

Minutes

Date: Friday 26 October 2001
Time: 10.00am to 1.00pm
Venue: Public Hall, Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant

Attendance

Members

Eleanor Burnham, Chair	North Wales
Alison Halford	Delyn
Ann Jones	Vale of Clwyd
Gareth Jones	Conwy
Tom Middlehurst	Alyn and Deeside
Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
Rod Richards	North Wales
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Karen Sinclair	Clwyd South
Rhodri Morgan, First Minister	Cardiff West
Brian Gibbons, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services	Aberavon

Officials

Steve Milsom	Social Care Policy Division
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Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Howell Rees	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Introduction and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant for its hospitality. Apologies had been received from Dafydd Elis Thomas, John Marek, Janet Ryder, Dafydd Wigley and Ieuan Wyn Jones.

1.2 The Chair explained that the choice of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant as the venue for the meeting reflected her wish to take the Committee to smaller communities to allow local residents to observe and participate in the work of the Assembly.

Item 2: Minutes and report back from previous meeting - NWR 03-01(min); NWR 04-01(p1)

2.1 Following the last meeting on 6 July, the previous Chair had written to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities summarising the main points of the discussion on the Housing Strategy for Wales. A copy of the Minister's reply had been circulated to Members and to those who raised particular points at the meeting. The comprehensive reply from the Minister was welcomed.

2.2 Mair Williams, Caernarfon Town Council, asked that the minutes of meetings be circulated to community councils.

2.3 The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

Item 3: Strategy for Older People in Wales

3.1 The Chair welcomed Brian Gibbons and Steve Milsom to the meeting. Brian Gibbons gave a presentation explaining the background to the development of a strategy for older people. A copy is at annex 1.

3.2 The Chair then invited contributions from the public.

3.3 Godfrey North from Bethesda said that local authorities were being forced to transfer old people's homes to the private sector. Local authority homes were expensive to run and many needed investment to bring them up to standard.

- Brian Gibbons said that in some areas there was over-provision of nursing home places, but in others there was a shortage. Over-provision created viability problems and it was important to match care provision in each area with the needs of the local population. A partnership approach to develop a consistent and stable relationship with private care providers was needed. There should be a choice of provision and support also for older people who wished to remain in their own homes.

3.4 Douglas Reid, Montgomeryshire Carers, said that the strategy needed to address the needs of carers if older people were to be able to continue to live at home. Local authorities often failed to contact carers' organisations and he asked how this could be addressed.

- Brian Gibbons said that the Assembly had launched the National Carers Strategy and £3 million a year was available to help carers and provide respite care. A new mechanism was being

developed for the holistic assessment of the needs of individuals.

3.5 George Johnson, Age Concern, North Wales Central, asked if the Assembly would respond positively if the consultation demonstrated support for free personal care for older people. Margaret Miller, Age Concern Wrexham, was also concerned about the provision of free personal care and asked what the Assembly would do.

- Brian Gibbons said that the Assembly was already committed to providing free nursing care for people in nursing homes. The question of free personal care would be considered in committee and Plenary debate. It would cost about £40 million in Wales and between 3,000 and 4,000 people would benefit. The Assembly was in favour of the principle of providing free personal care but the cost needed to be considered against competing priorities for older people including care in the community and hospital services.

3.6 Barry Latham, North Wales Nursing and Residential Homes Association, said that the cost of nursing care in nursing homes was paid for by the Assembly but this did not cover the costs of many consumable items

- Brian Gibbons said that in future nursing care would be provided on the basis of an assessment of need. If a placement in a nursing home was most appropriate then nursing costs would be met. Steve Milsom said that the Assembly welcomed the views of the independent sector and Mr Latham's comments on consumable items had been noted.

3.7 Bryn Williams, Chief Officer, Age Concern, North Wales, said that the present system of care for older people was inadequate in a number of ways:

- the rate of clinical depression amongst those in care was much higher than amongst those cared for at home;
- most older people entered nursing homes from hospital and often had no input into the process of selecting a home;
- inadequate support made it difficult for older people to remain in their own homes and couples were often separated by the system;
- the cost and availability of nursing home care was a concern.

The NHS Community Care Act established the principle that people needing care should be able to live at home or in their own community. If this was to be achieved a long-term strategy had to be developed to deliver a responsive and flexible care system for future generations.

- Brian Gibbons said that standards varied between nursing homes. The Assembly was addressing this by establishing the Care Standards Inspectorate which would help drive up standards. There was a need to improve the training and qualifications of care staff but the independent sector, in particular, often found it difficult to devote sufficient resource to this. A partnership relationship

needed to be developed between the public and private sectors to help provide the stability both required to plan and invest.

