

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Date: Thursday 22 March 2007

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: Edwina Hart – Report to SJ&R Committee – 22 March 2007

1. Report on Substance Misuse Counselling Workforce Shortages

I stated in my report to the Committee on 8 June 2006 that I had asked for a report to be provided on counselling services. The work was undertaken by Peter Mason Consultant Services, who were contracted to work with the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework Psychological Therapies and Psychosocial Interventions specialist sub group, to report on the workforce shortages in counselling within substance misuse services in Wales. I have now received the report which is included as an annex to this report.

The report has a number of conclusions which are:

Consideration of a national long term approach to counselling training as part of a wider training strategy.

The establishment of an All-Wales Action Learning Group to develop service specification templates.

Career paths being built into the process to support the recruitment and retention of staff.

Practice teachers be attached to services that offer counselling to facilitate student placements.

Agencies that supervise trainee counsellors should be required to have standards, approval and accreditation.

A national strategy on assessors and guidance on which organisations should become Assessor Centres.

Recognition by the Welsh Assembly Government of the importance of funding workforce development.

Training developments be linked to the Lifelong Learning infrastructure and the funding opportunities available.

The report specifically mentions:

Confusion between commissioners and providers on the definition of counselling and what counselling service provision is being provided.

Problems with the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework (SMTF), in that there is no actual way to ensure that the services that are being provided match up to the framework specifications.

Commissioners comment on the unmet need, and there appears to be a consensus between providers and commissioners that the service needs expanding and developing.

The need for more acutely defined counselling services with clear outcomes that can be measured. The development of future monitoring and outcome measurement systems are vital for assessing need and developing appropriate services.

Commissioners felt that standards such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) should be increasingly used within the substance misuse field. There are clear issues relating to the design, commissioning and monitoring of services. There is little consistency of approach and varying degrees of understanding.

A Substance Misuse Treatment Framework for Wales Psychological Therapies and Psychosocial Interventions module was published in August 2006. This module outlines the definition of counselling and provided good practice guidance for the provision of this service by substance misuse commissioners.

The Committee is aware of the work currently being undertaken on a workforce development strategy.

In addition, the Committee has also been informed of the work that is well under way on the establishment of an all Wales network and collaborative centre for the promotion of excellence for education, training and development in substance misuse.

I have asked my officials to keep these matters under review. A copy of the report is at annex A.

2. Marketing the All Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline

A range of marketing material including posters, leaflets and cards have been distributed widely, including GP surgeries, A&E departments, substance misuse services, housing associations and criminal justice agencies. Young people have been especially targeted with the All Wales Schools Liaison Officers handing out advertising cards as part of the core programme. In 2007/08, ?20,000 of funding will allow for the development of a marketing plan focusing on the use of TV, cinema and radio advertising together strengthening links with local businesses such as breweries and the licensing trade.

3. Substance Misuse Action (Capital) Fund

At the January 2007 meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, I agreed to provide a comprehensive list of all capital projects approved from the Substance Misuse Action (Capital) Fund.

A total of 75 capital projects have been approved from the Capital fund in the first two years of the scheme at a cost of almost ?6 million. These are listed at Annex B.

4. Progress on Implementing Actions relating to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report on Hidden Harm

I am pleased to update members on actions relating to the implementation of Hidden Harm. Supporting vulnerable families through early intervention and prevention is at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government policies and programmes for children and social justice. Therefore, I am pleased to report the establishment of a Making the Connection project jointly supported by the Minister for Health and Social Services and myself. The project consists of five pilot sites across Wales using different early intervention models and techniques to support fragile families where parental substance misuse may place the child at risk. The pilots will be run in 5 Community Safety Partnership areas. They are Flintshire, Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend.

The pilots will test the development of seamless services that take into account the holistic needs of the child and the family. Pilots will be subject to an independent evaluation at the end of two years and will inform the Assembly Government's future direction on policy and promotion of evidence-based best practice.

Substance misuse problems account for some 40 per cent of child - care proceedings and children in care tend to come from families experiencing severe social problems such as substance misuse and mental illness. The Welsh Assembly Government will consult later this year on a strategy for children in need and those in local authority care. This will be predicated on reconfiguring services towards prevention and early intervention to provide sustained support to fragile families and bridging the gap between children and adults service which is the basis of the service that we are piloting.

These pilots will also contribute to the Welsh Assembly Government's child poverty aims by improving the parenting capacity of families effected by parents' substance misuse and improve the outcomes for disadvantaged children and fits with the Deputy Minister's Child Poverty Implementation Plan which includes a proposal to progressively co-ordinate its programmes to provide holistic 'wrap around' support for each child in poverty, their family and their community through a new Dignity Programme for children to be rolled out after 2010. Evaluation of the Early Parental Intervention Project could contribute to the development of such a programme.

The development and piloting of this service was only one of a number of examples of work in Wales that are referred to in the recently published Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs Report on Hidden Harm - Three Years On: Realities, Challenges and Opportunities which describes and comments on how local authorities and services have responded to the recommendations of the original Hidden Harm report. It also provides practice examples and information about implementation, together with key learning for the future.

