

Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting :	22 November 2018
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Craig ap Iago
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Department / Service:	Economy and Community
Title of Item: Role of the Area Regeneration Officers in future	
Why does it need to be scrutinised? The Department was asked to consider incorporating the role of collaborating with Community Councils and the Third Sector into the future work programme of the Community Regeneration Service. This was in response to the funding of a temporary resource in the Corporate Support Department coming to an end. The Department had identified the need to review the role of the Area Regeneration Officers within the Community Regeneration Service in 2018 as a result of change in the demands for support by communities, and the funding opportunities available. Different options have been considered to make the best use of the skills and resources, and the input of the Scrutiny Committee on the favoured option is welcomed.	
What are the background and relevant considerations?	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The regeneration officer network was set up in Gwynedd in 1997 to help communities come up with ideas for enterprises, and support the establishment of new enterprises in order to safeguard and create jobs locally. The LEADER fund was initially targeted, which was European funding to trial new ideas. In 2000, however, the Cwlwm Gwledig Fund was established with the assistance of the Assembly's Rural Regeneration Programme. This secured £2.5m worth of resources for communities to target with help from the Area Regeneration Officers. Emphasis was on using the fund as match funding with other funds.2. By 2001, several funds had been established to support communities and the third sector with the help of Objective 1 European Funding, Welsh Government, and Lottery funding. Together with the Gwynedd Third Sector Group it was agreed that the gaps in Gwynedd lay in skills to:	

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- support communities to prioritise interventions that would make the biggest difference;
- provide guidance on preparing business cases;
- help with submitting applications to target funding programmes.

The role of the Community Regeneration Officers during that time was revised so that they collaborated with communities in eight catchment areas across Gwynedd. They generated community regeneration plans and supported partners to deliver the priority projects.

3. Through the work of the area plans, it emerged that greater priority needed to be given to targeting communities in need and the team was developed alongside the Communities First Programme in Gwynedd. Between 2001 and 2018, the Communities First Programme provided intensive support to communities in the most deprived wards. Meanwhile, the Community Regeneration Officers targeted those communities with the highest levels of deprivation that did not meet the national threshold that made them eligible for help from the Communities First Programme (Community Regeneration Structure in Appendix 1).
4. As part of the Council's 2012 savings programme, the decision was made to reduce the network of Community Regeneration Officers from eight to five. This meant that the resources were no longer available to sustain the relationship at the same level. The total budget for the Community Regeneration service in 2018 is £212,800. Over the same period, there was a fall in the level of aid available for community organisations on a national and local level with fewer grant funds available to target.
5. Over the past three years, officers' roles have become more responsive to the demands of communities; there has been less emphasis on community regeneration aspects and greater emphasis on supporting communities to respond to change. A copy of the team's Work programme will be available to the Committee 22 November and you will note from this that the nature of the demand for support varies greatly. More emphasis is now placed on helping communities plan in response to changes to public service bodies' provision arrangements, with fewer projects planned as part of a targeted community regeneration programme.
6. It is clear from the work programme that the officers work closely with Community Councils and the third sector and already operate in several communities as a main point of contact for the Council. The team of regeneration officers has been working closely with the Community Council Coordinator and Community Groups (within the Corporate Support Department) over recent years and has supported the communities to engage and respond.

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7. Over the same period, the Welsh Government regeneration policy has moved away from working with communities to target regional strategic plans in the centres that have the most profound levels of deprivation. The skills of the Economic Development Programmes team have been more relevant to these regeneration programmes and this is the service that now manages and develops the regeneration projects.
8. The Communities First programme ended in 2018 and was superseded by the Communities for Work programme. This programme's emphasis is on supporting individuals into work; its outcomes are more economic and is less involved with empowering communities. The role of the Community Regeneration Officers' team has, thus, naturally become distanced from the regeneration agenda, yet it continues to play a key role in supporting communities.
9. The background clearly shows that the role of the Community Regeneration Officers has evolved consistently over the past 20 years. But, its purpose has remained constant over the period, which is to support communities. Incorporating the role of third sector and community council liaison would be a natural step toward making the most of resources.
10. The Department has considered several opportunities to make the best use of these resources, but there are two specific options on which the Scrutiny Committee's input would be welcomed:
 - Option 1 - merge the role of the community regeneration team with other teams within the Economic Development Programmes Service (Appendix 3). There would be advantages here to strengthening resources to target more communities. However, it is considered that the two services no longer have the same purpose and that the skills needed for delivery also differ. Consequently, there would be nothing to gain from merging the service units.
 - Option 2 - retain a small team to keep the emphasis on supporting communities to achieve (Appendix 2). The advantage here would lie in creating a resource that would enable Gwynedd Council to maintain a relationship with the communities across a wider range of programmes; they would not be restricted to programmes that only contribute to regeneration and economic development.
11. Of course, it is impossible to predict at this point the Council's decisions on savings within the budget, but on the grounds that the budget is safeguarded, it is recommended:
 - that the role of the Community Regeneration Officers be re-defined as Community Support Officers that would incorporate the role of Community Council and Third Sector liaison.

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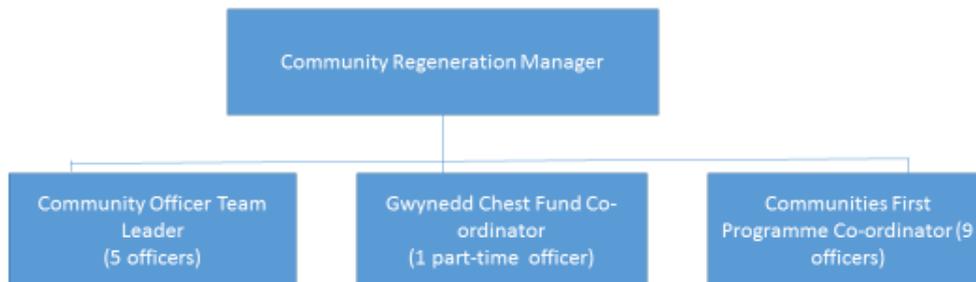
- that a liaison officer be identified for individual communities, but that officers operate more as a county team in order to benefit from the specific strengths and skills of different team members.
- that the team strengthen the link with libraries in order to promote community access to sources of information and assistance in future

12. The Scrutiny Committee’s views on these recommendations would be welcomed.

Relevant timetable: Action 1 April 2019

APPENDIX 1

Community Regeneration Structure 1/4/17



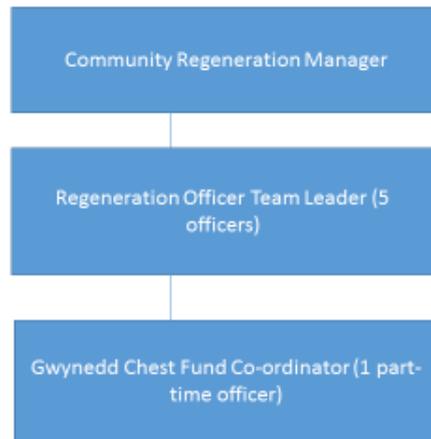
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APPENDIX 1

Community Regenerations Structure (Temporary) 1/4/18



APPENDIX 2

Option 1: Merge with the Economic Development Programmes Team





APPENDIX 2

Option 2: Establish an Economic Communities Support Team



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