3.8 The Chair then invited comments from Committee Members and the following points were made:

- only a relatively small proportion of older people were reliant on care services. The consultation should consider a wide range of issues affecting older people including law and order and taxation policy;
- the Assembly needed to give direction to local authorities on housing and personal safety issues. Integrated housing schemes could help older people to continue to feel they were part of the community. Very often people did not have the support of their extended family and it was important to develop networks. Lifelong learning should also feature in the strategy;
- it was important to maintain high standards in nursing homes. Problems over standards often arose in relation to the physical environment for providing care rather than on quality issues. Some nursing homes could be forced out of business and the Deputy Minister was urged to take these factors into consideration in considering the responses to the consultation on care standards;
- older people had skills and experience to give to their communities but they often became disengaged. The barriers which prevented them from contributing needed to be broken down;
- the isolation and depression faced by many single elderly people had to be addressed. Couples were often separated by the care system when they could no longer cope in their own home. They needed help before problems became too severe to be overcome. People were often too proud to ask for help but it was important for public authorities to help them stay in their own homes. While it was usually cost effective to support people in their own homes their needs were greater when they did eventually have to move into residential care so the system should allow funding flexibility;
- the work of Care and Repair in helping people to stay in their own homes was praised. The efforts that independent care homes were putting into improving standards should be recognised and local authorities should pay a fair price for the services provided;
- North Wales was often seen as an affluent area but concern was expressed that proposals in the Townsend report could see resources for health care redistributed to other areas of Wales. Creative thinking was needed in drawing up the strategy on a whole range of issues including transport, chiropody, dentistry, diabetes and incontinence;
- It was also pointed out that the Townsend report proposed rebalancing health authority allocations. However, as the health budget was growing all authorities would get additional resources with proportionately more going to areas with the greatest need.

3.9 The Chair invited further contributions from the floor.

3.10 Bob Barton, a community councillor, said that joined up thinking was necessary on transport. Transport costs and access to public transport made it difficult to visit elderly relatives in hospital for an extended period. Lessons could be learned from schemes operated by hospitals in the south east of England where bus services were provided along a circular route and passengers paid a flat rate fee. Objective 1 funding could be used to fund similar schemes in Wales. Hospital car parking charges could

also be expensive if visits had to be made on a daily basis.

3.11 Mair Williams, Caernarfon Town Council, said that district nurses and carers visiting elderly people at home faced problems when not allowed to give out tablets or other basic medication.

- Brian Gibbons said that there was considerable variation in practice across Wales and in some areas carers were permitted to give medication. The Social Work Council, which would be responsible for regulating carers, would establish a minimum level of training and qualification. This should include the administration of simple medication and address inconsistencies across Wales.

3.12 Jim Jones, Flintshire County Council and Wales Pensioners, stressed the need for the strategy to be properly funded. There was a need for co-operation and partnership between local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide flexible services, particularly in relation to transport.

3.13 Glenys Jones, Age Concern Llanidloes, said that it was impossible to distinguish between nursing care and personal care. The cost of care should be met without drawing any distinction.

- Brian Gibbons said that the new mechanism being put in place to assess needs in a holistic way should eliminate fruitless arguments over definition.

3.14 David St George, Celtic Dimensions, said there was a clear link between diet and health. Initiatives aimed at other sections of the population were already in place and similar schemes should be developed focusing on older people.

3.15 David Lloyd, Glyn Traearn Community Council, said that the Benefit Agency did not help to ensure that elderly people claimed all the benefits to which they were entitled. The application forms for housing benefit and rent rebates were complicated and people needed help in completing them.

- Brian Gibbons agreed that poverty was a barrier to people living a normal life and many older people were not claiming all the benefits to which they were entitled. Research was being commissioned into income and access to benefits for older people. Innovative ideas needed to be developed on releasing the capital tied up in assets

3.16 Mr E Thomas, Community Transport Association Wales, said that a recent survey had found that 70% community transport groups' travel time was related to journeys to and from health service facilities. However community transport groups received no core funding from the health service. He told the committee about a scheme in Worcester where the health service employed community transport officers.

3.17 The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and said that if there were any further points people wished to raise they should write to Assembly Members.

Item 4: First Minister

4.1 The Chair welcomed the First Minister to the meeting. The First Minister said he was pleased to be in Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant. He said that the Minister for Health and Social Services was, that day, announcing additional funding for cancer services in Wales. North Wales would receive £2 million to improve cancer services and equipment.

4.2 The economy of the area around Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant relied on farming and tourism and had been badly affected by foot and mouth disease. There were signs that tourists were beginning to return but visitor numbers from the United States were down and the loss to the Welsh economy could be significant. The agricultural industry still faced considerable problems as it tried to recover from the effects of foot and mouth.