I am pleased that there are other developments which received a positive mention in the report. These include:

The Welsh Assembly Government's Performance Management Framework Project, set up in 2004 to help to manage the delivery of Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales, established an All Wales Standardised Data Collection and Recording System. The ACMD considers inclusion of questions in the Wales databases of questions on children of problem drug users as a marker of progress.

The Cost-Benefit analysis, of the "Option 2 Service" in Cardiff, and the Vale of Glamorgan with a view to determining the scheme's effectiveness in preventing the removal of children of problem drug users into Local Authority care.

The "Option 2" service and "Families First" a multi-agency collaboration in Rhondda Cynon are cited as examples of projects whose work accords well with the findings from research and evaluation highlighted in Hidden Harm.

The Welsh Assembly Government's briefing events for supporting the launch of the guidance to Local Safeguarding Children's Boards, which included presentations to raise awareness of the needs of children of problem drug users. The ACMD takes this to suggest that a high level of priority is being given to this issue.

The piloting of a Common Assessment Framework for Wales in which the needs of children of substance misusing parents have been taken into account and noting that the Wales In-depth Integrated Substance Misuse Assessment Toolkit includes questions relating specifically to children and dependents of substance misusers, which are intended as a trigger for assessors to contact the appropriate children's services.

The All Wales network and collaborative centre for education, training and development in substance misuse which takes account of the aim in the 'Hidden Harm' Framework for Action, 'to ensure that the health and social care workforce is better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of substance misusers and their children.

The Substance Misuse Midwifery Liaison Service in North Wales.

Secondment from the Welsh Assembly Government of an official to work with Barnardos Cymru on issues which include those relating to Hidden Harm and Criminal Justice.

5. Substance Misuse - DAWN Project

Members will recall that we have been working closely with CAIS Ltd, (the Agency who run the DAWN project) and the Welsh European Funding Office to ensure that CAIS Ltd secured continuation funding for their European funding grant which was scheduled to end in December 2007.

I am very pleased to be able to advise the Committee that this work has been successful, resulting in CAIS Ltd receiving continuation funding until December 2007.

We are now focusing our efforts on working with CAIS Ltd and the CSPs to consider longer term provision and funding issues post December 2007.

6. Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators

The Committee may be interested in an update on the latest position regarding Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators.

All Community Safety Partnerships in Wales have designated Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinators who are now in their third year of operation and are driving work forward on dealing with nuisance behaviour. They are supported by annual funding of ?25,000 each from the Home Office.

ASB co-ordinators can challenge anti-social behaviour using a wide range of 'interventions'. Some of the most effective interventions are those that directly engage the individual and lead them to change their own behaviour.

The range of interventions include:

- warning letters and interviews
- contracts & agreements (eg Acceptable Behaviour Agreements/Contracts (ABCs/ABAs) and Parenting Contracts)
- fixed penalty notices (FPNs) and penalty notices for disorder (PNDs)
- parenting orders, Individual Support orders (ISOs), Noise Abatement Notices (NANs),
- dispersal powers and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders(ASBOs).
- demoted tenancies, 'crack house' closure orders.
- possession proceedings against a tenant

Local ASB co-ordinators may provide diary sheets to record the details of the behaviour as it happens, or the police may get involved depending on the circumstances and severity of the problem.

If a victim or witness of anti-social behaviour is too frightened to give evidence for fear of reprisals, he/she can give evidence but remain anonymous. This type of evidence is called hearsay.

A police officer or other professional witness, such as a council official, health worker, teacher or doctor can also give evidence in court on behalf of a vulnerable witness.

Some examples of emerging Best Practice are:

Safer Swansea's anti social behaviour Protocol based around the procedure they have established for tackling nuisance behaviour and calls on the public. The system involves a series of letters, visits and case conferences involving the individuals who are behaving in an anti-social manner leading up to a voluntary Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) or the ultimate penalty of an ASBO. In 70 per cent of cases the first letter eliminates the nuisance behaviour.

Neath Port Talbot's dedicated telephone line for people to report those who cause misery for their neighbours is proving to be very effective. Also anyone who gets three referrals to the anti-social behaviour unit in Neath Port Talbot will receive a warning on a yellow card – if they do not curb their behaviour they will be given a red card and could be put on Acceptable Behaviour Contracts or given an ASBO.

7. Crime Fighting Fund

During Assembly Questions on 1 February 2007, I undertook to provide information on the effectiveness of the Crime Fighting Fund. A table showing the outcomes is set out below.

