

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Friday 2 February 2001

Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm

Venue: University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (Colchester Avenue Campus)

Attendance:

Members:

Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff Central
Alun Cairns	South Wales West
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Michael German	South Wales East
William Graham	South Wales East
Brian Hancock	Islwyn
Jane Hutt	Vale of Glamorgan
Pauline Jarman	South Wales Central
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West

Jenny Randerson	Cardiff Central
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Phil Williams	South Wales East

In attendance:

Sarah, Hayley and Keith	'Right On 4 ' The Cardiff Youth Network
John, David and Trowie	Fernhill Drop-in Centre
Catriona Williams	Director, Children in Wales
Andy James	Policy Officer, Barnardos
David Allen	National Secretary, YMCA Welsh Council
Joe Howsam	Director of Social Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council

Secretariat

Martin Stevenson	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

Opening remarks

1. The Chair extended a welcome to all those present including members of the public and presenters. The theme of the meeting was provision for children and young people, and the Chair said that the Partnership Government had made a firm commitment to transforming the way in which these services were provided. The National Assembly was conducting a wide-ranging consultation on its policy towards children and young people, and he felt that it was appropriate for the Committee to hear the views of young people themselves. The Committee would also be hearing the views of the voluntary sector and local government.

Item 1: Apologies for absence

2. Apologies for absence were received from Rosemary Butler, Jane Davidson, Geraint Davies, David Davies, Jocelyn Davies, Sue Essex, Janice Gregory, John Griffiths, Carwyn Jones, Peter Law, Huw Lewis, David Melding, Jonathan Morgan, Rhodri Morgan and Lynne Neagle.

Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December: SEWR-06-00 (min)

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December were approved.

Item 3: Open mike session

4. In response to an invitation from the Chair, members of the public raised the following issues:

- There were several questions concerning provision of services for disabled young people, including transportation to youth centres and access to further and higher education.
- There was a question relating to increased provision for speech and language therapy amongst children and young people and a call for the introduction of neo-natal hearing screening in Wales.
- The issue of funding was raised in relation to education. This led to some discussion on the National Assembly's role in monitoring local education authorities to ensure the appropriate use of funds to enable an effective and efficient education service.
- There were several questions raised about the longer-term funding of voluntary sector organisations which had received support from the National Lottery.
- There were a number of questions relating to child safety, including a call for the National Assembly to take account of environmental issues when implementing policies that may have a significant impact on the safety of children. There was also a point

made on the control and inspection of foster care services.

- There were questions about the impact on the voluntary sector of the charges made by the police for criminal record inquiries.
- There was a question on the Data Protection Act and confidentiality and how this may lead to difficulties in partnership working.
- The issue of youth justice and the rights of children regarding the law was raised.

5. The Chair said that if those asking questions provided their names and addresses he would arrange for them to receive an answer in writing from the relevant Minister.

Item 4: Provision for children and young people: The young people's perspective

6. The young people from 'Right On 4 ' The Cardiff Youth Network began by stating that they were confused about their rights. They outlined the contradictions that children and young people face, for example, young people were able to serve in the armed forces yet they were not entitled to vote.

7. The following points were made in the presentation:

- The move to replace A levels with AS levels was criticised for placing unnecessary pressure on students.
- It was suggested that key skills were unnecessary and inappropriate for many students and that they were of no additional benefit.
- It was felt that there was inadequate financial and emotional support available to young people in further and higher education.
- There was a call for the minimum wage to be extended to include all young people of working age. It was suggested that the current rate led to exploitation of those who were most vulnerable.
- It was suggested that contraception should be available to all young people free of charge and that the clinics offering advice to young people should be made more accessible.
- It was felt that there should be more help and guidance available to young people living alone who may experience difficulty coping with the pressure of living independently. It

was suggested that any advice available to adults should be available to young people.

- It was suggested that young people should be entitled to free leisure facilities, which would increase general health and well-being and result in a more productive workforce.
- There was a call for adequate funding of the voluntary sector which would help take forward the recommendations made in the consultation documents.
- It was felt that there was a need for ongoing consultation between the National Assembly and young people in Wales. Furthermore, the views of young people needed not only to be heard but to be taken into account in the policy making process.

