

Regeneration and poverty in Wales: Evidence and policy review

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Final report

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Current policies on tackling poverty	2
3. Current policies on regeneration.....	4
3.1. Prosperous communities	4
3.2. Learning communities	4
3.3. Healthier communities	4
4. Evidence of the impact of regeneration programmes.....	5
4.1. Communities First.....	5
4.2. Physical and economic regeneration	10
4.3. Cymorth and Flying Start	11
5. Discussion	14
6. Conclusion.....	16
7. References	17

Introduction

This report reviews the evidence on the impact of regeneration on poverty in Wales. It is part of a wider research project for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that looks at the impact of regeneration on poverty across the UK. A main report – *Regeneration and poverty: policy and practice review* - comprehensively summarises all the evidence across the UK. This report on Wales is one of three smaller reviews produced for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland respectively to ensure full discussion of the distinct approaches across the UK with regard to regeneration as a devolved policy area¹. Details of the methods used to review the available evidence are provided in the main report.

Wales has had a different approach to regeneration than the other countries of the UK, reflecting the increasing devolution of decision making over the period considered here and which dates back to the 1965 and the creation of the Welsh Office. Since 1999 Wales has had a devolved National Assembly and a government with devolved powers over many areas of domestic policy including regeneration. Welfare benefits and some of the big macro economic levers such as fiscal and monetary policy are still controlled from London. The powers of the National Assembly for Wales have gradually grown since 1999 and now include primary legislation within its 'areas of competence'. The Welsh Labour Party has either formed the Welsh Government on its own or in coalition with another party, once with the Welsh Liberal Democrats and once with Plaid Cymru. The combination of increasing powers and the pattern of political direction mean that regeneration policy has diverged substantially from that in England.

The aim of this report is to examine the area-based regeneration policies that have been aimed at poverty in Wales in order to assess evidence related to the success or otherwise of these area-based programmes in alleviating poverty. The report begins with a review of anti-poverty policy in Wales and then examines the three main strands of regeneration activity in terms of their objectives, processes and their impact on poverty. The analysis has been hindered by the lack of measurable outcomes for most programmes and it has not been possible to show that area-based regeneration programmes have had a positive impact on poverty in Wales.

¹ The main report and three smaller country reviews are all available at <http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/>

Current policies on tackling poverty

The Welsh government has a poverty strategy, but it is constrained by the lack of control over welfare benefits and the key economic levers of taxation policy. The current Tackling Poverty Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2013) focuses on three objectives and sets of actions:

- the prevention of poverty: actions here are focused on improving educational attainment of children living in deprived communities through the Flying Start programme and other programmes such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant to provide extra funding for deprived pupils
- helping people into work: actions involve training and employment opportunities and the Economic Growth Fund
- mitigating the impact of poverty: actions include the Supporting People Fund which provides funding for housing support services, improving primary health care, credit unions and financial advice services.

These three strands were explicitly linked to the revised objectives of the Communities First regeneration programme in 2012 (Welsh Government, 2013a) with the first strand linked to the objective of learning communities, the second to prosperous communities and the third to healthier communities.

Therefore, the Communities First programme, first initiated in 2001, has been the main area-based regeneration programme with specific anti-poverty objectives. The programme has evolved over time, but currently involves 52 clusters that cover the ten per cent most disadvantaged areas of Wales as defined in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Spending on the programme was £214m between 2001 and 2009 (National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee, 2010) with 65 per cent of this allocated to staffing costs in the partnerships.

There are two other strands of major regeneration activity in Wales that fit the definition taken for this study of being area-based and poverty-focused. The second strand of regeneration activity, which has been followed in varying forms since 1986, is the area-based economic development work of first the Welsh Development Agency and later the Welsh Government. This has taken a number of forms including specific area regeneration schemes such as those in Cardiff Bay, Barry Waterfront and Newport as well as programmes in the Heads of the Valleys and areas in North Wales. There were seven regeneration programme areas, although these are being phased out under a new regeneration framework Vibrant and Viable Places. This strand has recently been linked to the poverty strategy and its three poverty objectives as outlined above (Welsh Government, 2013b).

