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EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITIES FOR WORK PROGRAMME

Phase 1: Theory of Change and Logic Model Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2016, the Welsh Government (WG) appointed OB3 Research, Dateb, the People and Work Unit and the Institute for Employment Studies to undertake an evaluation of its Communities for Work (CfW) programme.
- 1.2 CfW is designed to respond to the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2013 by supporting long term unemployed and economically inactive adults and 16-24 year olds not in employment education or training (NEET) to increase their employability and to move into or closer to employment. Over a five year period to 2020, CfW aims to support 47,500 people living in 52 Communities First (CF) cluster areas across Wales. CfW is jointly funded by the WG, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the European Social Fund (ESF).
- 1.3 CfW is delivered at a local level by teams comprising specialist Youth and Adult Mentors, Employment Advisers and Triage Support Workers, who all work in community settings such as CF premises and Integrated Children's Centres. Mentors and Advisers seek to engage participants, to understand the factors that hinder them from working and to agree personal action plans, determined by their individual needs. Participants are then helped to access relevant support, training, job search activities and work experience opportunities. Those with more complex barriers and deemed to be more than 12 months away from employment are supported by Adult and Youth Mentors (as appropriate), whilst those deemed to be slightly closer to employment are supported by specialist Employment Advisers. Triage Support Workers provide Mentors and Advisers with case management support, including coordinating interaction with partner organisations in order to ensure the effective integration of CfW with other support services e.g. substance misuse counselling services, debt management services, Youth Engagement and Progression Framework teams etc.
- 1.4 Whilst all CfW staff work in community settings, Mentors and Triage Support Workers are employed by Local Delivery Bodies (LDBs), whilst Advisers are seconded from the DWP.

1.5 Participation in CfW is entirely voluntary.

2. Research aims and methodology

2.1 The three aims of the evaluation are:

- to elucidate the theory of change for CfW and develop the logic model underpinning the programme, considering the differences between Priority 1¹ and Priority 3 CfW operations
- to assess how the programme has been set up and how it is being operated
- to provide an indication of its overall effectiveness (including any differences between the target groups).

2.2 The evaluation will be undertaken in three stages between October 2016 and January 2018. The work commenced with the elucidation of a theory of change and logic model for the CfW programme and this forms the basis of the Phase 1 report. Two further reports (to be produced in June 2017 and January 2018) will explore in detail how the programme is being implemented, the progress made against targets and the effects of CfW upon participants.

2.3 The research that led to the production of the Phase 1 report involved:

- a review of policy documents, programme planning documents and evaluations of previous active labour market programmes
- interviews with 14 policy makers and stakeholders involved in the development and early implementation of CfW
- developing a theory of change and logic model for the programme as a whole as well as two subsidiary logic models for elements of the programme focused on adults and, separately, 16-24 year olds who are NEET.

3. Key findings – Phase 1 report

Outcomes

- 3.1 CfW aims to help those furthest away from the labour market progress into sustainable employment and, by so doing, reduce the levels of persistent poverty experienced by participants and mitigate the risk of their falling into poverty in future. The emphasis is upon progressing people into jobs which involve a minimum of 16 contracted hours a week and which must be paid at or above the living wage.
- 3.2 Over a five year period, CfW aims to engage with 47,500 individuals and to progress 10,000 of these into employment, a ratio of just under one in five. It is expected that participants who do not progress into employment should nevertheless reap some benefit from the wrap-around, holistic support offered by CfW in terms of addressing some of the barriers that they face and increasing their employability.

Outreach and integration

- 3.3 The three groups of target participants for CfW (long term unemployed, economically inactive people and 16-24 year olds who are NEET) are amongst the hardest-to-reach and support in society. On this basis, a central plank of the CfW model is the delivery of services on an outreach basis in trusted, less formal settings, in the communities where target

¹ This refers to the Priorities of the ESF Programmes: Priority Axis 1 relates to ‘tackling poverty through sustainable employment’ whilst Priority Axis 3 relates to ‘youth employment’.

participants live. It is expected that the outreach model adopted will allow CfW to become more seamlessly integrated with existing support services and to capitalise upon the reputations and relationships which programmes such as CF have already forged in the community. Working in this way is expected to create referral pathways into CfW from a range of partner organisations and to afford CfW staff access to target participants in an unthreatening, familiar environment.

- 3.4 Integrating CfW with existing support structures in this way is intended to offer other potential advantages, such as reducing the risk of duplication, providing a means of establishing the programme more quickly and allowing economies to be realised. However, realising these potential benefits will be dependent upon the strength of existing structures and the quality of the relationships forged between CfW teams, CF cluster teams and the wider local support infrastructure.