Budget		Outcome
Disaffection Grant – Electronic Registration		Baseline Study being undertaken and attendance statistics will be monitored against this.
Community Safety Partnership – funding to assist with implementation of Assembly Youth Offending Strategy.	<p>During 2005-06 recorded crime in Wales fell by 3% compared to a 1% decrease for England and Wales.</p> <p>There has been some reduction in the number of Welsh first time entrants into the criminal justice system and in 2006-07 a 5% reduction is expected to be reached by the end of 2007-08.</p> <p>The target of a 2.5% reduction in reducing re-offending is expected to be reached by the end of March 2007.</p>	

Operation Tarian	<p>During 2005-06 as a result of Operation Tarian a total of: 1.7 kg of Class A Drugs and ?730,320 in cash was seized as well as ?1.5 million of stolen property recovered. Nine operations were conducted which resulted in 75 arrests</p>	
On Track	<p>The On Track programme was designed to develop areas of excellence in early prevention and models that would lead to substantial reducing in offending by young people in high crime, high deprivation areas. The Comprehensive evaluation is an essential component of the programme and will last for 10 years until the first children involved in the project are 14-21 years old. However, On Track is starting to show some early indications of how it might start to have a positive impact and the Evaluators say it clearly has the potential for future success.</p>	
Substance Misuse Action Fund		<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for Substance Misuse Treatment Services in Wales includes a KPI to reduce the number of incidences of reported acquisitive crime.</p> <p>There was a 19% reduction of incidences of reported acquisitive crime in 2005-06 compared to 2003-04 - this exceeded the target of a 15% reduction by 4%.</p>

Domestic Abuse		<p>We are seeing increasing levels of police incidents and increasing successful outcomes in court cases.</p> <p>Calls to the All Wales Abuse 'helpline' increased from 710 in January 2006 to 2031 in January 2007 – a 186% increase.</p>
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8. Rural Crime

During Assembly Questions on 1 February 2007, an issue was raised with me about the apparent difficulties farmers have explaining their precise location when reporting an alleged crime, and the delays in police attending the scene as a result.

The police have advised me that establishing and verifying the location of all callers to Police Control Rooms/Call Centres is of paramount importance. The police, like many other public services, have introduced and continue to develop the use of GIS Mapping Systems. These systems, based upon recognised identification features such as post codes, assist services to quickly identify and verify the location of callers, and then direct resources to them accordingly. A working knowledge of the area is an important quality in any call handler or control room operator, but GIS Mapping Systems remove the need for intimate geographic knowledge of vast urban and rural areas. No system is completely foolproof, but such technology is being continually improved and utilised by police forces and many other service providers to ensure that an effective response is provided to all callers. The Police have also informed me that they are not aware that difficulties in identifying locations of reported incidents is a significant problem, but would welcome information on such cases that may arise so that any issues can be properly addressed.

Police Forces in Wales recognise the need to engage as effectively as possible with both individual farmers and the wider farming and countryside communities. This has been, and continues to be achieved through a number of well established initiatives in each force area, such as Farm Watch, Horse Watch and Rural Watch etc. Each of these initiatives enable the provision of crime prevention advice and information direct to farmers, in addition to providing a mechanism for receiving their concerns and any information that they have that would assist both the police and their local communities in making the countryside safer. Local officers also work hard to maintain effective links with the local representatives of farming unions and Local Farmers Networks. The development and roll-out of Neighbourhood Policing will serve to improve further the existing links between the police and the farming communities across Wales.

9. Police Community Support Officer Figures in Wales

During Assembly Questions on the 1 February 2007, I undertook to provide figures on the number of PCSOs in Wales.

Police Authority	Strength 2002-03	Strength 2003-04	Strength 2004-05	Strength 2005-06	Strength 2006-07	Projected Figures 2007-08
Dyfed Powys	-	5	11	26	74	74
Gwent	30	50	60	76	109	129
North Wales	-	8	33	58	157	Depends on future funding
South Wales	-	63	68	111	285	325
Total	30	126	172	271	625	528 (N. Wales not included)

10. Fire and Rescue Service Operational Statistics 2005-06

I would like to bring to the attention of members, the statistical release titled 'Fire and Rescue Service Operational Statistics for Wales, 2005-06', published on 28 February 2007. The release is the first produced by the Welsh Assembly Government following the transfer of data collection from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Collecting and publishing this data gives us the opportunity to ensure that we provide information that is pertinent and relevant in Wales. Already we have ensured that the release highlights specific recruitment data requested by the Commission for Racial Equality.

The issues highlighted in the release cover Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Personnel, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety and Operational Activities. The information will continue to inform policy development and central and local initiatives such as the recruitment campaign that will be undertaken this summer to attract more women to become firefighters in Wales.

Some key results are set out below:

Fire and Rescue Service Personnel

There were 2,353 fulltime equivalent (FTE) staff employed across the three Welsh brigades as at the 31 March 2006, in addition to 1,528 Retained duty system (RDS) staff. This equates to staff increasing by 3 per cent and 1 per cent respectively since March 2005.

Equality and Diversity

At 31 March 2006, females accounted for 12 per cent of all staff, compared to 11 per cent in the previous year.

Minority ethnic staff in Wales accounted for 0.5 per cent of all staff, a slightly higher proportion than the previous 2 years.

In 2005-06, 7.0 per cent¹ of male applicants were successful compared with 6.6 per cent¹ of female applicants.