The third strand is Cymorth - the Children and Youth Support Fund, initiated in 2003, which is a scheme to help children and young people in the most disadvantaged communities. Cymorth took the place of the Sure Start programme in Wales and brought together a number of related programmes. Flying Start, a programme for under three year-olds was instigated in 2007 and is specifically mentioned in the Poverty Action Plan. Both programmes were aimed at alleviating child poverty and both were area based. Flying Start is aimed at the prevention of poverty through the increase in pupil attainment and is being expanded. Cymorth was included in the local authority general revenue support grant from 2010/11 and so is no longer ring-fenced.

In addition to these targeted area-based approaches Wales has also benefited from European Union Structural Funds programmes (the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) that have funded some physical regeneration activity as well as employment and economic activity within Wales. Between 2000 and 2006 Wales received £1.8 billion of European funding (£3.8bn including matched funding) plus a further £1.8bn in the 2007-2013 programme round. EU Structural Fund programmes tend to be evaluated at the broad programme level rather than at lower spatial scales so these programmes are not included in the analysis of area-based initiatives that follows.

Any attempt to assess the impact of these schemes on poverty is complicated by the lack of clearly specified objectives and outcome data. There have been official evaluations of the programmes, but each one has highlighted the lack of outcome measures and of clear objectives. Following devolution, there has been a lack of analytical capacity within the Welsh Government as well as a political leadership that did not seem to value objective research. As a consequence, some programmes were implemented without a clear rationale. After a number of criticisms from the Wales Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee of the Welsh Assembly there has been recent action to specify clear objectives of regeneration activity linked to overall poverty objectives and to implement frameworks for measuring outcomes, as well as tightening up the management structures to achieve greater accountability, consistency and clarity.

Current policies on regeneration

The current Regeneration framework 'Vibrant and Viable Places' was launched in March 2013 (Welsh Government, 2013b). Its aims are to produce prosperous, healthy and learning communities through a holistic and more targeted approach with the priority on coastal communities, town centres and Communities First areas. Therefore, the objectives have been aligned with those in the overall poverty strategy, although poverty is not specifically mentioned in the framework. The definition of regeneration is 'an integrated set of activities that seek to reverse economic, social, environmental and physical decline to achieve lasting improvement in areas where market forces will not do this alone without some support from government'. However, the key performance targets relate to investment levered in, percentage of spend retained within Wales, additional jobs created, and people supported into work thus showing the primary economic focus of the programme. There are also a number of additional outcome measures that could be seen to link to poverty related objectives both in material and non-material terms:

3.1. Prosperous communities

- percentage of workless households (gap between deprived areas and others)
- employment rate (gap between deprived areas and others)
- percentage of people who think their neighbourhood has improved in the last 3 years.

3.2. Learning communities

- percentage obtaining key stage indicators at age 16 (gap between deprived areas and others)
- percentage of people with post-school qualifications (gap between deprived areas and others)

3.3. Healthier communities

- percentage of adults reporting fair or poor health (gap between deprived areas and others)

The linking of regeneration activities with the anti-poverty agenda represents a new and potentially important change of emphasis from the more general and poorly specified approach seen previously. This is linked to a clearer top-down strategy process from the Welsh Government and a stronger commitment to outcome measurement. Coupled with similar changes in Communities First, it offers the potential for a more joined-up and coherent approach to poverty.

Evidence of the impact of regeneration programmes

4.1. Communities First

The Communities First programme was instituted in 2001 with 142 small areas chosen across Wales, with priority given to those in the 100 most deprived areas as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. There was a central support unit in the Welsh Assembly Government and funding given for support units in local authorities and voluntary organisations in the areas concerned. For the individual Communities First partnerships, the first priority was to create a structure of a voluntary board and staff. The board was intended to be made up of representatives from the local community, the local authority and other statutory agencies, and local councillors. This was later codified in the 2006 guidance into a “third/third/third” split between the three categories. Staffing was usually made up of a co-ordinator and administrative and support staff.

Partnerships were encouraged to undertake community capacity building and then to identify needs within their areas and to formulate plans to meet those needs. This process was planned to take up to three years. In the initial stages there was little guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government about the objectives of the programme or its implementation. Objectives were set in very general terms with little guidance as to how they could be achieved. The objectives were: to build confidence and self-esteem; encourage education and skill training for work; create job opportunities and increase the income of residents; improve housing and the surrounding environment; improve health and well-being; make communities safe; and drive forward changes to the delivery of public services (WAG, 2002). According to the interim evaluation (WAG, 2006) this lack of guidance was partly due to a desire to give the partnerships the flexibility to define their own needs in a truly bottom-up process. However, it also reflected a lack of capacity in the central support unit and a lack of understanding of what the programme required in order to enable the local partnerships to undertake their functions.

