

Forsythia Youth Centre

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 7 Mawrth 2017

Petitions Committee | 7 March 2017

Research Briefing

Petition number: P-05-742

Petition title: Stop Forsythia Closing

Text of petition: Forsythia Youth Centre is at risk of closing due to the uncertainty surrounding Welsh Government's Communities First funding.

Forsythia Youth Centre is a FREE access youth provision which is open:

- 4 nights a week for 51 weeks of the year;
- Open during the day and the evenings throughout school holidays;
- Open on the weekend if completing project work.

Without fail, Forsythia has a minimum of 50 young people aged 11-20 from across Gurnos, Galon Uchaf, Pant, Dowlais and Penydarren, attending every night.

Without Forsythia Youth Centre, young people would not have a safe place to access within their community and they would not have anywhere else to go due to a lack of other provision aimed at young people.

Forsythia Youth Centre offers young people the opportunity to take part in youth projects, such as 'Commit to Quit' with Ash Wales, Erasmus+ project on 'Attitudes and Values of Youth Work', and the 'Agenda Project' with Cardiff University.

Young people are also provided the opportunity to access organisations such as Drug Aid, Sexual Health projects, Smoking Cessation, Mental Health and Confidence Building, Skills and Qualifications and receive in house support from qualified youth workers.

Young people and the workers are very concerned about the uncertainty surrounding the Communities First funding, as without this funding, Forsythia will have to close down.

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that potential changes to the Communities First programme do not cause the closure of Forsythia Youth Centre.

Communities First

[Communities First](#) is the Welsh Government's main programme for tackling poverty. It began in 2001, but the programme was reorganised in 2012 to improve performance and accountability. Communities First aims to “narrow the economic, education/skills and health gaps between our most deprived and more affluent areas”, with the long term aim of “contributing to alleviating persistent poverty”. It does this by providing funding to 19 ‘lead delivery bodies’ (LDBs) for 52 different areas known as ‘clusters’, which then distribute funding to individual projects.

In February 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced that the [Communities First Programme would be phased out](#). During that announcement he stated:

“I know the potential impact on individuals and communities. So, I will adopt a careful approach going forward, seeking to preserve some of the most effective aspects of the work done by Communities First. I will ensure that lead delivery bodies have sufficient time and resources to plan the transition. And so, I have decided that funding, at 70 per cent of current levels, will be provided until March 2018. I will establish a legacy fund of £6 million, to be introduced in April 2018, which will enable local authorities, in consultation with communities and public services boards, to maintain some of the most effective interventions or community assets developed by Communities First.”

The Cabinet Secretary also specifically commented on [mitigating any possible effect on children and young people](#):

“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.”

National Assembly for Wales Action

In December 2016, the Assembly's Children, Young People and Education Committee issued a report following its inquiry into [Youth Work](#). All of the recommendations were either accepted in full or in principle by the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government's full response is available on the Assembly's [website](#) and the transcript of the discussion in Plenary is available here: [RoP, 8 February 2017](#).

There is due to be a Statement by Alun Davies, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language on “The Future of Youth Work Delivery in Wales” on Tuesday 21st March 2017.

The Communities First programme has been subject to scrutiny by Assembly Committees on a number of occasions. Most recently, the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children on [16 February 2017](#).

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.