

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Report to Assembly 2005/06

1. Introduction

1.1 Standing Order 9.9 requires subject committees to report to the Assembly on their progress in fulfilling their forward work programme. This report covers the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006.

2. Membership

2.1 During the year membership was:

Janice Gregory (Chair)	
Mick Bates	From 07.06.05
Peter Black	Until 07.06.05
William Graham	Until 17.05.05
Edwina Hart (Minister)	
Mark Isherwood	
Laura Anne Jones	From 17.05.05
Huw Lewis (Deputy Minister)	
Sandy Mewies	
Catherine Thomas	Until 01.01.06
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Until 01.01.06
Leanne Wood	Jocelyn Davies substituted from April to July 2005 whilst Leanne Wood was on maternity leave

3. Meetings

3.1 During the period the Committee met formally in public on 18 occasions. Two of these meetings were held outside Cardiff, in Swansea and Colwyn Bay.

4. Visits

4.1 The Committee visited Corus Living Solutions and Dangerpoint in North Wales. Members of the Committee undertook a visit in connection with its review on substance misuse to Newport which concluded the programme of visits which had started in the spring term 2005.

5. Remit and Responsibilities

5.1 The Committee's remit is based on the portfolio of the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, which covers the governments programme for regenerating the communities in Wales, in particular those communities that are most disadvantaged. It includes Community First, anti-poverty initiatives, the social economy, the voluntary sector, community safety and relations with the police, the fire service, drug and alcohol misuse, youth justice and housing. The responsibilities of subject committees, as set out in Standing Orders, are attached at Annex 1.

6. Aims and Objectives

6.1 The Committee set out its aims in the Strategic Forward Work Programme for the period from June 2005 to December 2006, which was approved following the meeting on 18 May 2005. The aim has been to address anti-poverty and achieve better, simpler government. The Committee believes that housing matters are the key to this agenda.

6.2 The Committee agreed that in reviewing and developing policy it would focus on those areas where it may be seen to complement, rather than duplicate policies being developed by the Minister.

7. Progress

7.1 The Committee has concentrated on its policy reviews and on regular presentations from interested organisations from the voluntary, public and community sectors to enhance its appreciation of all matters included in its remit. Because that remit is so broad, the Committee has developed a strategic approach to its work. It has done so by adopting a single theme approach (where possible) to each meeting that supplements the regular Ministerial reports on priorities identified in the Strategic Forward Work Programme.

8. Policy Development and Review (Standing Order 9.7)

Housing for Older People

8.1 The Minister updated the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee Report (published in July 2004) on 12 January 2005.

Substance Misuse

8.2 The Committee began an inquiry into substance misuse in spring 2004 and following receipt of written submissions to the consultation exercise, decided to concentrate initially on treatment and treatment services. An interim report on treatment and treatment services was prepared and discussed in the Committee meeting on 23 June 2005. Following that discussion, amendments were made and a revised report was circulated to Members in July before recess. During the June meeting, Members identified that they wished to look at Barriers to Treatment Services as part of the Review and oral evidence was gathered at the meeting on 6 October 2005. A final report was considered on 25 January 2006 and following further revisions and amendments, the Report was agreed and laid on 24 March 2006. The Committee has agreed to conduct a second phase review into substance misuse, specifically looking at prevention.

Restructuring the Constabulary

8.3 In September 2005, the Home Secretary wrote to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to inform her that the UK Government intended to endorse the findings of the Report by Denis O'Connor CBE QPM, of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Closing the Gap a review of the "fitness for purpose" of the current structure of policing in England and Wales. The Minister subsequently asked the Committee to undertake a review on the report's findings, taking evidence and considering different ways in which the aims of the Home Secretary might be achieved in Wales. During October and early November, the Committee conducted a consultation exercise and took oral evidence. Its Report was published on 23 November and debated in Plenary on 30 November.

8.4 During February 2006, the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration asked the Committee to undertake a further review into the restructuring of the constabulary and to specifically look at future democratic structures. As with the earlier review, the Committee has a short timescale to conduct this review and aims to report by the end of June 2006. A consultation exercise ended on 31 March and the first oral evidence session was held on 30 March.

Other issues of policy development and review

8.5 In addition to its own policy reviews, the Committee has contributed to the key policy developments being taken forward by the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration. From the outset the committee has identified "housing" as the key element in the whole Social Justice agenda. It has prioritised those housing issues that have been identified in the Welsh Assembly Government's Housing Strategy, including those surrounding homelessness the ageing housing stock, energy efficiency, local housing strategies and the special problems of rural areas. The Committee has kept a watching brief on CAF/CASS following its transfer into the National Assembly for Wales in April 2005.