The interim evaluation (*ibid.*) also reported that progress in many local partnerships had been slow, but that almost all had a functioning Partnership Board to oversee progress, and had undertaken substantial community capacity building within the local area. The quality of the partnerships between the different actors varied widely and there was reported evidence of conflict in some instances, particularly between residents and local councillors. The interim evaluation also criticised the lack of guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government and pointed to a lack of emphasis and control on the identification and measurement of key outcomes. Despite evidence of substantial activity in some areas, the evaluation could not point to any systematic evidence that the objectives of the programme had been met and

criticised the lack of clarity of aims, the lack of systematic outcome measures, and the lack of emphasis on achieving meaningful outcomes. For example, the steering group of the evaluation found no written overall rationale for the programme and had to adopt their own as follows:

'to raise the capacity of disadvantaged groups and of people and organisations living or working in the most deprived communities to develop activities and projects of communal benefit and to harness mainstream funding to deliver economic and social regeneration'

In response to the interim evaluation the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) issued revised guidance in 2006 (WAG, 2006a) which contained a set of objectives for the programme. These did not explicitly mention poverty, although the objectives could be construed as being aimed at the reduction of material and non-material dimensions of poverty:

- to build confidence and to raise the self-esteem of people living in the community
- to increase the incomes of local people (including reducing the costs of food, heat, credit, etc.)
- to improve health and well-being
- to encourage and improve education and skills training for work
- to create jobs
- to make communities safe, secure and crime-free
- to ensure public services are delivered in ways which are more responsive and more locally accountable
- to improve housing and the quality of the environment
- to encourage active citizenship.

These objectives built on the four guiding principles of Communities First (WAG, 2002):

- that it is non-prescriptive about structures and ways of working, subject to guidance on the scope and eligibility of expenditures
- that it is flexible in its ability to respond to local circumstances, local capacity and local needs
- that partnership working rather than independent action is at the heart of the programme
- that this partnership working is driven by the process of community involvement and participation in defining the needs of local communities.

These principles were added to in the 2006 guidance (WAG, 2006a):

- promoting social justice, creating an equitable environment where people believe in their personal power to change things for the better
- the promotion of a culture in which diversity is valued and equality of opportunity is a reality
- local people must be involved in leading the Communities First process
- a recognition that change requires time, and therefore the Communities First programme is a long-term investment in communities

- disadvantaged communities making a long-lasting difference to the life of their communities and to the systems, policies and institutions that contribute to their disadvantage.

Communities First was characterised by the interim evaluation report (WAG, 2006: 4.12) as 'an internally funded capacity building programme leading to externally funded regeneration and mainstream programme bending [where] success of the programme depends on significant changes within external agencies and institutions (including local authorities, health boards, the police, etc.)'. This is a crucial point as funding for Communities First has largely been allocated to support the process of partnership working. Directly available funds for projects only totalled 16 per cent of total expenditure up to 2007 even including expenditure through the Communities First Trust Fund, which was established in 2001 to enable Communities First partnerships to undertake small-scale projects (WAG, 2006). Therefore, success in moving from community capacity building, through the definition of local needs, to meeting these needs is crucially dependent on bending mainstream funding or accessing new funding streams. The underlying rationale of the programme was the assumption that community development, that is putting residents in the driving seat of a partnership process involving local agencies, leads to community regeneration, without a real focus on the processes involved and the validity of this assumption in practice.

It was also never made clear how this bending of mainstream funding was to be achieved and the Partnerships had no sanctions to exert if the agencies concerned were reluctant to change. There was also a lack of fit between the Communities First processes and the strategic planning processes of the local authorities and other agencies in terms of timing and staff involved. The Communities First staff had a lack of authority compared to their local authority counterparts and, therefore, were given little credibility in local authority processes. In addition representation on the Partnership Boards from the agencies involved was largely made up of operational rather than strategic staff. Therefore they lacked authority within the agencies.

