

New approach to building resilient communities announced

The approach is focused on employment, early years and empowerment, and will involve phasing out the Communities First programme.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“We have listened very carefully to thousands of people who have been involved in Communities First, either as employees or participants. While it is clear that Communities First was successful in its impact on many individuals, it has not had an impact on overall poverty levels in these communities, which remain stubbornly high.

“We are clear, as a Government, that we must now transition into a new phase in our fight against poverty in Wales. Our support for those who need it most will not end with this programme. Indeed, our aim is to intensify our efforts to give people the tools they need to have a more equal share of this nation’s prosperity. At the centre of this must be the promise of good, secure work.

“A new approach is needed which deals with the root causes of poverty.. We will take forward a cross-government, all-Wales approach focused on helping people into work, giving children the best start in life, and ensuring people’s voices are heard in the design of local services.”

Funding at 70% of current levels will be provided to the Communities First programme until March 2018. A legacy fund of £6m a year, to enable some of the programme’s most effective projects to continue, will be introduced in April 2018.

In addition, the Community Facilities Programme will receive an extra £4m a year from 2017/18, with priority given to Communities First areas, to help protect valuable community assets such as community centres.

A new £12m a year grant to support those who are furthest from the labour market will also be launched. This will build on the success to date of the Communities for Work, Lift and PaCE programmes and will feed into the wider Welsh Government Employability Plan led by the Minister for Skills.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“In total, including these and other ongoing projects, we will continue to put over £25m annually directly into deprived communities. This figure cannot be viewed in isolation. Across the

Welsh Government, there is increasing investment in a range of initiatives which are crucial to preventing and alleviating poverty. These include increasing our investment in apprenticeships to over £126m and investing over £93million through the Pupil Deprivation Grant in 2017-18 to help close the attainment gap of disadvantaged children. In addition we are establishing the Valleys taskforce and creating the North and South Wales metros.”

Investment in Flying Start and Families First, both of which provide practical support to thousands of families and their children across the country, will continue, while the development of Children’s Zones and the establishment of a new Adverse Childhood Experiences hub have already been announced. Support for the Streetgames programme which engages young people in positive activities, and for Citizen’s Advice, will continue.

The Cabinet Secretary added:

“Investing in our children is an investment for the long term. It is the most sustainable means of building a more prosperous future.

“I have been encouraged by the very positive response to the development of Children’s Zones and the establishment of an “ACEs Hub”, to help organisations, communities and individuals across Wales tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences, which can have such a devastating impact on children’s life chances.

“These initiatives, together with our continued investment in our successful Flying Start and Families First programmes, will ensure there is comprehensive support for children as they grow up.

“Building resilient communities is the work of Welsh Government as a whole. We are committed to prosperity for all, a strong economy that creates sustainable, quality employment opportunities accessible to all.

“Together we can build the resilient, safe, strong communities that we all want. And we will continue to engage with communities and stakeholders as we move forward.

“Change is never easy. But we cannot ignore the combination of new and deep-rooted challenges we face. We must have the courage to find fresh ways to respond. That is what I and all of my government colleagues are determined to do.”

Press release: Rugeley Flood Risk Management Scheme well under way

From:

First published:

14 February 2017

Hagley playing fields closed to the public during scheme construction works.

The Environment Agency's Rugeley Flood Risk Management Scheme that began in December is progressing well. Preparations for the construction of the embankment have now started.

To make sure that the public stay safe while the work is being carried out, the Hagley playing fields will remain closed to the public until 2018, once the scheme has been completed.

During a flood, the embankment will hold water from the Rising Brook and help to reduce the risk of flooding for over 114 homes and 159 businesses. Other benefits of the £3.8 million scheme include improving habitat, restoring heritage features and reconnecting footpaths and improving accessibility. It also forms an integral part of Cannock Chase council's plans to regenerate parts of the town centre.

Environment Agency Project Manager Matt Griffin said:

We're working hard to get the scheme completed as soon as possible so we can minimise any disruption and inconvenience. However, keeping people and the community safe during the work remains our priority which means closing the playing fields is essential.

The works are a partnership with Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

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Aberdeen students strengthen links with local businesses

Second year students from the Aberdeen Campus of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) are honing their business skills in a challenge to create a new community focal point for the local Chapelton Estate.