

CF 17

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

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bro Morgannwg

Response from: Vale of Glamorgan Council

The Vale of Glamorgan Council (VoGC) acts as the Lead Delivery Body (LDB) for the Barry Communities First (BCF) Cluster and has acted in this role since the formation of the Cluster approach in 2013.

For the purpose of this response, we also consulted with a number of partners via our BCF Partnership Board at a workshop on 11/5/17.

A. What worked and didn't work about the Communities First (CF) programme;

What worked;

The initial Welsh Government (WG) Communities First Cluster programme Guidance published in 2012 with proposals for setting up the new programme in 2013 was good. The Guidance provided clear direction about how best to engage with the community, stakeholders and partners in order to ensure that the most effective projects would be created and helped to lessen the chance of duplication. The Guidance facilitated the creation of effective projects that addressed local and WG priorities. This enabled good partnership working to flourish at the outset, often delivering on joint outcomes with partners such as Families First.

The Guidance allowed for a large degree of flexibility in how each LDB managed the Cluster programme. In VoGC, the BCF team is managed by the Regeneration and Planning Dept. which we believe is the most appropriate line-management structure for a 'tackling poverty' programme that has an emphasis on Prosperity and employability as the best means of supporting people to move out of poverty.

At the outset, the BCF programme was therefore aligned strongly with VoGC priorities and integrated with other Regeneration workstreams. It also allowed BCF to maximise subsequent opportunities in this area e.g. in respect of the WG's 'Vibrant and Viable Places' programme.

Having a specific 'tackling poverty' targeted approach helped structure projects and provided a platform to evidence outcomes/achievements. All partners bought into this process as it was reasonably clear and transparent. Further to this, adoption of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) process also helped keep the ongoing measurement of progress simple but effective.

We have evidence that people wanted to move into the BCF Cluster area as a result of a positive 'tackling poverty' programme becoming available that addressed their needs e.g. in order to access our Healthy Communities projects.

The CF Cluster Guidance highlighted the importance of engagement and involvement and the WG has maintained this focus throughout the life of the programme. The WG also increased the focus on those deemed 'hard to reach'.

Whereas other programmes and public bodies have struggled to engage with the 'hardest to reach', BCF generally succeeded in this area and supported partners and stakeholders who wished to take advantage of these links. For example, VoGC's Adult and Community Learning team were able to increase the number of people it enlisted onto their courses from deprived communities by linking in more effectively with the BCF team and its projects.

This in turn increased the amount of partnership work going on within Barry, as BCF sought to work with those 'expert partners' who already engaged with those considered 'hard to reach' and they in turn became our 'champions' for working with their service-users.

BCF events have always been well attended and showed good engagement with residents. For example, at our annual Jobs Fair, we regularly attract over 850 to 1200 people. As we always organise events such as this in partnership with local Agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, other organisations and Agencies have benefitted from this high level of engagement.

Partners and stakeholders considered the CF programme to be well marketed, nationally and locally, with the WG allowing the VoGC and BCF flexibility in how the programme was marketed locally. When asked, partners have stated that in their view, most residents knew of the programme, associated projects and/or CF branding.

Year upon year, staff and managers have had more understanding of the Guidance, WG priorities and how to work more effectively with partners in order to make the programme more effective.

Involvement of the community (individuals and groups) in the BCF programme has been extremely beneficial and improved the effectiveness of the programme. For example, inviting residents to sit on the BCF Partnership Board and be involved in the decision-making process. This added value to the work that was being carried out.

What didn't work;

The new Cluster programme in 2013 could have been given a different title to the previous CF programme to establish the fact that it was, in essence, a different programme. Whereas one was a generic community development programme, the new Cluster programme specifically focussed on 'tackling poverty'. This distinction was not made and did not help the programme progress.

Further to this, the WG should have fully rebranded the programme in order to move forward properly, because partners felt that the previous phase of the CF programme left a 'stigma' and that a minority of CF Partnerships in other parts of Wales gained national attention for poor operating practices. This gave a poor impression and left a negative legacy behind.