8. The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members acknowledged the frustration young people encountered regarding inconsistencies in the age restrictions which applied in different areas. The Committee had some sympathy with the view that there should be a greater standardisation of the statutory age limits. However, it was noted that generally these limits were in non-devolved areas, so that the National Assembly would have to persuade the UK Government of the case for change. One suggestion was that a Commission should be established to consider statutory age restrictions more generally. It was also noted that discussions were continuing about the formation of a National Youth Parliament for Wales, which would provide a forum for young people to express their views. Some Members felt that if discrepancies in age consent were remedied allowing young people to gain more rights, they must also accept the responsibilities associated with adulthood.
- There was discussion on how to improve access to further and higher education, where a comparison was drawn with Ireland where over 50 per cent of young people progress to further and higher education. It was suggested that there was a relationship between the education system in Ireland and the rapid growth of the Irish economy. Some Members felt that greater financial assistance to young people was required to facilitate an increase in the uptake of further and higher education.
- It was suggested that the specialisation associated with A level study was unnecessary at such an early age and that AS levels had been introduced to combat this and widen the opportunities available to young people. Members felt that the AS level system was still in its infancy and that it was not yet possible to review its effectiveness. Likewise the aim of key skills was to promote a broader knowledge base, increase flexibility and equip young people with the skills required in all aspects of life.
- Members felt that the National Assembly had adopted an inclusive approach to young people which had enabled them to be more involved in decision making processes. This

was exemplified by the appointment of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, when children and young people had been involved in the selection process. It was also noted that young people had direct access to Assembly Members via the Internet.

- It was acknowledged that further discussion was necessary on the most effective way to consult young people. Jane Hutt undertook to visit the young people in order to discuss teenage health and how to improve the consultation process. Lorraine Barrett and Christine Chapman stated that they would welcome the opportunity to visit the Fernhill Drop-In Centre for further discussions.

9. The Chair thanked the young people from 'Right on 4 ' The Cardiff Youth Network and Fernhill Drop-In Centre for sharing their views and ideas with the Committee. The Chair said that the views which had been expressed would be submitted to the relevant Assembly Ministers so that they could be taken into account in the current consultation exercise.

Items 5 and 6: Provision for children and young people: The voluntary sector and local authority perspectives

10. Introducing her presentation, Catriona Williams welcomed the consultation documents *Children and Young People – A Framework for Partnership and Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales*, although it was felt that a single document would have been preferable. She endorsed the development of a strategic framework for the planning and delivery of services to children and young people and particularly welcomed the emphasis given to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was suggested that it would be appropriate to establish a cross-cutting committee in the National Assembly to deal with issues relating to children and young people.

11. Catriona Williams welcomed the proposed rationalisation of the available funding streams into a Children and Young People's Support Fund. She suggested that there was a need to map those needs for which funding was not available, and drew attention to the position on foster care. She also welcomed the proposal to improve local planning through a single Children and Young People Partnership, although there was a need to consider strategic planning guidance for local authorities. There was also concern about the lack of infrastructure to support the planning process, in the absence of Children and Families Forums in some local authorities. She felt that the new policy framework would depend on the success of partnership working on the ground, and a clear direction was required from the National Assembly in order to help foster effective partnerships. She emphasised the level of expertise which the voluntary sector could bring to local partnerships, which could be used by local authorities to help design their services.

12. The next presenter was Andy James of Barnados Cymru, who said that he would comment on three aspects of the consultation documents, that is partnership working, participation and

universality.

13. On partnership working, Barnados Cymru was committed to working in partnership both with service users and other agencies. However, experience of partnership working varied considerably across Wales, and Andy James felt that a significant cultural shift was needed if the aspirations for the proposed Children and Young Peoples Partnerships were to be achieved. It was important that the National Assembly did not under-estimate the difficulty of this task, given the time and effort needed to establish and maintain effective partnerships. This would require trust and a sense of equality among the partners, long-term resourcing and capacity building to support the infrastructure of the partnership, as well as a shared vision of what needed to be achieved rather than a concern to protect or promote an individual organisation's interests. He urged the National Assembly to value the contribution which voluntary agencies could make to partnerships, which often included funding as well as expertise, knowledge and experience.

14. With regard to participation, Andy James commended the National Assembly for its clear commitment to involving and listening to young people in the planning and delivery of services. Again he felt that it was important not to under-estimate the size of the task, which would require a cultural sea-change in most organisations. There were implications for the design of services, which needed to be flexible so that it was possible to respond quickly to whatever young people wanted. It was important to avoid tokenism, as young people would become disillusioned if their views were not acted upon. Furthermore, the service providers would have lost an opportunity to frame their services in a way which met users' needs.