4.3 Another controversial issue locally was windfarms. They produced clean energy but had an environmental impact. There was a need for decisions to be taken in a national context whilst taking account of local views.

4.4 The Chair invited questions from the floor.

4.5 Rhiannon Efans from Bethesda said that elderly people were not the only ones who needed care in the community. People of all ages who had suffered strokes needed similar support. She expressed concern that funding through the Independent Living Fund was being taken up by agencies and not getting to the people who needed it.

4.6 Les Day, Bangor Community Council, raised concerns about the dignity and quality of life of people who were cared for in the community. People were often not able to get up until late in the morning and were put to bed early in the evening. They were often alone and lonely for long periods. Mrs Butler, Bangor Community Council, said that the concerns of older people in receipt of care were often very basic, such as maintaining the cleanliness of their homes.

- The First Minister said it was sometimes difficult to see where the responsibility for care under the NHS ended and care under the local authority began. He was aware of many of the issues raised from personal experience and understood the wish of many older people to remain in their own homes. It was important for there to be a flexible range of options available to reflect need, ability to pay and the wishes of the individuals concerned.

4.7 Ann Roberts said that hospices often provided services that should be provided by the NHS. She asked if the Assembly had a strategy for the provision of palliative care.

- The First Minister recognised the importance of the hospice sector and the need to support palliative care.

4.8 Joyce Dudley said that sheltered housing provided a useful alternative between living at home and moving into care. The Assembly should encourage local authorities to provide more sheltered housing.

- The First Minister agreed that sheltered housing should be part of the suite of choices available to older people.

4.9 Jim Downey from Ruthin asked how the Assembly could help people who were affected by the recent flooding in the town but did not have insurance. Many of them had been affected by flooding last year.

- The First Minister said that Denbighshire County Council and the Environment Agency were working towards a permanent solution to the flooding problem which would involve diverting the river.

4.10 Bob Barton said that, as more people were cared for at home, housing associations were seeing more vacancies in their sheltered housing. He felt that it was important to help older people move to cheaper more efficient heating systems and pointed out that the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) was available only in areas that had mains gas. He suggested that Objective 1 funding could be used to fund green energy schemes.

- The First Minister said that he would look into the anomaly that HEES was available only in areas served by mains gas. The issue of grant aid for green energy projects had been raised with him by solar panel manufacturers.

4.11 John Arthur Jones, Best Value UK Ltd, said that the information in the leaflet on HEES was very difficult to understand. Care and Repair cost the public purse about £2.6 million a year to run. The cost on Anglesey was around £90,000 and he said that his company could provide the same service for considerably less. He also said that local authorities were ignoring the rules which applied to disregarding the first £6,000 of an applicants savings in respect of discretionary house improvement grants.

- The First Minister invited Mr Jones to write to him and said he would respond in detail.

4.12 Gwyneth Kensler, Denbigh Town Council, said that, because of bureaucracy, Objective 1 money was not being spent quickly enough and she asked for an assurance that all the funding available would be used. She also asked if the Welsh Development Agency's accounts and annual reports were available to the public.

- The First Minister said that he was confident that all the money available would be spent. The bureaucratic demands of the Objective 1 programme reflected the requirements of the European Commission. If Mrs Kensler had any particular concerns he invited her to write to him about

them. He confirmed that the WDA's accounts and annual reports were publicly available and were usually published in July.

4.13 Mario Kreft, North Wales Nursing and Residential Homes Association, welcomed the development of a strategy for older people and the involvement of the independent sector. The sector provided 25,000 beds in 1,900 settings in Wales and was, thus, an important resource. He urged better integration between the public and private sectors to promote the best features of the independent sector.

- The First Minister agreed that the private sector had an important role to play. Care provision should be seen as a seamless suite of services and it was a matter of personal choice and clinical assessment to determine the best provision for any individual.

4.14 Dewi Davies, North Wales Tourism, welcomed the support that had been given to tourism businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. Following the events of 11 September the number of American tourists visiting Wales had fallen. He asked if this could be taken into account when compensation was paid. He welcomed the numbering of junctions on the A55 and asked that lane closures for road works avoid the peak summer period and bank holidays. He was also concerned that electronic traffic signs sometimes displayed messages that were off-putting to visitors, such as advising them to lock up their valuables.

- The First Minister said the package of assistance was specifically designed to help businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak rather than other factors. He agreed that the messages referred to on electronic signs on A55 could give the wrong impression and said he would take the issue up with Sue Essex. On lane closures he said that road works were unpopular at anytime but he would take up the issue with Sue Essex and ask her to write to Mr Davies on this point.

4.15 Frances Hunt, from Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant, said that foot and mouth disease had had a considerable effect on the area and created much stress among farming families. She also urged the Assembly to put in place measures to tackle age discrimination.