At the inception of the new Cluster programme in 2013, the WG could have allocated research/academic support to the new Clusters right at the outset, establishing

independent 'baselines' as the basis for an ongoing evaluation to allow the CF programme to be adequately measured and assessed, both on an annual and full-term basis. This opportunity has now been lost, with previous evaluations considering the 'old' programme and subsequent evaluations playing 'catch-up' and therefore missing a great deal of evidence.

Apart from the first year (2013-14), the WG did not provide the programme with any certainty beyond a 12 month period. This did not provide any confidence to the LDB, partners, staff or the public that the programme would continue beyond a limited period of time.

As a result of the above and some of the inadequate planning and timescales for the creation of annual plans, it was difficult for the LDB and partners to plan the CF programme adequately to coincide with other planning cycles and demands, such as work undertaken for the VoGC Corporate Plan. Inadequate time to prepare plans also undermined community engagement considerably, especially at the start of the programme, with our partnership board not having a realistic time to make amendments before submissions.

Partners and stakeholders found the geographical boundaries not necessarily 'fair', too small and divisive.

The WG provided a huge amount of Performance Measures (PM) for Clusters to focus on, many of which were repetitive, difficult to measure and did not provide an adequate framework for addressing the 'tackling poverty' agenda.

In addition, the WG did not consider how to align the CF PM Framework with other 'tackling poverty' programmes; for example in Families First, Flying Start and Supporting People. Connections and potential synergies between all these projects were not immediately made clear by the WG until two years into the CF Cluster programme. When work finally got underway in addressing this deficiency, the positive subsequent work undertaken by LDB's and partners was then discarded.

B. How local authorities will decide which projects continue to receive funding after June 2017;

The VoGC aims to follow the recommendations made by the WG in the document, 'Communities Transition and Strategy Guidance' relating to the Communities First and transitional arrangements for the 2017-18 financial year, published in March 2017. We envisage that this will be a similar process to how the BCF programme was first created i.e. researching the issues and then consulting with partners, stakeholders and our communities in order to achieve a positive outcome for the end of the programme and smooth transition to effective use of the Legacy Fund and Employability Grant.

This process has already begun in our consultation work with the other 'tackling poverty' programmes and their respective Boards. For example, we've held two workshops to explore 'legacy' issues. We're also working with the WCVA CF Support team to 'map and gap' our employment provision in Barry and the wider Vale to support any plans we propose to the WG over the course of the next year.

This process is assisted by the fact that a number of partners are already involved in joint delivery arrangements. For example, our Putting Families First project is currently jointly delivered with Families First funding.

Negotiations have also begun with the Public Services Board (PSB) to further involve them in this process, so that by the Autumn of 2017, all partners as suggested in the Guidance will have been included in the decision-making process. Ultimately though, it will be the prerogative of the LDB to ensure both the Legacy Fund and Employability Grant are used to support VoGC priorities and strategic plans.

BCF has already been working towards a model of self-sustainability for most of those projects considered 'at risk', i.e. those projects not directly supporting the employability agenda but worthy of continuation.

C. How different poverty reduction programmes (Communities for Work, Lift, Flying Start etc.) will change as a result of the end of Communities First;

VoGC does not have a LIFT project, but BCF has been working with the other 'tackling poverty' programmes in VoGC for some time, within the Poverty Alignment Group (PAG). This has ensured all partners involved are aware of these proposals and actively included in consultation about the future of the BCF programme on a regular basis.

Locally, due to the excellent working relationships within the PAG, PAG members are amenable to adjusting their provision to account for the demise of the CF programme where their individual Guidance allows. VoGC as the LDB will ultimately decide which programme will be the best 'fit' for the Legacy Fund and Employability Fund future projects. However, it would be helpful for the WG to clarify expectations for these programmes as soon as possible.

Please note these views are those of officers and this response has not been formally endorsed by the BCF partnership nor the VoGC.