Whilst 7.8 per cent¹ of minority ethnic applicants were successful, only 6.9 per cent¹ of white applicants and 5.3 per cent¹ of applicants whose ethnic background was not stated were successful.

(1) Based on all known applicants during the year.

Health and Safety

Over the last year the number of shifts/days lost per person by wholetime firefighters fell slightly from 9.8 to 9.4 shifts/days. In comparison, shifts/days lost per person for fire control staff fell from 14.2 to 12.6 shifts/days.

Ill-health retirements increased slightly from 9.0 per 1,000 employees in 2004-05 to 9.6 per cent in 2005-06.

Operational Activities

During 2005-06 there were 9,214 non-fire incidents in Wales, an increase of 4 per cent on the previous year.

More detailed information can be found in the release and its additional tables: www.wales.gov.uk/statistics located in "Headlines, Releases and Bulletins" topic area "Other Government".

11. Delegated Running Costs for Fire & Rescue Service Branch 2007-2008 Onwards

The Committee will wish to note that I, and the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services, have agreed to fund the Delegated Running Costs (DRCs) for 2007-08 and beyond, from the Community Fire Safety Revenue programme budget in order to carry out the functions associated

with the responsibilities for the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales.

This funding will be enabled in 2007-08 and beyond by transferring ?673,000 from the Community Fire Safety Revenue BEL (within the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG) to the Staff Costs & Salaries BEL within the Staff Costs and Salaries Spending Programme Area (SPA) of the Central Administration Main Expenditure Group (MEG).

12. Home Energy Efficiency Scheme – Interaction with the Post Office Service

During Committee on 15 February 2007, I said that I would look at how the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme and the Post Office Service in Wales might interact more systematically. My officials are in discussions with Eaga, the Scheme manager in Wales, as to how this can be best taken forward and I will update Committee in due course.

13. Energy Suppliers Advice Services

At the last Committee meeting I agreed to provide a note on consumer advice from energy companies. The energy regulator, Ofgem, requires energy suppliers to invest in energy efficiency measures in customers' homes through the Energy Efficiency Commitment as part of their supply licences. They are also required to provide energy efficiency advice to customers. Many suppliers have their own energy efficiency advice lines, and information on their websites.

These services promote the assistance available from the Energy Efficiency Commitment and our own Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. Suppliers can also provide benefits advice, information on tariffs, and the priority services which are available to vulnerable customers.

The Energy Retail Association has also set up the Home Heat Helpline, which offers independent, free and confidential advice to customers and partner organisations on a range of issues related to energy bills. Callers to the freephone number (0800 33 66 99) can talk to specially trained staff who can provide help and advice with their home heating bills including grants to make homes more energy efficient (through EEC & HEES), arranging alternative payment methods to suit their circumstances, accessing a priority service team of specialist advisers and providing links to other support agencies.

Energy watchdog – energywatch

Energywatch, the independent gas and electricity consumer watchdog, is an independent advocate for consumers in the gas and electricity markets. Energywatch aims to be an independent consumer champion committed to improving the services provided by utility companies to all gas and electricity consumers.

In carrying out this role energywatch provides information and advice about gas and electricity; helps with complaints about energy companies; and campaigns for value for money and a better standard of service from energy companies.

14. Low Carbon Building Programme (LCBP)

The DTI's Low Carbon Building Programme has an overall budget of ?80 million and will run for three years from 1 April 2006. It replaced DTI's Clear Skies and Solar PV programmes. The programme is UK wide and provides grants for micro-generation technologies for householders, community organisations, schools, the public sector and business.

LCBP Phase 1

Phase 1 funds a range of microgeneration technologies including:

- Solar photovoltaics
- Wind turbines
- Small hydro
- Solar thermal hot water
- Ground/water/air source heat pumps
- Bio-energy
- Renewable CHP
- MicroCHP (Combined heat and power)
- Fuel cells

Two streams of grants are available under phase one of the programme:

Stream one: for householders and community organisations.

Stream two: for medium and large microgeneration projects by public, not for profit and commercial organisations.

LCBP Phase 1 Stream 1

Monthly caps have been applied to householder Stream 1 Low Carbon Buildings Programme grants to cope with high levels of demand. The total fund available has been increased to £12.7 million

LCBP Phase 2

The successful bidders in Phase 2 of the £50 million Low Carbon Buildings Programme have been

selected and will be managed by the Building Research Establishment.

Phase 2 provides grants for the installation of microgeneration technologies to public sector buildings (including schools, hospitals, housing associations and local authorities) and charitable bodies.

Applications have been accepted from December 2006 and are expected to be open until March 2008, with projects required to be completed by March 2009 (to be confirmed by DTI).

Grants are available for the supply and installation of any combination of the following technologies:

- Solar photovoltaics
- Solar thermal hot water
- Wind turbines
- Ground source heat pumps
- Automated wood pellet stoves
- Wood fuelled boiler systems

Organisations can receive up to £1 million in grant funds over the lifetime of the programme. This may be for multiple technologies at multiple sites - subject to a maximum of three eligible technologies per site, and through more than one application.

Welsh Assembly Government actions to date

DEIN and SJ&R officials have met with two of the successful framework contractors for Phase 2 to discuss how Welsh Assembly Government might promote the scheme in order to maximise take up in Wales. SJ&R officials have written to RSLs promoting applications to the scheme and confirming that Social Housing Grant (at the standard rate) will be available to contribute towards the costs not met by the DTI grant. Officials continue to help facilitate contact between the framework contractors and public sector bodies promoting the opportunities available to the public sector.

Welsh Assembly Government capital support for renewables

There are no current plans to provide grant support in the able to pay sector whilst Low Carbon buildings Programme funding is available. Officials will continue to monitor the success of the programme in Wales and any subsequent evaluation which will help inform future budget decisions. In the low income domestic sector the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to piloting renewable technologies and their potential role in tackling the hard to heat homes as part of HEES. Initial piloting has started with a number of local authorities.

Following the statement made by the Minister for Environment, Planning and the Countryside on Sustainable Buildings, February 13, a cross departmental group of officials will be looking at implementation of the BREEAM 'Excellent' target across all Welsh Assembly Government funded construction projects. Meeting the standard may, dependant on the specific project circumstances, involve the incorporation of renewable energy technologies.

15. Centre for Sustainable Construction

At the last Committee meeting, during the discussion of the report on Sustainable Development, Mick Bates supported the need for a sustainable construction centre in Wales, related to a statement made by the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside in Plenary on 13 February and the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment for all new buildings in Wales to be 'zero-carbon' by 2011. In his view the construction industry, including designers and architects, will need to build its capacity if we are to deliver this.

The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development has been considering these issues are part of their work. Following the plenary statement, we will be developing an Action Plan for Sustainable Buildings in Wales that will provide the framework for achieving our aspirations. In parallel, the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for construction jobs, skills and business development also looks at how the construction industry can change to deliver more sustainable buildings.

The issue of capacity building has been recognised and one of our objectives is to ensure we have in place the guidance and working methods that are needed. A centre for sustainable construction could play a major role in this.

I said that we are having discussions on this in Wales. Most recently on 27 February 2007, Constructing Excellence in Wales hosted a consultative workshop to further develop the proposal that has been developed by a group including Centre for Research in the Built Environment, Building Research Establishment Wales, Constructing Excellence in Wales, Fforwm Tirlun (Wales Landscape Industry Forum). Welsh Assembly Government officials representing Housing Directorate, Value Wales and DEIN were present.

Following this consultation workshop, a proposal for an Institute of Sustainable Construction will be submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government. Its purpose would be to advise and support the industry, including clients and consultants, on how best to deliver sustainable construction through information papers, technical assistance, best practice design advice and developing skills.

16. Legal Requirements and Guidance of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

I will be writing to the Chair in March 2007 with a note on the legal requirements and guidance of the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA).

17. Refugee Housing Action Plan

Awareness Raising

A series of guidance Welsh Assembly Government documents have been published with appropriate referencing to Refugees and Asylum seekers. Research by Professor Vaughn Robinson of Kings College London has recently been launched and its recommendations are being considered by the Housing Sub-Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum

Planning a Refugee Service

Liaison between the New Asylum Model teams, the housing providers and the local authorities have improved since the new contracts have been in operation. The Refugee Inclusion Strategy directly addresses a series of issues promoting better integration and community cohesion, as stated above, this is currently out to consultation and is the responsibility of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy Steering Group.

Accessing Housing and Support

A re-write of the Guidance document Asylum Seeker and Refugee Guidance issued in March 2005 is now required and has been put into the work programme of the Housing Strategy and Services Unit. The re-write will take into consideration the regional context for service provision and the New Asylum Seeker Model teams amongst other things.

The Action Plan would wish to ensure that Refugees and their organisations make full use of Social Housing Grant and to date not many schemes have applied for this funding. Community Housing Cymru, the Housing Associations Charitable Trust and the Welsh Assembly Government aim to raise awareness of Social Housing Grant funded schemes in England and examine their relevance for Wales.

Delivering Housing and Support

The requirement for a further research project is to be examined in the up-dated version of the Refugee Housing Action Plan. This research would involve:

Developing a profile of the refugees and asylum seekers being placed in Wales and more accurate statistics on how many people and households and their characteristics and if they remain in Wales. With this information more appropriate support can be considered.

The work of the Community Safety Unit and how this interacts with Refugees and Asylum seekers is to be reviewed. Numbers of any relevant incidents will also be looked at.

Further training for delivery agencies and statutory bodies on the needs of Refugees and Asylum Seeker groups is required and the up-date will focus on training programmes to be delivered by Community Housing Cymru and other agencies. Training for Tenants and Residents groups is also on-going.

A Welcome Pack for Asylum Seekers on specifically housing issues is to be considered.

A Translation and Interpretation Sub Group has been set up and will meet in March, to review these services.