The Communities First programme was evaluated in 2011 and substantially revised in 2012 (Welsh Government, 2013a) following a consultation in 2011 in which new proposals were outlined. The revised programme has three objectives, in a bid to impose a clearer top-down vision on the programme, which is now described as a 'Community Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme' (Welsh Government, 2013a). The objectives are:

- prosperous communities: activities here include supporting employment skills, employability, welfare advice and financial inclusion. Examples of programme bending activities include Parent Employment Advisors with Jobcentre Plus; Youth Employment Mentors with Jobs Growth Wales; a time banking project; and advice services.
- learning communities: activities here include a Pupil Deprivation Grant Match fund; a project on digital exclusion; and the aim of the Higher Education Council for Wales (HEFCW) to increase the number of people from Communities First areas in higher education.
- healthier communities: activities include over-50s health checks; and the Early Years and Child Care plans to bring together interventions such as the Flying Start programme.

The original Partnerships are also being grouped into clusters to make them larger (the guide is for 10,000-15,000 people per cluster) and there is an increased emphasis on achieving measurable outcomes under the three objectives with a common performance framework. There is a stronger lead from the Welsh

Government level to oversee delivery and to promote joined-up working at the central level. At the local authority level there will be a Programme Board to oversee work in the new clusters and liaise with the Local Service Board to co-ordinate activity. There will be local area delivery teams to work in the clusters to manage the delivery of the activities. Funding for individual projects is to be continued and expanded through the Communities First Outcome Fund, established in 2009, with the lower limit of individual projects raised to £100,000 to encourage more strategic proposals. The fund provided £25m over its first three years.

In summary, the 2013 changes are in response to previous evaluations that have indicated difficulties with the original delivery mechanisms, in particular the unevenness of management expertise and inability to bend mainstream funding. The result has been an increase in size away from the neighbourhood level and a more managerial emphasis that may dilute the unique neighbourhood focus of the original programme, but may offer improved working with mainstream agencies and a stronger managerial element. At the same time the Welsh Government has taken steps to strengthen a top-down agenda in order to focus more clearly on outcomes and to align the programme with the national poverty strategy by adopting a coherent set of objectives.

Evaluations of Communities First and key findings

There have been a number of evaluations of Communities First:

- an interim evaluation published in 2006 that focused on the initial processes because of the lack of outcomes that could be measured at that stage (WAG, 2006)
- an evaluation report by Adamson and Bromiley (2008) published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which examined the community empowerment impacts of the Communities First programme
- a Wales Audit Office report in 2009 which examined the outcomes of the programme and the value for money achieved (Wales Audit Office, 2009)
- a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by Hincks and Robson (2010) that also examined outcomes from the programme
- a Public Accounts Committee Report in the same year also looked at value for money (National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee, 2010).
- An evaluation for the Welsh government in 2011 (Welsh Government 2011)

Findings are presented below in terms of community capacity building and service outcomes.

Community Capacity Building

Both the interim Communities First evaluation (WAG, 2006) and Adamson and Bromiley (2008) highlighted the achievements of the programme in building the capacity of the communities involved and this was confirmed in the 2011 study (Welsh Government 2011). For example, Adamson and Bromiley (2008) point to considerable community development activity in the Partnerships with significant levels of community involvement. However, there was frustration at the inability of residents to influence statutory agencies and to achieve programme bending. This means that community capacity building did not result in community empowerment.

Service Outcomes

All of the evaluation reports were unable to identify any significant impact on the relevant outcomes from Communities First. The lack of a coherent vision at the outset, coupled with a lack of emphasis on outcomes and their measurement meant that there was initial confusion about aims and the outcomes to be achieved. The specific form of funding adopted was the application of “outside” funds and mainstream programme bending, neither of which was achieved to any extent. The Wales Audit Office (2009) report was unable to show any measurable outcomes. The Hincks and Robson (2010) report examined a number of indicators in Communities First areas and compared them with other deprived areas not in the programme. The indicators they used included:

- the percentage change in the working-age population claiming Jobseeker's Allowance
- percentage change in the working-age population who are economically inactive
- percentage change in the employment rate in the working-age population
- change in population
- mean change in house prices.

Their analysis showed that house prices in the Communities First areas, which were previously lagging behind those in other deprived areas, had converged with those of other disadvantaged areas not in the programme, but that patterns of change in terms of rates of unemployment and economic inactivity were broadly the same. Between 2001 and 2008, both Communities First areas and deprived comparator neighbourhoods saw economic inactivity decrease and unemployment increase by approximately the same amount. The authors concluded that 'the gains that have been made in Communities First areas have been relatively marginal' (ibid. 17).