Triage initial assessment and caseloading

- 3.5 Individuals engaging with CfW are taken through a light touch assessment to gauge their distance from the labour market and to identify their support needs. This feature of CfW is intended to allow clients to be referred to Advisers, Mentors or other programmes, as appropriate, and to ensure a balanced caseload within CfW teams. Although it was originally envisaged that these light touch initial assessments would be undertaken by Triage Support workers, it is now accepted that they might also be undertaken by Advisers or Mentors, though the intention remains that individuals will be referred onwards to the most appropriate form of support.
- 3.6 Separate engagement targets have been set for the DWP and LDBs in respect of each CF cluster and it is possible that this may instil an element of competition between staff involved in the delivery of CfW at a local level. It will, therefore, be important for the evaluation to consider the unintended consequences of the approach taken to setting targets as well as whether an effective early assessment of needs can be made ahead of an in-depth diagnostic assessment.

Advice and mentoring services

- 3.7 Advisers and Mentors conduct in-depth diagnostic assessments with clients, documenting needs and barriers in detail and designing support to address those needs. Advisers and Mentors then work with participants over a period of time, referring them to other interventions and agencies, as necessary.
- 3.8 The nature of support provided by Advisers and Mentors is expected to differ, reflecting the distance from the labour market of those with whom they are assigned to work. Advisers are expected to offer work-related support to those deemed to be less than 12 months from the labour market. This support might include 'better off calculations', referral to short training courses, job search and CV/application support etc. Mentors, on the other hand, are expected to work with those facing more complex barriers (e.g. personal issues, mild mental health problems, substance misuse, debt or housing problems etc.) which may require referral to specialist intervention. Accordingly, the duration of Mentor support is generally intended to last longer.
- 3.9 Advisers and Mentors manage their own caseloads, but are assisted by Triage Support workers who, for example, manage the booking of training and organise 'triage meetings' with external support agencies.
- 3.10 The non-prescriptive nature of support available recognises the complex and often multiple barriers to employment faced by target participants, be those attitudinal or psychological, or more practical in character. Flexibility in terms of the timescale and intensity of support on

offer is designed to enable participants to move into sustainable employment and to avoid the 'revolving door syndrome'.

- 3.11 A key feature of CfW is the continuity of support provided to participants by Advisers and Mentors. This reflects evidence that a service built upon ongoing rapport and trust will enable participants to consider movement towards the labour market, perhaps undertaking activities they had not previously considered. However, it is assumed that participants (most particularly those aged 16-24) might be handed over from Mentors to Advisers as they progress towards employability and the emphasis of the support required moves towards job-search type activities. Subsequent stages of the evaluation will explore the extent and effectiveness of such hand-overs.

Training provision and the Barriers Fund

- 3.12 Participants are able to access existing flexible training programmes delivered locally through a variety of organisations including CF. In addition, where nothing appropriate is available through existing or mainstream sources, participants are able to book bespoke training programmes delivered via a centrally procured managed service.
- 3.13 A barriers fund is also available to help participants overcome final barriers to employment by enabling the purchase of, for example, interview clothing, travel costs, short-term childcare and tools to start work.

Programme exit

- 3.14 CfW participants exit the programme once they move into employment and/or, in the case of 16-24 year olds who are NEET, when they enter education or training. It is intended that CfW will help to develop participants' appreciation of local employers' needs and temper their aspirations to align with those needs. It is expected that the achievement of job outcomes will be partly dependent upon demand within local labour markets and it is possible that there could be some variation in the apparent success of CfW across different parts of Wales. This will be explored during subsequent stages of this evaluation.
- 3.15 Whilst crisis support from Mentors is available to CfW participants after exit, on an informal basis, there is no intention within the design of the programme to provide in-work support on any more formal basis.