8.6 The Committee also recognises the part being played by the Community First initiative in redressing the balance by helping to regenerate the poorest communities in Wales. It receives regular reports on progress.

8.7 The Committee has contributed to Welsh Assembly Government developing policies on Disabled Facilities Grants and housing adaptations, Social Enterprise Strategy for Wales, Affordable Housing Toolkit and social enterprise.

8.8 The Committee received presentations from a number of different organisations whose work impacts on that of the Committee. These include Citizen's Advice Cymru, The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Anti-Poverty Network, Welsh Consumer Council, British Transport Police, Dyn Project, Fire and Rescue Services, Cymorth Cymru, New Pathways Project, South Wales Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Carers Wales, Royal National Institute for the Blind and organisations connected with social enterprise projects.

Minister's Report

8.9 The Committee scrutinises the Minister at each meeting via her regular reports to Committee. Following the restructuring of the Committee timetable from January 2006, the Minister attends every other meeting.

9. Review of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (SO 9.7(iii))

9.1 The Committee's remit only one ASPB - the Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse. As the title suggests this is an advisory panel only with no financial responsibility and its operations have not been scrutinised by the Committee

10. Scrutiny of Legislation (SO 9.8(i)).

Secondary Legislation

10.1 The Committee agreed a protocol for handling subordinate legislation in June 2003. The Committee received a detailed timetable of forthcoming legislation within the Minister's portfolio at each meeting. In accordance with the agreed procedure the following items were considered by the Committee

Social Housing Ombudsman for Wales Regulations

Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (Wales) Order 2006

European Legislation

10.2. Following the Panel of Chairs endorsement of the European and External Affairs Committee proposals for a system of more proactive scrutiny of European legislation by subject committees, papers have been prepared detailing all relevant social justice and regeneration documents deposited in the EU Parliament. Members are given the opportunity to identify items for future scrutiny. To date, none have

been identified.

10.3 Following the publication of the Commission's Annual Work Programme in January 2006, the Committee agreed that its priority areas would be Rights of the Child, Drugs Policy, Alcohol-Related Crime and Postal Services.

Primary Legislation

10.4 Following the Queens Speech, Plenary determined that the Charities Bill and Children and Adoption Bill should be referred to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee for consideration. Both Bills were considered and no amendments were proposed, However, Members wished to support amendments proposed by the NSPCC and Women's Aid regarding Child Contact on the Children and Adoption Bill. These proposals related to concerns raised about gaps in the legislation and that contact orders are sometimes made inappropriately by courts where there may be issues of domestic abuse. The Committee Chair wrote to the Minister of State for Children and Families with these concerns.

11. Appointments (Standing Order 9.8)

11.1 Janice Gregory, William Graham (until 17.05.05) and Mark Isherwood (wef 06.07.06) were the Committee's nominees for public appointments. Appointments made in the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 where subject committee nominees have been consulted were:

- Residential Property Tribunal: Appointment of Specialist Quantity Surveyor Member (06.07.05)
- Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse: Reappointment of Chair/Members (20.09.05)
- Residential Property Tribunal: Appointment of President (14.11.05)
- Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse: Appointment of Members (01.03.06)

12. Budget (Standing Order 9.8)

12.1 The Committee considered and commented on the Assembly Government proposed budget for 2005-2006. The Chair's letter conveying the Committee's recommendations is attached at Annex 2.

13. Cross Cutting Issues/Joint Working

13.1 On 13 March 2006, the Assistant Children's Commissioners attended a joint meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration, Education and Lifelong Learning, Health and Social Services and Equality of Opportunity Committees to discuss the Children's Commissioner Annual Report for 2004-05.

14. The Statutory Schemes

14.1 The Committee has taken account of the National Assembly's statutory schemes for relations with the voluntary sector and the sustainable development scheme in the course of its work. Similarly it has

had regard to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. Committee received a paper in February 2006 on how the Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio is meeting the requirements of the Equality of Opportunity Report 2004-05.

