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Y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth
Leol
Minister for Social Justice and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref yourref
Ein cyf/Our ref ourref MB/BG/260/09
Mick Bates AM
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

30 April, 2009

Dear *Mick*

On 19th March I presented evidence to a scrutiny session of the Sustainability Committee. At that meeting you asked for a written note on the Environment strand of the Communities First Vision Framework, with specific examples of environmental project work undertaken by Communities First Partnerships and an explanation of how the Outcomes Fund will operate. This letter addresses specifically those questions. I will write separately on the more strategic level questions you posed about carbon reduction and the sustainability agenda across the Social Justice and Local Government portfolio.

Communities First Vision Framework

The revised Communities First Vision Framework sets out the Assembly Government's thematic priorities for action by Communities First Partnerships. The revised Vision Framework provides a more focused framework for the local Communities First Partnerships and their partners; it also relates more directly than the original version of the Framework to the needs of communities and to the policies of the Assembly Government and other service providers.

The revised Vision Framework is split up into six themes of which the Environment is one. Each theme identifies several activities which Partnerships are expected to address over the course of the programme. The Environment theme includes activities which will make a real contribution to carbon reduction, for example, addressing climate change, sustainable resource use, encouraging the provision of public and community transport and providing and maintaining safe routes for pedestrians and cycles. Communities First Partnerships are not expected to address these issues by themselves, but to work with partners who are able to provide relevant expertise, training and resources. I enclose a copy of the revised Vision Framework. It will be clear from looking at the other five themes also that sustainability is a principle which underpins all activities which are encouraged through the programme.

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Communities First: Examples of Environmental Work

From the very start of the programme, Communities First Partnerships have carried out a large range of environmental projects, not least because the smaller-scale activities are a particularly good way of generating interest in the work of a partnership and encouraging the involvement of potential volunteers. In this next phase of the Programme we are encouraging Communities First Partnerships to build on the interest generated and the links established and to work in more strategic ways with the various service providers. To facilitate this work my officials in the Communities First Policy Unit have been developing links with organisations such as the Environment Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Forestry Commission Wales and Keep Wales Tidy. Environmental guidance for Communities First Partnerships is being prepared (in consultation with the Environment Agency) and we are investigating what training can be provided to local Communities First coordinators to enhance the contribution they and their partnerships can make to addressing climate change.

Several good examples of the type of environmental work undertaken by Communities First partnerships are contained in 'Making a Difference', the Communities First Good Practice Guide. The examples are grouped under the six themes of the original Vision Framework – of which the Environment was one. The examples are typical of the specific environmental projects supported by the Communities First Programme across Wales. I enclose a copy of the guide and have made arrangements to send one (together with a copy of the revised Vision Framework) to each member of the Sustainability Committee.

Communities First Outcomes Fund

The new Communities First Outcomes Fund will provide no less than £25 million over the next three years to develop and deliver new activities, services and projects for the benefit of Communities First areas. The Fund is structured to support activities which deliver real improvements for local people and it is linked to the priorities identified in the revised Vision Framework. Accordingly, environmental projects (ie linked to the activities listed under the theme heading) are eligible for funding under the Outcomes Fund. All projects must show that they have the support of Communities Partnerships in the areas of operation and priority is given to those which can show an element of match funding from the partner service providers. These requirements are designed to enhance the long-term sustainability of the projects supported.

We launched the Outcomes Fund by giving approval in principle to five Demonstration Pilots, one of which, the Anglesey Community Environmental Project, targeted the Environment theme of the Vision Framework. Two of the other Demonstration Pilots – in Newport and Bridgend – also included important environmental elements to their work. I attach a short note describing the scope of each of the three projects. The final offers of grant for the Demonstration Projects are dependent upon the applicants finalising some outstanding details, including confirmation of the extent of match funding. Final Operational Plans are being devised at the moment. The Outcomes Fund is also now open to mainstream applications and we anticipate the Demonstration Pilots will serve as encouragement to others to run similar schemes.

There is clearly a lot of good environmental work going on in Communities First Partnerships across Wales, but it is important to remember that Communities First Partnerships are not agencies or service providers in their own right. They are informal partnerships that are designed primarily to involve and engage local people. As such, they

are ideal mechanisms for raising awareness and getting people involved in tackling important issues such as climate change. Communities First Partnerships have shown that they can introduce important messages into the community, disseminate information and learning and mobilise local people to take action. It is also worth noting that Communities First Partnerships are charged with engaging all sectors of the community and are particularly valuable for taking issues like these to groups that would be least likely to get involved otherwise.

The Assembly Government is convinced Communities First Partnerships have an important role to play in addressing the key issues we face in terms of sustainability and tackling climate change and we are committed to ensuring that they fulfill that role.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Gibbons', written in a cursive style.

Brian Gibbons AM/AC