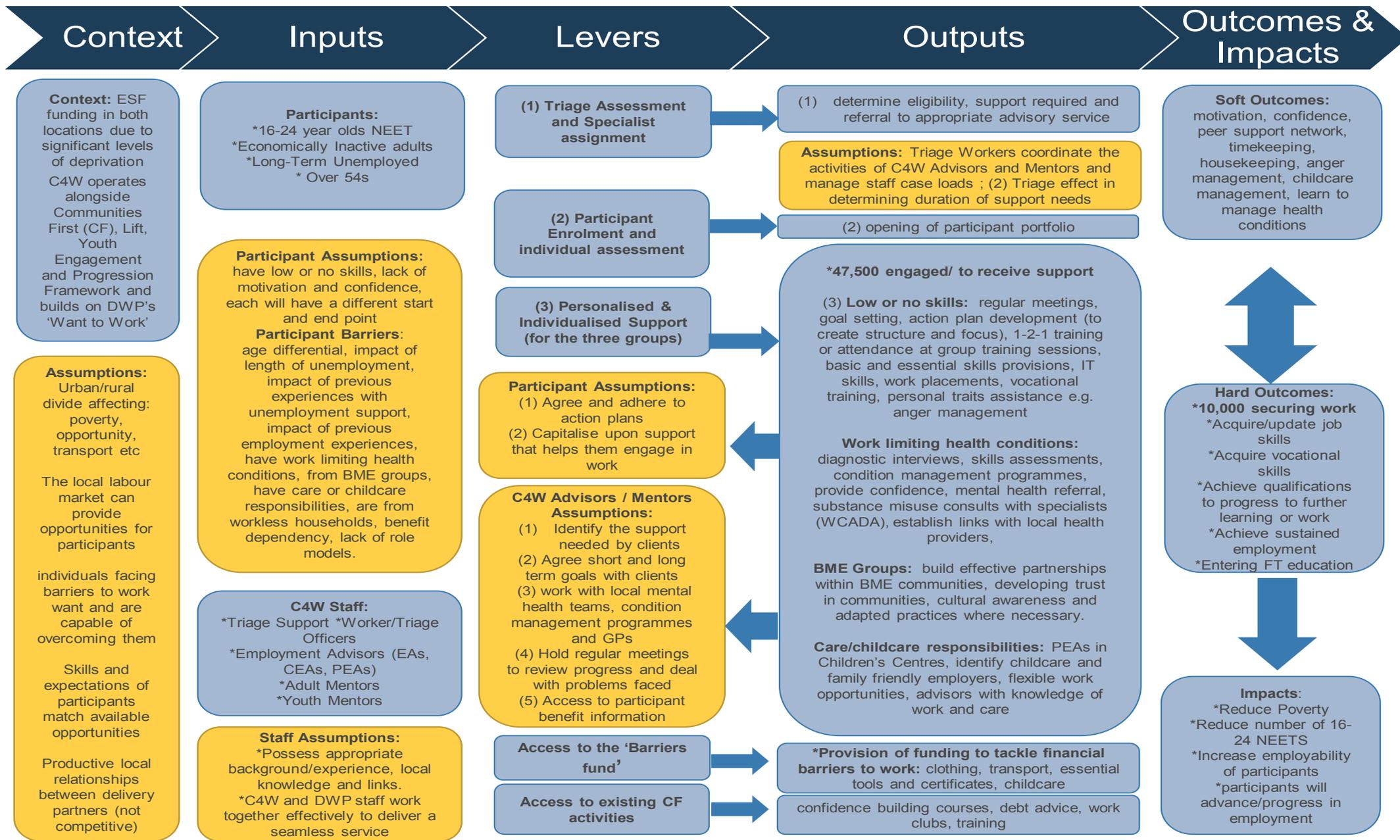
CfW staff

- 3.16 CfW staff need a range of skills and knowledge, for example, the ability to engage target individuals, an understanding of the barriers to employment which participants face, the ability to help participants set realistic targets and to motivate them to achieve them a sound knowledge of networks and partnerships within communities and a good understanding welfare benefits.
- 3.17 Whilst CfW has been built upon existing structures, the scale of the programme may present challenges in terms of finding staff with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Communities for Work Theory of Change/Logic Model

- 3.18 The logic model given at Figure 1 below seeks to capture participants' expected progression through CfW and through interim, short and mid-term outcomes into longer term hard outcomes. The model identifies the range of assumptions that underpin the programme and which the primary research will test during forthcoming stages of the evaluation.

Figure 1: Communities for Work Overarching Theory of Change Model



4. Conclusions about the veracity of the CfW theory of change

- 4.1 It is clear that CfW aligns well with the WG's tackling poverty ambitions and it is evident that in designing the programme, lessons have been learned from previous interventions. However, CfW is a complex programme which involves a number of organisations (WG, DWP and 19 LDBs) and is reliant upon the ability to build upon and integrate with existing structures, most notably CF. These factors will all need to be considered during subsequent stages of the evaluation.
- 4.2 There is strong evidence for providing continuity of support through a trusted adviser. Thus, case-loading within CfW and allowing the personalisation of service to emerge from this is a tried and tested mechanism through which outcomes can be achieved. Similarly, there is a strong evidence base that holistic, integrated work is effective and can support the hardest to reach when delivered in trusted spaces in the communities where target participants live.
- 4.3 There is a clear rationale for targeting the programme at particular groups, but the design has also been driven by the need to fit with ESF funding structures. Although many of the barriers faced are the same, the needs of individuals are likely to vary, as are their starting points. The ability to address this range of needs through a personalised, advisory relationship is well established and does not indicate or assume that all groups require the same or specialised support.
- 4.4 Additionally, it is known that intervening to address the barriers of young people who are NEET to enable them to make better transitions can result in huge economic and social returns relative to the costs that emerge from this status.
- 4.5 Less well known is whether the Triage concept can work effectively as this is a novel characteristic of the programme. Similarly it is unknown how well this will direct resources to ensure cost effectiveness.
- 4.6 Also less certain is whether the referral mechanisms can generate the planned level of demand that will lead towards the target outcomes being achieved.
- 4.7 A further uncertainty is the degree to which local contexts will affect delivery, both in terms of the nature of local labour markets and in terms of the quality of relationships between CfW teams and key partner organisations.
- 4.8 Subsequent stages of this evaluation will explore the veracity of the theories underpinning CfW, with the Stage 2 report focusing more closely upon process issues and the Stage 3 report focusing on emerging outcomes.

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