Systems Issues

Systems at the Home Office have changed with the introduction of the New Asylum Seekers Model and the Immigration and Nationality Department. The National Refugee Integration Forum has been disbanded and consultation is taking place in a new body to replace it. NAM claimants should be given a 28 Day notice period of a claim determination and this is now more likely to be the case.

Funding Opportunities

Access to Social Housing Grant is to be reviewed. The Disadvantaged Groups fund is also under review. A new Action Point will be to review websites dealing with Refugee issues and services and to bid for funding to have these sites improved if necessary.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is the role of the Housing Sub Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum to monitor and evaluate implementation of the strategy and the up-dates seeks to achieve this. The next up-date will be in April 2007. In conclusion, a series of issues had moved on and the Mapping the Field research project needs a proper evaluation to see where and how lessons can be learnt and implemented.

18. Supporting People Grant

I agreed to update Committee regularly on the Supporting People Grant, particularly the formula arrangements for the redistribution of the grant. This is not to be confused with the handover of Supporting People Revenue Grant to local authorities.

I raised the issue of redistribution with the WLGA when I met them on the 7 February 2007.

I informed them:-

That I want to ensure that any changes to the distribution of Supporting People funding would be phased to protect, as far as possible, existing services and take account of the needs of service users.

It is important that the redistribution of Supporting People funding did not lead to a cut in the total number of services across Wales.

I want to consider the conclusions of the working group before reaching any decisions on redistribution.

I have agreed that officials will draft, and agree with me, a paper outlining a set of principles

governing the work of the working group and any proposed handover.

Furthermore, there is now a project timetable outlining the process for developing the formula, this will include a three month consultation on the development of the formula. The formula is scheduled to be completed in December 07.

19. Additional Funding for Extra Care Housing (Social Housing Grant)

I am pleased to announce that the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services has agreed with my request to utilise capital underspends from within my MEG to provide additional funding for extra care housing schemes in this financial year.

The SJ&R MEG is forecasting a capital underspend in the Fire and Rescue Services Capital BEL because of a legitimate change in the way funding transferred from the former ODPM is being used. As a result, it has been agreed that ?5 million be transferred into the Social Housing Grant extra care scheme budget for 2006-07.

20. Transfer of Funds to Support Housing Accommodation

The Committee will wish to note that I, and the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services, have agreed to transfer ?348,000 from the 2006-07 Substance Misuse Action Fund - Capital BEL in the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG to the SHG - Investment: Substance Misuse/Young Offenders BEL within the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG.

This funding will support the development of a 6 bedded supported housing accommodation for 16-18 year olds who have successfully completed a period of detoxification. I have agreed to transfer the costs of this project to the SHG: Investment: Substance Misuse/Young Offenders Budget Expenditure Line as it is the more appropriate budget to support this proposal.

21. Housing Waiting Lists

At the last Committee meeting I agreed to report back on the number of persons on Housing waiting lists. All 22 authorities were contacted by telephone and they provided their current figures which include number of statutory homeless and the number of tenants wanting to transfer. I can confirm that in total there are 82,850. A breakdown of that figure can be found at annex C.

22. Social Justice and Regeneration Committee- Youth Homelessness Policy Review

I provided my written response to the Committee's report on youth homelessness on 14th March 2007, and an oral report to Plenary yesterday. I am grateful to the Committee for all the hard work it has done to provide such a valuable report, which will inform future policy in tackling this serious problem.

23. Rapid Response Adaptations Programme (RRAP)

RRAP has been very successful to date and I am pleased to be able to tell you that I have agreed a 33% increase in the budget for 2007-08 which means that it will stand at ?2 million. This comprises ?1,980,000 for Care and Repair agencies and ?20,000 for Care and Repair Cymru for administrative costs.

I have also decided that an extra ?279,000 revenue should be allocated for the programme, this being an additional revenue pressure that will be found from capacity elsewhere within the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG.

24. Diversity Breakdown and Age Profile of Communities First Partnerships

At previous Committees, I agreed to look at both the diversity breakdown and age profile of Communities First Partnerships. Since the interim evaluation of the programme reported, my officials have revised a number of forms that relate to the Communities First funding process to improve the monitoring and evaluation of Communities First Partnerships. The key to taking this forward has been a thorough overhaul of the Communities First Annual report form which is completed by each local partnership. The approach has combined a new requirement for Communities First Partnerships to provide much more detailed information, while still enabling them to set their own priorities and objectives within the broad scope of the Communities First Vision Framework which encompasses all aspects of regeneration.

The form has been sent to Partnerships and it requires them to provide the Welsh Assembly Government with detailed information across a number of areas. This will include a diversity breakdown and age profiles of Partnership members. Partnerships will also have to provide a breakdown of the full staff structure including posts funded from other sources, and other external funding levered into the community through the programme. The annual report will also require Partnerships to show, amongst other things, how the work they have undertaken supports Partnership working, the programme bending agenda and the engagement of excluded groups. Specifically, Partnerships will be asked to identify their key achievements each year (as well as the barriers they have encountered) and will be expected to show how they have progressed against the SMART objectives they have set themselves, as well as setting out objectives for the following year.

