plug any gaps in service provision. Otherwise there is likely to be a large detrimental effect on community well-being, cohesion and safety, particularly for people from protected characteristic groups.

Recommendations

8. We recommend that the following actions are taken to mitigate any impacts should Communities First be phased out:
 1. Continue existing projects where possible to avoid loss of trust and to minimise impacts on service users.
 2. Funding future tackling poverty and community resilience schemes is important to replace the gaps in provision left by the removal of Communities First.
 3. Activities should ensure specialist support is available for access requirements, language requirements (including sign language) and tailored, individual support.
 4. Specialised and targeted support services and activities should be made available for people from all protected characteristic groups.
 5. Increase awareness of what facilities and schemes are available going forward.
 6. Provide support and services to people living in poverty wherever they live in Wales.
 7. Tailor services and schemes to local areas.
 8. Intergenerational projects and support are vital ways of improving community cohesion and providing community activities. These should not be lost with Communities First ending.
 9. Use service users' views to take positive steps in improving the services.
 10. In relation to early years, additional information, training and awareness should be made available in order to empower parents and involve them in their child/children's education. This could include out school-time sports clubs and homework clubs.
 11. Equality training, information and support should be provided for employers to address barriers to employment.
 12. Training and volunteering opportunities should be continued following the end of Communities First, especially for refugees who aren't yet allowed to work in the UK.

13. Programmes should include building the skills of people within communities with a view to future employment as community development professionals.
14. Lifelong learning and community education opportunities should continue for people of all ages after Communities First. Currently a lot of community education opportunities and short courses are funded through Communities First.
15. Digital inclusion training, especially tailored training for older people and disabled people who use accessibility settings or assistive software is vital to tackling poverty and ensuring equitable access to services.
16. Make sure that any replacement schemes take into account the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 so that individuals may have quality of life.
17. Services and support should be available in multiple languages, including BSL, and in a range of accessible formats.
18. Social activities and opportunities in communities are vital to reducing isolation and providing support, especially for older and disabled people. These need to be varied and not merely traditional opportunities, for example having rock choirs and walking groups for older and disabled people.
19. There is a general lack of money management and financial capability support in communities. Many projects that do exist are run by Communities First projects. Financial capability and money management training, advice and support should be supported across Wales to both prevent and tackle poverty.