Further, the outcomes varied between types of areas, four of which were identified using a typology developed by the authors:

- *escalator areas* where incomers were of a similar economic status to those already there, but leavers tended to move to more affluent areas
- *gentrifier areas* where the population changed to a more affluent one as incomers were from less deprived areas and leavers moved to similar or more deprived areas
- *isolate areas* had few links with other areas and so movement was small
- *transit areas* where most incomers and leavers come from and move to less deprived areas.

Gentrifier areas improved most between 2001 and 2008 based on changes in a 'rank score' calculated according to overall performance against the five indicators listed above. This seems to indicate that demographic change had been the primary factor in the improvement. Transit areas also improved more than others further reinforcing the importance of demographic change. Little positive change was recorded in Isolate and escalator areas, where people move out to more affluent areas. In the latter case this may be because those who benefitted from the programme moved out to be replaced by people from other deprived areas. In this case the area may not improve even though individuals may see some improvement in their lives.

The evaluation of Communities First in 2011 (Welsh Government 2011) assessed the impact of the programme under a number of headings and in two major ways.

The first method was through what they called a 'top-down' approach using large-scale datasets to judge the difference between Communities First areas and other comparator areas over time. The lack of usable data meant that the research coupled this with the use of 'bottom-up' qualitative data based on the views of a sample of people involved in the programme in a sample of areas. Despite the wide variation between individual projects, the overall situation was that there had been convergence between the Communities First areas and the comparators on a number of indicators, but the difference was small and there was no difference in many other indicators. The qualitative analysis showed that the belief amongst many people involved in individual Communities First projects was that they had made a difference, but it was recognised that it was difficult to show this objectively and that many impacts would be long-term and so would not show up in data yet. Because of the difficulty in relying on the subjective 'bottom-up' data the focus here is on the quantifiable 'top-down' analysis.

The results of the top-down analysis were considered under a number of headings as follows:

- *Worklessness*; the gap in worklessness rates with the rest of Wales narrowed according to the ILO definition, but increased in terms of other indicators such as the number of those claiming Job Seekers Allowance. It appears that Communities First has enabled new people (usually women) to enter the labour force, but has not improved comparatively the situation of those already seeking work, however the positive difference was very small (equivalent to 0.26%).
- *Skills*; the Communities First Areas continued to have low skills levels, but they have improved significantly. Nevertheless, the gap with the rest of Wales has widened in terms of the proportion of the population with no qualifications, although it narrowed for those with qualifications above level 4.
- *Education*; the average points score of residents in the CF areas has increased by more than in the rest of Wales.
- *Crime*; in general the gap widened with the rest of Wales in the incidence of crime.
- *Health*; the levels of ill-health and disability in the CF areas declined, but in line with the rest of Wales

4.2. Physical and economic regeneration

There is a long history of targeted physical and economic regeneration activity by the Welsh Office, Welsh Government and by agencies such as the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). The Welsh Development Agency was subsumed within the Welsh Government in 2006. Some of these projects and funding mechanisms have been supported by European Union (EU) structural funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes from 2007. The first project of this kind was in 1986 when the Welsh Office's 'Community Investment: an Initiative for the Valleys' was launched which focused on environmental improvements to encourage private investment in the Valleys area. In 1987 the Welsh Development Agency instituted an 'Urban Renewal Unit'. This focused initially on seven 'needy' areas and worked through public/private partnerships to undertake primarily property-based regeneration. In 1991 this was reconstituted as the Urban Development Programme and was extended to 30 locations within Wales before its demise in 1994/5.

It was followed in 2000 by the 'All Wales Community Regeneration Programme' run by the WDA. It was an area-based programme, focused on economic regeneration and run in partnership with other agencies. It was more used in some areas of Wales than others.

The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was established in 1987 as part of the Urban Development Corporation programme to undertake the economic and physical regeneration of Cardiff Bay before being wound up in 2001. It was firmly controlled by central government. In 1988 the Welsh Office introduced 'Valleys: A Programme for the People' which involved a partnership approach to delivery and covered education and training, physical infrastructure, tourism, health and housing. This initial three year programme was extended for a further two years in 1991 and then again in 1993. In 2006 a further regeneration programme for the Heads of the Valleys was established involving a holistic approach to regeneration, focusing on economic inactivity, education and skills, health, image, connectivity, and environment, using a partnership approach. This project led to the introduction of Strategic Regeneration Areas (now known as Regeneration Areas) in another six locations in Wales.