The ultimate aim is that in future there will be clearly identified outcomes for the work of each partnership which will also be able to be analysed at a national level to demonstrate the cumulative benefit of the programme in respect of a wide range of policy areas.

25. Communities @One and Post Offices

At the last Committee meeting I agreed to consider how Communities@One could be linked in to post office services. My officials have discussed the issue with staff of the Wales Co-operative Centre (who administer the initiative on the Welsh Assembly Government's behalf) and it has been agreed that, in the first instance, the Communities @One Advisory Board will be invited to give their views when they next meet. Subject to any decision being made by them, discussions would then be needed with the various parties with an interest in post office issues.

26. Raising the Profile of Post Offices

At the Committee meeting held on 19 October 2006, I agreed to raise with the Welsh Local Government Association what can be done to support and increase the profile of post offices. I met the leader of the WLGA, Cllr Derek Vaughan on 7 February 2007, and expressed our concern that some local councils do not maximise the use of post offices to deliver services or information to local residents. In particular, I raised the criticisms expressed in the Assembly Chamber about some councils no longer allowing residents to pay council tax in post offices. I asked Cllr Vaughan if the Welsh Local Government Association could examine using post offices for the delivery of other Local Government services.

27. Support of Post Offices through the Structural Funds and Convergence Programme.

At the Committee meeting on 18 January 2007, I agreed to consider how support for post offices could be linked into Structural Funds particularly the Community Economic Development Theme of the Convergence Programme. A drafting group is working on the Strategic Framework (SF) for Community Economic Development; the SF is expected to be finalised by June 2007. My officials will continue to liaise with the group to ensure that all possibilities are being explored.

28. Consultation on the Future of the Post Office Network

I can report that I have replied on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government to the Department of Trade and Industry's consultation, a copy of which was sent to the Chair on 7 March 2007.

29. Child Poverty Implementation Plan

As Members will know, the Deputy Minister has been leading on the development of the Child Poverty Implementation Plan.

My officials are in the process of implementing the proposals contained within the Plan. These include bending resources across Welsh Assembly Government Departments towards the needs of the poorest children and maximising family income. For example, officials are in contact with the End Child Poverty Network with the intention of raising awareness of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) amongst the Network's membership and, most importantly, gearing up low income families to apply for HEES. Of the total HEES budget for 2005-06 of £14.2 million, it is estimated that £1.9 million (14%) was spent either directly or indirectly on children and that this assisted some 1,600 households by providing over 2,500 energy efficiency measures.

The Plan also includes a commitment that all new Welsh Assembly Government initiatives and new spending commitments should be child poverty proofed. To that end, the Welsh Assembly Government's policy gateway tool has already been amended to include a specific question on the impact of children and families in poverty. It is intended that this will be developed further following the Assembly elections.

I was pleased to be able to approve funding under the New Ideas Fund for Save the Children to undertake a research project which is exploring 'made in Wales' policy solutions to lift our poorest children out of poverty. I look forward to seeing the outcome shortly.

30. Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Child Maintenance White Paper

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions presented the Child Maintenance White Paper to the House of Commons on 13 December 2006. The consultation period ends on 13 March and my officials have sent a comprehensive response on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Overall I welcome any improvement and simplification in child support and maintenance issues and support any arrangements which help improve financial outcomes for children and young people. This is wholly consistent with our shared aim with the UK Government to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and we very much welcome the stated commitment by the UK Government that tackling child poverty is the first and most critical test for child maintenance reform.

Our primary objective must be to lift more children out of poverty and to ensure that parents have improved access to information and guidance in order that they are able to take greater responsibility for their own maintenance payments. We have offered to work with the UK Government to identify ways in which the Welsh Assembly Government and its partners in the public, voluntary and community sectors can help to improve access to this support.

Our response to the consultation does however raise a number of issues of concern. In particular, how the recommendations could impact on the family courts in Wales both in cost and in pressure of work at a time when the service is seeking to cut staff costs and funding. The use of the private sector in recouping outstanding payments, and specifically the potential loss of public sector jobs to private debt collection agencies, has also been raised.

Concern has also been noted about the possibility of compulsory joint birth registration as this could compromise the safety and protection of children and vulnerable women.

Whilst supporting the proposed increase in the level of the disregard we commented that a full disregard would be the most effective way of making this contribution to combating child poverty. We have also suggested increasing the disregard to take account of any contributions to the Child Trust Fund as this could be particularly beneficial to children from low-income families who have much to gain from asset based welfare policies.

With regard to the proposal for charging arrangements for the new enforcement body C-MEC, we have argued strongly that parents on benefit or low incomes should not be charged as the system needs to provide a set of protections and enforceable rights for our most vulnerable citizens. Whilst the White Paper rightly states that any charging regime must not dissuade low income parents from seeking maintenance, we have sought assurances that this important principle will holdfast during the Work and Pension's Secretary's consideration of this issue.

