

Report To: Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 30th July 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Hugh Irving, Lead Member for Customers & Libraries/
Strategic Planning Team Manager, Liz Grieve

Report Author: Rhys Burton, Programme Manager, The Co-operative Group.

Title: North Denbighshire Communities First

1. What is the report about?

The current and foreseeable delivery of the Welsh Government's 'Communities First' programme in North Denbighshire by the Co-operative Group as the Lead Delivery Body for the programme in the county.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information regarding the progress being made within Communities First – to include the work also taking place within the Pupil Deprivation Grant that has also been secured for 2015/16. The report also outlines a further request being made by the Welsh Government to the Co-operative to participate in the 'Communities For Work' project that has recently been awarded European Funding.

3. What are the Recommendations?

To accept the report and provide assistance to the Communities First programme and Communities For Work project in identifying further links with council programmes where routes into employment may be provided for residents not presently in employment.

4. Report details

Communities First is one of the programmes under the Welsh Government's Anti-Poverty Strategy for Wales and has been awarded £666,020 for work in the North Denbighshire Cluster in 2015 / 16. Much of the costs for the North Denbighshire Cluster are for staff costs and for work commissioned to other local partners.

[Please see the attached budget for further detail of our funding]

Work supported by Communities First in Denbighshire is specifically intended for those within a defined cluster area against outcomes set by the Welsh Government. Cluster delivery does not require project work to be undertaken across all outcome measures, but Communities First clusters are required to identify which outcome measures they intend to target and for the Lead Delivery Body (i.e. the managing body) to annually agree these with Welsh Government.

Cluster activities are now commonly understood in the context of 3 delivery themes – these being:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Prosperous Communities; and

- Education & Learning

The focus within Health and Wellbeing can be simplified into common objectives such as (i) a better nutrition and diet; (ii) healthier / more active lifestyle; (iii) better understandings of health determinants by individuals / families; (iv) greater ability to cope with life challenges and have stronger emotional wellbeing; (v) have a better start to life and to long term health; and (vi) earlier identification of factors affecting personal health or the earlier identification of health issues.

The focus on Prosperous Communities can be simplified into common objectives such as (i) debt and money management support; (ii) providing work ready support and training; (iii) CV and job search / job application advice and help; (iv) mentoring and support for those with increased barriers to employment; (v) digital awareness and support to develop online capability; (vi) support with accessing key services (such as drug and alcohol help or mental health support)

The focus within Education and Learning can be simplified into common objectives such as (i) helping schools reduce truancy and improve attendance levels; (ii) raising learning aspiration and the desire of individuals and families to achieve in education; (iii) to support adult literacy and numeracy; (iv) increasing family and community in learning activities and leading to training and qualification; (v) Support Key Stage achievement at school through activities and work that builds upon the required skills and which gives additional context to learning (e.g. Lego and computer programming skills)

[Please see the attached cluster area map which indicates our geographic coverage. Please also see the attached Outcomes Framework for further detail]

The delivery of Communities First is understood within the context of collaboration / co-operation with many partners from both the statutory and community sectors. It is understood that programme impact will realistically be achieved by working with others.

Community Involvement remains an important element in the composition of the programme and there is an emphasis on engaging residents – both as ‘customers’ (i.e. recipients or beneficiaries of services or projects) and also as people who might assist with project delivery and development such as volunteers or in partnering as a community organisation.

Developing an active community involvement remains a challenge for us in our work in North Denbighshire, but we have seen progress and have also made some structural changes to our Communities First team in order to provide 2 part time posts as Senior Community Inclusion Officers.

The national transition of Communities First into Cluster areas (composing between 10,000 – 15,000 population sizes) in 2012 saw our Communities First work grow from its original South West Rhyl area to a number of ‘new’ communities with no previous engagement in the programme. In most other clusters across Wales the composition of cluster areas was largely constructed by amalgamating existing Communities First communities into a joint cluster area. However, this was not the case for our Denbighshire cluster and we have faced the added challenge of building and developing relationships with residents and community organisations across the

extended cluster area and of 'catching up' in terms of the access we have in these areas compared to areas where the programme has already been active for 10 years.