14.2 Equality issues are mainstreamed in the normal working operations of the Committee. As part of its work programme for 2005-06, the Committee considered such issues as:

- Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy on Tackling Domestic Abuse. An update on the implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy was received in January. The Committee also received presentations from the Dyn Project, a scheme to help men who are victims of domestic abuse and the Children's Commissioner attended a Committee meeting to talk about the effect domestic abuse has on children.
- The Committee received a paper on how the Department for Social Justice and Regeneration is promoting the use of the Welsh language.
- Disabled Facilities Grants and housing adaptations were considered throughout the year with the Minister publishing a review into all aspects in spring 2005. This is an issue that the Minister and the Committee have returned to on a number of occasions.
- The Committee considered the Home Office consultation on Human Trafficking.

14.3 On sustainable development, the Committee received a report at its February 2006 meeting on how the Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio is mainstreaming sustainable development.

15. The Future Programme

15.1 The committee's priorities for 2006-2007 are set out in the Strategic Forward Work Programme. Key subjects include:

- Housing
- Substance and Alcohol Misuse
- Domestic Violence
- Crime and Disorder
- The Anti-Poverty agenda – including community regeneration
- Youth justice
- Police and Fire services
- CAF/CASS
- Scrutiny of secondary legislation, particularly that relating to the implementation of the Housing Act in Wales
- Scrutiny of European Legislation
- Scrutiny of Primary Legislation included in the Queen's Speech and remitted to the Committee for consideration by Plenary

Annex 1

Responsibilities of Subject Committees

Standing order 9.7 and 9.8 set out responsibilities of subject committees.

Responsibilities

9.7 Each Subject Committee shall:

- (i) contribute to the development of the Assembly's policies within the fields for which the relevant Minister is accountable to the Assembly;
- (ii) keep under review the expenditure and administration connected with their implementation; and
- (iii) keep under review the discharge of public functions in those fields by public, voluntary and private bodies.

9.8 Each Subject Committee shall also, within the relevant fields:

- (i) advise on proposed primary, secondary and European legislation affecting Wales, including performing its functions under Standing Order 24;
- (ii) provide advice to the Assembly Cabinet on matters relating to the allocation of the Assembly's budget in accordance with Standing Order 21;
- (iii) perform its functions under Standing Order 23 (complaints);
- (iv) perform any functions assigned to it under the Code of Practice on Public Appointments Procedure made by the Assembly under Standing Order 22; and
- (v) consider matters referred to it by the Assembly within its fields.

Annex 2

Letter from the Chair to the Minister conveying the Committee's recommendations on the Assembly Government's proposed budget for 2005-06 (dated 25.05.05)

Budget Planning Round 2005

I am writing to formally record the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's views on your paper on the budget planning round 2005 that was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 18 May 2005.

May I first of all put on record the Committee's appreciation of the paper, which reflects the policies it has previously advocated and prioritised for the next 12 – 18 months. The Committee is again unanimous in its view that housing is central to the whole Social Justice agenda, and would clearly wish to see more resources being allocated if this was possible. It was noted that the cut in the Supporting People fund will have an effect on your budget and that in order to continue supporting very vulnerable people, you will have to fund projects from within your budget to counter this reduction.

On substance misuse, Members were very appreciative that the amount of money that has already been allocated to this has made a huge difference and the effect of a small investment has provided excellent value for money.

Members of the Committee felt that not only do the costs of abolishing means testing for disabled facilities grants have to be met from the budget but a start on reducing the deficit, which has occurred because some of the money previously spent on these grants has been put into the major repairs allowance, must be made. Members emphasised how important

this grant was and asked that the system ensured flexibility that enabled authorities to provide the facilities required for people with disabilities. It was noted that the disabled facilities grant impacts on the wider budget and given the financial constraints, it is essential that the maximum value for money is achieved.

The question of affordable housing, is of concern to Members and it was suggested that additional funding be secured from the central budget to enable your work on affordable housing to continue and develop further.

On the areas of homelessness, bed and breakfast / temporary accommodation, you were asked about how much social housing grant would be directed into temporary accommodation in relation to homelessness. It was noted that there would be a cost to local authorities because of the legislation on bed and breakfast accommodation that your budget has to cover.

The other point raised was with regard to the Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP). Acknowledgement was made of how popular and successful this programme has been and the excellent value for money achieved to date. It was suggested that a similar fund to CFAP be established for youth facilities, an area that has been raised in Committee on many occasions and the haphazard distribution of

such facilities throughout Wales. You helpfully suggested that you were considering establishing an inventory of all community facilities that exist, a point that was well received by Committee.

I hope you will find the views of the Committee helpful and supportive in your discussions with your Cabinet colleagues on the 2005-06 budget

I am copying this letter to all Members of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee.