

Social Justice & Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-09-06(p1)

Date: Thursday 8 June 2006

Time: 1.30pm-4.30pm

Venue: National Assembly for Wales

Title: Edwina Hart - Report to S J & R Committee - 8 June 2006

1. Operation Tarian

At Committee on the 15 March I agreed to report on the effects of Operation Tarian on adjoining Police forces including the North Wales force.

Tarian is the all Wales approach to the threat of Class 'A' drugs and Serious Organised Crime. The four Welsh forces have a specific lead area for each aspect of Tarian:

Availability - Chief Constable Dyfed Powys Police

Communities - Chief Constable South Wales Police

Children & Young People - Chief Constable Gwent Police

Treatment - Chief Constable North Wales Police

Due to the geographic profile and different threat levels across Wales, the availability/enforcement aspect of Tarian does not include North Wales. The three Southern Wales forces decided that the threat within Southern Wales was such that a dedicated team was needed to tackle Level 2 (middle market) drug distribution and a Regional Task Force (RTF) was established to enforce this. The RTF is staffed by officers from the three forces and is seen as an example of best practice for collaborative working throughout the UK.

The RTF is tasked with operations from the Regional Tactical Tasking & Co-ordination Group (RTTCG) on a quarterly basis. RTTCG is chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable of South Wales Police and is attended by the heads of CID from all four forces.

North Wales is a member of the Co-ordination Group and can task the RTF with an operation if the organised crime group being investigated is impacting on more than one force area in Wales i.e. the

crime is cross border. Whilst North Wales is an active member of the RTTCG, it finds that its participation in the English North West RTTCG operationally more beneficial. This is due to the threat of organised crime radiating from Merseyside and Greater Manchester.

Since the inception of the RTF the unit has been tasked with 26 operations, 3 of which have had significant links to Liverpool. These operations show that the threat from organised crime is significant from Liverpool for both North and South Wales. The RTF operations with links to Liverpool have resulted in:

- The seizure of 1.5 Kg of Cocaine, this seizure would have created at least 300 street level deals.
- £7,760 cash seized
- £274,478 assets confiscated from the organised crime group
- 2 Organised Crime Groups dismantled
- 58.5 years sentence given to offenders.

Enforcement collaboration between the Welsh forces in combating serious and organised crime has led to a greater understanding of the threat posed to Wales and enforcement activity has significantly stemmed the flow of class A drugs into Wales.

2. Courts Administration

We have received confirmation from the Presiding Judge of the Wales and Chester Circuit, the Hon Mr Justice Roderick Evans, that Her Majesty's Court Service has announced that it is restructuring its administrative units. One aspect of the restructuring is that, from April 2007, Cheshire will be moved into the Northern Region of England, and Wales will form its own free-standing administrative unit (effectively a 'Wales' circuit). Some Welsh court work will continue to be heard in court in Chester until there is adequate provision of courts in North Wales.

It has also been confirmed that HMCS will be restructured into 3 areas in Wales, compared with the current 4 area structure.

I know that the Committee will join me in welcoming these developments, which follow a period of sustained pressure from the Welsh Assembly Government for a 'Wales Circuit'.

3. Equity Release Launch

I launched new guidance on equity release for the benefit of older people on 5 April. It is essential that

older people have clear and comprehensive information on this subject in view of the complexities and pitfalls involved. The package of information comprised a DVD, posters and other material and was organised by Care and Repair Cymru in conjunction with Care and Repair agencies and other organisations.

4. Review of Housing Adaptations and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)

Steady progress is being made on the implementation of the DFG review. Revised guidance for local authorities and booklets for the general public are being prepared by my officials. I have also been considering further advice on the implementation of the review's recommendations relating to Registered Social Landlords (RSL). My officials have also had discussions with their counterparts in Health and Social Care on the recommendations covering Occupational Therapists.

5. Local Authority Capital Resources for Housing Renewal

Information on Local Authority Capital Resources for Housing Renewal is contained within Annexes 1 and 1(a).

6. RNIB Training to Improve Housing Adaptation

Further to my oral update to Committee on the 9th February, members will be pleased to note that from the funding provided by the Assembly Government through the Social Housing Management Programme RNIB Cymru are providing essential training courses. These courses are formally recognised by the College of Occupational Therapists, supported by CIH Cymru and are fully funded by the Assembly Government.

These courses have been designed specifically to equip individuals with the relevant knowledge to make homes accessible and improve their services to people with a sight loss and are based upon the principles in their three publications - "Housing Sight", "Adapting Homes" and "In sight of Home".

7. Meeting with the Voluntary Sector

On 17 May I met with representatives of the voluntary sector, as part of the regular series of meetings between the sector and Cabinet Ministers. Among the issues discussed were the regenerative effects of housing stock transfer; social inclusion; the employment of skilled refugees; and the long-term funding of voluntary organisations.

8. Post Office Card Account

I have written once more to James Plaskitt MP, Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions raising my concerns regarding the expiration of the Post Office card account in 2010. As with the previous letter from Mr Plaskitt, I will relay his response to the Committee.