An Urban Regeneration Company was established in Newport by the WDA, WAG and Newport City Council in 2003 to co-ordinate the delivery of economic regeneration.

These initiatives have largely been focused on economic and physical regeneration, although the recent regeneration areas have had wider, although in practice subsidiary, social aims. The spatially targeted programmes have been largely based on a partnership approach between local authorities and other agencies and have aimed to kick-start private investment.

Outcomes

There is little evaluation of the outcomes of regeneration activity. The lack of clearly specified objectives and of measurable outcomes has meant that the only evaluations have been undertaken by the project teams themselves and have concentrated on the outputs of the projects such as the number of sites developed and number of businesses in situ. There has been no assessment of the impact of these activities on the areas involved or on aspects of poverty.

4.3. Cymorth and Flying Start

Cymorth was introduced in 2003/4 by the Welsh Assembly Government with a commitment of £235m over five years to provide a network of targeted support to children and young people under the age of 25. It was designed to impact on child poverty by providing early years intervention. It subsumed previous programmes such as Sure Start, Children and Youth Partnership Fund, National Childcare Strategy, Youth Access Initiative and Play Grant. Funding was delivered through Children's and Young People's Framework Partnerships in each local authority area and it was required to focus funding on deprived areas in general and Communities First areas in particular. Cymorth funded individual projects with an average size of £55,000 per year to a total of 890 projects each year from 2004 to 2008. At the beginning funding was dominated by "legacy schemes" that originated in the funding streams taken over. However, over time the proportion of new schemes originated by the Framework Partnerships increased. However, the total of annual funding by Cymorth was only three per cent of total funding in Wales for children's and young people's services. From 2010/11 Cymorth was subsumed under the general Revenue Support Grant from the Government to local authorities in Wales.

An evaluation (Welsh Government, 2009) concluded that Cymorth had been successful in its goal of improving partnership working in support of services for disadvantaged children and young people, helped to put preventative services in place and on the agenda of the mainstream service providers, and introduced innovative ways of working. However, there was little systematic evidence on the value for money of the projects or their outcomes. The programme was also considered to be a useful precursor to the complementary Flying Start programme which is the Welsh Government's programme for 0-4 year-olds living in deprived areas. Flying Start consists of grant funding from the Welsh Government to local authorities and can only be spent in deprived areas. It is intended to deliver certain entitlements such as:

- one health visitor per 110 children
- quality part-time childcare provision for two year olds
- parenting programmes
- basic skills with every family having access to language and play programmes
- information sharing and referral.

Six themes were identified for Cymorth. These were:

- family support to foster positive relationships between parents and children
- health promotion
- play, leisure and enrichment
- empowerment, participation and active citizenship
- training mentoring and information
- building childcare provision.

Overall the aim of the fund was to make targeted services more effective in breaking the cycle of deprivation that affected children and young people's life chances and was aimed at alleviating child poverty. This included the enhancement of early years development, play opportunities, parental support and mentoring in adolescence to prevent problems such as school exclusion, early parenthood, low skills, offending behaviour and unemployment. Parental support and mentoring took at least half of all funding through the Cymorth programme.

Each Children's and Young People's Framework Partnership was to formulate a three year strategic plan to provide a strategic vision, a set of agreed priorities among the partners, a set of agreed joint targets and set a base for the joint commissioning of services. Cymorth funding could be used to support these arrangements. According to the interim evaluation (Welsh Government, 2009) these partnership arrangements were working well and had succeeded in getting representation from strategic officers of the various agencies.

Outcomes

The interim evaluation published in 2009 of both Cymorth and Flying Start (Welsh Government, 2009) highlighted the difficulty in defining and measuring specific outcomes, particularly as the programmes were relatively new and the outcomes may not be seen until the children and young people reached later periods in their lives. Also there were gaps in the information collected at both the local and national level. Nevertheless conclusions were reached on qualitative evidence and from case studies of particular projects. Overall it was concluded that the partnership

arrangements had worked well and there was effective service planning and joint working. The exception was the continuation of some Cymorth activities from previous funding streams that did not necessarily fit with the new planning priorities.