- The First Minister agreed that the farming community faced considerable problems following foot and mouth. Lamb and beef exports were still banned but the supermarkets had done a lot of good work in promoting the domestic market for Welsh mountain lamb.

4.16 Helen Owen, Age Concern, said that the organisation was frequently asked for help with benefit claims, particularly attendance allowance. As a result, Age Concern had developed some expertise in this area.

- The First Minister said that Age Concern did a great deal of good work to encourage the take up of benefit. He agreed that it was important to help older people take up their full benefit entitlement.

4.17 Dorothy Bullet said that the application forms for Disability Living Allowance were very difficult to understand and asked if they could be simplified.

- The First Minister agreed that the forms were complex. The scheme was the responsibility of the Department of Social Security. MPs and AMs were aware of the difficulties because many problems relating to the scheme were brought to their surgeries.

Action points

4.18 Issue of messages displayed on A55 gantry signs to be taken up with Sue Essex - **First Minister**

4.19 Issue of lane closures on the A55 during the high summer season to be raised with Sue Essex and reply sent - **First Minister**

4.20 The Chair thanked the First Minister and said that the next meeting would be held on Friday 30 November in Llandrillo, Denbighshire when the topic would be the Welsh language.

Secretariat

October 2001

Annex 1

STRATEGY FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Presentation by Brian Gibbons AM

I am delighted that so many people have taken the time and trouble to attend today. It is very important that as many people as possible have the chance to contribute to this debate and to help shape the Strategy for Older People in Wales.

The development of this Strategy is a very important initiative by the Assembly, as it will enable us to focus policies on the needs of older people and to respond and plan proactively to the changes in age structure. It will be important that the Strategy takes account of the wide variation between people in the way they experience, and respond to ageing. Many 'young elderly' are relatively fit and rightly fiercely independent. Others, particularly those who are living well beyond 80 in increasing numbers, need to be assured that high quality health and care services and support is available to meet their assessed requirements.

We are all very much aware the numbers of older people are significantly greater than at any time in our history. People are living longer and are more healthy. This is a great achievement that should be celebrated. One of the main opportunities that face us this century however is to respond to the needs of

an ageing population and to harness the contributions older people can and do make to society. Older people expect much more from life and the services they use. They want a bigger say in decisions that affect them and want opportunities to contribute to their communities.

To meet this challenge we must plan for all our futures, not just for the current generation of older people. We need new strategies for engaging with older people and providing better services. The National Assembly now wants to develop its own Strategy for older people that is tailored to the circumstances and needs of Wales. That is why this Regional Committee session has been organised and why we need your help today in identifying the key issues and formulating some of the solutions.

The Strategy's terms of reference are:

"That older people in Wales should have the right to live independently and with dignity. To support them in achieving this, we will formulate a strategy to provide services in a timely and appropriate way, to promote their health and well-being and which enables them to maximise their independence, potential and participation."

It has 7 key themes, which can be used as a structure for our discussion today:

- Health and Social Care
- health promotion and healthy living
- housing and other local government services
- social inclusion including age discrimination
- transport, access, mobility and rural living
- lifelong learning and employment
- non-devolved issues including crime benefits, pensions

It will be important that the Strategy does not look at each of these issues in isolation from each other – people's lives are not neatly parcelled like that. The Strategy will therefore to a cross cutting approach and address these key questions:

What are the main problems facing older people: the main concerns are often about loss of control and certainty

What issues or causes lead to deterioration or disablement in the lives of older people?

When things go wrong, what are the systems in place to provide support?

We must plan for all our futures, not just for the current generation of older people. We need new strategies for engaging with older people and providing better services.

The Strategy will be evidenced base, utilising the research available on the lives of older people. We

also want the Strategy to be based on the realities of life for older people. We are therefore undertaking extensive consultation on the Strategy to ensure we hear as wide a range of views as possible – this has included 27 focus groups with older people, meetings with pensioner organisations, written consultation, an all Wales conference and finishing with sessions at the Assembly Regional Committees on 26 October and 2 November. The Strategy is a vital opportunity to ensure that the Assembly is proactive in planning for the changes in the age structure of our population and in addressing more directly now the needs and aspirations of Older People in Wales.

We are planning for the draft Strategy to be completed by March 2002 so it can be considered by the Health and Social Services Committee in spring 2002 and then published for completion of consultation by summer 2002. It is of course essential that the Strategy leads firmly to action and an implementation plan will also be developed to ensure that happens.

I hope that you enjoy the debate today and that you will be able to participate actively. The aim of this Strategy and the framework it will produce is to make a difference to the lives of older people and ensure living longer means much more than just adding years to life. Now is your chance to influence the future for older people and to have your say.