Communities First still includes elements of community development, but has had a shift in focus since 2012 which places our community support activity in the context of delivering the outcomes that have been agreed with Welsh Government. More commonly we need to define our community development and support work in the context of projects and objectives we are targeted with trying to achieve. To some extent this is limiting and can be commonly misunderstood by residents familiar with the previous programme purpose and also for agencies – some of whom who perhaps still prefer the concept of Communities First being focussed fully on community development.

In terms of the new programme structure and purpose – we now submit Delivery Plan and finance tables to the Welsh Government in order to secure cluster budgets. In previous periods of the Communities First programme funding has been secured for up to 3 years and has required an annual plan to confirm the release of yearly budgets. We are now anticipating another 1 year arrangement. In any event, we are required to return quarterly finance and project returns to the Welsh Government – with project reports being made on the online Aspireview system.

In addition to the Communities First budget, we have also been awarded £29,515 for a Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) project that we are providing to 7 schools which is being delivered through Education officers within the council. The funds secured by us are matched at a further £29,515 by the schools and the PDG work is being delivered through two Emotional Resilience Officers and focussed on wellbeing and strategies to cope with behaviours.

[Please see the attached Communities First Cluster Structure Chart – that also indicates commissioned work and that includes the PDG posts. Please also see the attached budget for our PDG delivery]

Funding for Communities First beyond March 2016 is not yet known and work is being progressed within Welsh Government for a decision for the 2016/17 period and which reflects the Assembly May election. However, there has been a recent European funding approval for the 'Communities For Work' programme that Welsh Government has submitted with Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) support for delivery in all 52 Communities First clusters across Wales. The programme is planned for 3 years and all existing Lead Delivery Bodies are being asked to manage this programme alongside their delivery of Communities First and to co-locate project and programme delivery.

The objectives of the Communities 4 Work project is to help people into employment and is to be delivered through 5 staff members within each cluster area. There are to be 2 Employment Advisors, that are directly employed and managed by DWP, and a further 3 officers to be employed by the Lead Delivery Body. These 3 posts are made up of: 2 Mentor positions and 1 Triage worker. It is understood that work is to be targeted at those with difficulties in gaining employment and that there should be (on average) 6 people entering employment each month. All Lead Delivery Bodies are presently reviewing recent documents from the Welsh Government and discussing implementation arrangements.

Without further clarity on the main Communities First budget for 2016/17 it is difficult to see how any Lead Delivery Body can fully plan its role and cluster level management of the Communities For Work project. However, we are anticipating further information on this soon and are in any case beginning to compose our Delivery Plan submission for 2016/17 – which we think may be required by October. It is likely that Lead Delivery Bodies will be advised to submit proposals which are similar in funding size and in project delivery terms to that which is being delivered in the current year.

In the context of our bid submissions and the involvement of the Co-operative as Lead Delivery Body it is of important that I especially note that the Management Charges within our cluster submissions do not generate any profit to the Co-operative. The costs shown are for 2 purposes. The first is to meet external costs incurred by us in managing our cluster (such as an external auditor statement of our accounts – as required by Welsh Government); and the second is to accrue the funds required to meet any staff redundancy costs through programme closure. There are other costs associated with the running of the programme, but which the Co-operative absorbs into our daily business because of our size and scale (e.g. Payroll, Human Resource and Legal functions).

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Communities First targets the areas of highest deprivation and is looking to make impacts in these communities across the 3 programme themes. Partnership arrangements and joint working offers much common interest that can contribute to the council's corporate priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

N/A except that Communities First is providing additional resources to project areas agreed with the local authority – such as the PDG work within schools.

We wish to record our thanks and gratitude to Denbighshire County Council for assisting us with a secondment to our Cluster Manager post from September 2013 to December 2014. While appreciating all previous and subsequent support from council colleagues, we are especially grateful for the support during the secondment period – in what was an important 'set-up' period for the new Communities First programme.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report

Equality and Diversity considerations for Communities First rests within the policy framework of the Co-operative as the Lead Delivery Body

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

Widespread community and agency consultation was undertaken during 2012 for the Delivery Plan submissions to Welsh Government for the 2013 – 2015 period.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Finance responsibility rests with the Co-operative as the Lead Delivery Body

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The management risks and responsibilities for cluster delivery remains with the Co-operative as the Lead Delivery Body.

- 11. Power to make the Decision**
N/A