15. Andy James' final point concerned universality, where he expressed support for the aim outlined in *Extending Entitlement* to provide universal and preventative services. It would be important to develop services on a fully inclusive basis, taking account of the needs of disabled children, young black people and other disadvantaged and socially excluded groups. However, he felt that services should continue to be targeted at disadvantaged groups of young people, otherwise there was a risk that they would continue to feel marginalised.

16. David Allen said that the YMCA welcomed the *Extending Entitlement* document, particularly as it began to restore the preventative function to the youth service, that is the provision of help and guidance to young people rather than simply dealing with the consequences of crises or failures.

17. He felt that voluntary organisations were the result of local people noticing a particular need and attempting to address it. The YMCA currently had 31 autonomous centres in Wales, each of which provided a unique range of facilities, reflecting the needs of the local community. He gave a brief outline of these facilities, ranging from cyber cafés, crash pads, secondary and further education courses, basement businesses and beds for people at risk. In order to support this pattern of service delivery, core funding was needed for the HQ organisation.

18. David Allen emphasised the need for sustainable funding for the voluntary sector organisations. He felt that three year funding available from the National Lottery could destroy the impetus of management committees and could lead to unrealistic ambitions within communities. It was noted that the YMCA obtained support from 26 different funding streams excluding voluntary trusts and charities.

19. Finally, David Allen raised the issue of the charges made by the police for providing criminal record information, which he felt would impose a crippling surcharge on volunteering which the voluntary sector would not be able to meet. He also felt that there was a fundamental difference between 'grant aid' and true partnership working and stated that the two should not be confused. He called for equal partnerships and integrated work.

20. Introducing his presentation, Joe Howsam said that he would give a personal perspective on provision for children and young people. He welcomed the consultation documents, although he echoed the view expressed by others that a single document would have been more appropriate.

21. A comparison was made with the implementation of the Children's Act 1990 which involved a large number of agencies and organisations each with their own agenda. Joe Howsam emphasised the importance of partnership, as distinct from co-operation, in taking the policy agenda forward. He endorsed the view expressed in the *Framework for Partnership* that services for children and young people needed to be based on an analysis of their needs and not the delivery structures of service providers.

22. Joe Howsam shared the voluntary sector's concerns about short-term funding and supported the rationalisation of the available funding streams. He questioned why it was necessary to employ specialists to prepare bids, and suggested that the current allocation of funding was often determined by the quality of the bids rather than where the needs were greatest. With regard to planning the delivery of services, he emphasised the need to strike the right balance in terms of provision of specialist services, so that it was clear what was needed without losing sight of the bigger picture. He felt that it would be helpful if there was greater synchronisation in the preparation of service plans, and emphasised the need for the process to be child-centred with full participation from young people and parents.

23. The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee endorsed the view that well-developed partnerships were vital in the provision of services for children and young people. It was felt that organisations needed to develop trust in the partnership approach and that local authorities must work at engaging communities.
- Members acknowledged the concerns raised about continuation of long-term funding. It

was noted that the National Lottery Board could now allocate 25 per cent of funding to continue established projects. The Committee felt strongly that funding from the National Lottery should not simply displace that of the local authority. The point was made that small isolated communities may face difficulty attracting National Lottery funding and that this should be investigated further.

- The Committee expressed concern about the financial implications for the voluntary sector of the charges made by the police for criminal record inquiries. It was noted that a number of Members had made representations to the Home Office on this issue. The Committee felt that continued support for the campaign was needed.

24. The Chair thanked the presenters for sharing with the Committee their perspective on the provision for children and young people and for answering questions from Members. He said that the views which had been expressed would be submitted to the relevant Assembly Ministers so that they could be taken into account in the current consultation exercise.

Item 7: Date of next meeting: Friday 30 March

25. The Chair reminded Members that the next Committee meeting would be held on Friday 30 March at Caerphilly Leisure Centre. He said that the topic for discussion would be environmental and regional land use planning issues.

Committee Secretariat February 2001

Annex

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS FROM THE 2 FEBRUARY MEETING

1. The Chair to arrange for each 'open mike' question to receive an answer in writing from the relevant Minister (paragraph 5).

2. The Chair to submit the views which had been expressed to the relevant Assembly Ministers so that they could be taken into account in the current consultation exercise (paragraphs 9 and 24).