The outcomes of the specific Cymorth projects examined were generally very positive, but there was a lack of evidence of mainstreaming of projects which was considered essential because of Cymorth's small project budget. For Flying Start the later implementation means that there has been less time to demonstrate impact. The interim evaluation stressed that there was evidence of the outcomes being achieved in terms of the service entitlements delivered, but the long lead-in time for the outcomes to be seen means that there is little evidence as yet that it has changed the lives of the young people involved.

Discussion

The programmes described above have until recently been undertaken with little in the way of overall strategy and with unclear objectives and outcomes. The link to poverty objectives has been acknowledged latterly, particularly in the Communities First and Cymorth and Flying Start programmes, but has rarely been clearly specified or thought through. Communities First should have been the primary focus of an area-based poverty strategy but it had many faults. From the beginning it lacked a clear understanding of the problem to be dealt with and a realisation of the strengths and weaknesses of the mechanism chosen. It was never clear how the community focus was to deliver the bending of mainstream funds. Resident groups were given no mechanisms to influence local authority or government objectives or actions and no sanctions to employ if their wishes were not listened to. The programme was implemented as if nothing had been learnt from the experience of area-based initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s that demonstrated the difficulties of achieving the bending of mainstream programmes (for a review see Lawless, 1979). The poor management of the programme from the Welsh Assembly Government compounded these problems with a lack of strategic direction, which led to inconsistency and a lack of focus on delivery. As almost all the funding was spent on staff and other management costs, the lack of a mechanism to achieve programme bending meant that little was achieved in practice in many areas that was on a scale sufficient to change outcomes for the neighbourhoods.

The series of physical and economic regeneration programmes outlined earlier changed direction many times and was focused around particular time-limited projects. Whilst it is clear that many partnerships achieved significant change to the built environment in their areas through new development, the lack of a clear social focus and poverty related objectives meant that there was little evidence of impact on general levels of poverty.

Cymorth and Flying Start have both been lauded for their achievements, although it has been difficult to demonstrate this through specific measurable outcomes. Cymorth has been merged into general local authority expenditure, but Flying Start continues.

All three of these strands of regeneration activity proceeded separately with little interaction between them. Each had separate operational structures of accountability and delivery and there was no co-ordination of objectives. However, there has been significant change by the Welsh Government in the past few years. The clear specification of a poverty strategy with measurable outcomes has enabled the ongoing programmes to be overhauled and redirected towards the over-arching objectives. There is now a clear strategy to deal with poverty with a set of objectives that form the basis of the aims of the constituent programmes. Communities

First now has a clear poverty remit as has the previously economic and physically oriented regeneration strand. The Welsh Government has strengthened the central oversight of the programmes and has increased the geographical scale of the Communities First areas in order to improve their professionalism and their capacity to bend mainstream programmes.

Conclusion

It has proved to be impossible to measure the outcomes of the three strands of area-based programmes discussed above on poverty in Wales. This is mainly because of the lack of emphasis given to the measurement of programme outcomes in the past, which is a symptom of the lack of strong management that characterised all the programmes. Strategic aims were seldom clear and well-specified. Activities were seen to be self-evidently justified without having to show value for money or outcomes that related to specific goals. This lack of clarity follows from the policy-making process within Wales which is a corporatist one, based on agreement between the parties involved, with little room for outside influences or independent evidence. There is still a lack of a strong research and evaluation culture within Welsh policy-making, but the evidence on the three strands of regeneration activity reviewed here is that some strides are being made in this direction. There are now clearly specified objectives that are linked with the overall poverty strategy and are supported by specific targets. If the relevant information is regularly collected, this should provide the evidence for subsequent evaluations.

On the basis of current knowledge it is not possible to tell whether the three programmes have impacted on poverty in Wales. Each programme can point to specific outputs that have made an impact on the lives of individuals, but it is not clear that this adds up to making a general and lasting difference to the extent and incidence of poverty. The only outcomes evaluation available (Hincks and Robson, 2010) of the Communities First programme shows little impact on the measures chosen. Despite the drawbacks of this study it tends to reinforce the view that the lack of clear direction and strong management has led to a fragmentation of effort and a lack of significant impact.

Important lessons now appear to have been learnt and stronger control over the programmes should enable assessment of their impact and a learning of what works from experience. If area-based initiatives are able to make a lasting and significant difference to poverty, the experience in the next few years in Wales should provide a good indicator.

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