



CABINET – 4TH OCTOBER 2017

SUBJECT: PHASING OUT OF COMMUNITIES FIRST, PROPOSALS FOR REVISED WELSH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND ASSOCIATED STAFF RESTRUCTURE

REPORT BY: ACTING DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 1.1 The attached report, which was presented to the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 19th September 2017, outlined the phasing out of the Communities First programme and the proposed implementation of the Legacy and Employment Fund, together with the proposed departmental re-structure and recruitment period which will enable a seamless transition to the Welsh Government's (WG) revised priorities and associated funding. Members were asked to consider if the proposals detailed within the report are appropriate and effective against the funding and policy criteria offered by WG, and their views were sought on the approach to the phasing out of Communities First and the proposed approach to the new programme, associated milestones and staff structure, prior to presentation of the report to Cabinet for consideration.
- 1.2 Officers outlined the background of the programme and the current staff structure, details of which were contained in the report and its appendices. Since 1st April 2012, Communities First has been a Community Focused Tackling Poverty Programme, concentrating on the most deprived communities in Wales. The programme is funded by WG and has an annual budget of £2.902m. On 14th February 2017, following a period of engagement with communities and stakeholders, it was confirmed that Communities First would be phased out between 31st March 2017 and 1st April 2018, and that funding will continue at 70% of 2016/17 levels until 31st March 2018.
- 1.3 It was explained that 2017/18 is intended to be a transition period which secures the legacy of Communities First whilst moving to a fresh approach to building resilient communities. Central to this approach will be the "Three E's" (employability, empowerment and early years). A full restructure of the Community Regeneration Team will be required in order to continue delivering the Communities for Work and LIFT programmes, as well as implementing the new Welsh Government initiatives, which will be funded from 1st April 2018. Both the Employment Support Fund and Legacy Fund (which are successors to the existing Communities First programme) were explained in more detail throughout the report.
- 1.4 Members were also advised of the potential impact of these changes to third sector organisations. The Communities First programme has contributed to the funding of a number of posts across Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), Groundwork Caerphilly and Senghenydd Youth Drop In Centre (SYDIC), and a reduction in the current funding is likely to have a major impact upon the Council's voluntary sector partners. Additionally, from 1st April 2018, it is only Local Authorities that will be awarded the new Legacy and Employment Support Funds.
- 1.5 In response to a Member's query regarding the focus of the new programme, Officers explained that it would promote access to employment and encourage users to gain sustainable employment. Discussion took place regarding the WG policies to promote

economic and employment opportunities in Wales and it was explained that WG are due to publish their economic strategy in the near future which will set out their plans moving forward. Members were also reminded of the benefits that the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal will bring to the area, including the Metro transport network which will improve access to work opportunities. Members also referenced the strong economic prospects within Cardiff and expressed a need for these to be more evenly distributed across the county borough and wider region.

- 1.6 Discussion took place regarding the success of the Communities First programme within the county borough. Officers explained that Caerphilly is regarded as having one of the most successful programmes within Wales, having secured the highest number of people into employment, together with other positive outcomes.
- 1.7 Queries were received regarding the impact on staff in view of the funding reductions and proposed restructure. It was explained that some Communities First staff have secured alternative employment in recent months, and therefore a number of posts detailed within the proposed restructure would be subject to a recruitment process. It was confirmed that a number of the Communities First-funded positions within the voluntary sector have also been vacated.
- 1.8 Reference was made to the Communities First budget for 2016/17 and the amounts allocated to salaries and projects. Officers explained that the budget allocation is set by WG and that there has been a need to secure additional funding to cover salary payments and transport costs associated with the programme.
- 1.9 Following consideration of the report, the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee unanimously recommended to Cabinet that for the reasons contained therein, the approach to the phasing out of Communities First, and the approach to the new programmes, associated milestones and staff structure be approved.
- 1.10 Members are asked to consider the recommendation.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Report to Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 19th September 2017 - Agenda Item 8