The White Paper states that there will be further consultation on a number of issues, such as the

development of C-MEC the new enforcement body, and we will certainly take the opportunity to comment further once the proposals are more developed.

31. British Irish Council – Lone Parents and Child Poverty theme

The Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for jointly chairing (with the Scottish Executive) the British Irish Council's group on Social Inclusion. At the Ministerial meeting on 3 March 2006, it was agreed that the work to be undertaken by officials during 2006-07 should be on Child Poverty with a focus on Lone Parents.

Work on the theme is progressing well. A literature review is being finalised and officials will seek to compare basic statistics on the scale of the issues across Member administrations. A paper has been prepared identifying common key challenges facing Administrations which will encourage joint working to find solutions and share best practice. Further work has been carried out to highlight engagement with stakeholders and best practice in gaining the views of children and young people on poverty issues. This work will feed into the final Ministerial Report which will be disseminated widely.

The next officials' meeting is to be held on 8 June 2007. A Ministerial meeting is provisionally planned for early 2008.

32. Evaluation of Regeneration Programmes in England

At the last committee meeting, I was asked to look at the broader issues around regeneration and stock transfer programmes in England. My officials have looked at the evaluations of regeneration in England, with particular reference to stock transfer and warden resource centres to explore their contribution to regeneration.

The main regeneration programme in England, New Deal for Communities (NDC), was developed as part of the Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. 39 areas were selected with the main aim of closing the gap between these and the rest of the country. Seventeen were introduced in 1998 and 22 in 1999. The key features of the NDC programme is working with partner agencies and the local community. It is estimated that Delivery Plans, developed by NDC's, should attract £50 million for each area, and the total programme budget is around £2 billion.

In terms of deprivation, 9 NDCs feature in the most deprived 1000 of 32000 Lower Super Output areas as defined in the 2001 Census. Their average population is 9800.

The programme is based on five principles. These are set out below in relation to their achievements at 2005:

Principle	Conclusion

<p>1. 10 year transformational change</p>	<p>This is a difficult objective for any programme with the lack of an effective evidence base at the start of the programme. However, there is evidence that increased spending has increased the added value provided by NDCs. There have been outcome changes in relation to attitudes towards the area, NDC, local environment and unemployment. The evaluation team are ‘cautiously optimistic’ about delivery plans being achieved in the second half of the programme.</p>
<p>2. The creation of dedicated neighbourhood level agencies to drive forward NDC partnerships</p>	<p>This has been a challenging objective in the early existence of NDCs, particularly due to existing agencies and local authorities not being optimistic. The NDCs have now become more embedded in the renewal community and examples of good practice have emerged.</p>
<p>3. A strong commitment to community engagement.</p>	<p>Numerous examples of individuals and households that have benefited from partnership interventions can be quoted. There are signs that the approach can improve residents’ attitudes towards their areas. However it is ‘not yet possible to argue that placing such an emphasis on community engagement better the changes of attaining ultimate outcomes such as fewer crimes, better education attainment rates or improved health’.</p>
<p>4. Working in partnership with other delivery agencies.</p>	<p>Joint working is an essential feature of the programme and evaluators suggest that NDCs have done ‘as much as might reasonably have been expected’.</p>
<p>5. Learning and innovation.</p>	<p>There has been less positive change in this area. Whilst partnerships have become more aware of the need to embed interventions in the evidence base, progress has not been as innovative as it could have been.</p>

A number of target outcomes have also been set across the following areas:

- Housing and physical environment;

- Employment, finance and enterprise;
- Crime and disorder;
- Health; and
- Education.

The interim evaluation of the New Deal for Communities suggests that, overall, there has been much improvement and the programme has produced high levels of added value. It also argues that there is little evidence that outputs would have occurred without the existence of the programme.

Stock Transfer

In terms of the effects of stock transfer on regeneration, the evaluators argue that it has been a critical element in several NDCs. For those that have voted to transfer, it has been successful in levering in millions of pounds into the area. However, the main reasons for areas where the vote has concluded not to transfer have been in relation to concerns about rent levels rising.

Research commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government examined the established histories of transfer in England and Scotland and considered the long term effects of stock transfer on communities and the organisations involved.

The report recognised the difficulties of comparing stock transfer across England and Scotland due to the different policy regimes, which also applies when considering the long term effects of stock transfer in Wales.

The majority of early studies into the effects of stock transfer were on behalf of large scale voluntary transfer policy initiators. The more recent literature has emerged with from an academic perspective. The main findings from this study are as follows:

Post-transfer tenants demonstrate higher satisfaction levels with a new landlord, and even more so where a new transfer organisation is established.

Former Scottish Homes tenants had increased power in the management of their homes and had increased trust in their management boards to do what was right for the community.

Tenant involvement has been wider and deeper in new organisations set up at transfer.

The elimination of housing debt has often generated a capital receipt which has been used as a catalyst for a more strategic enabling role.

Regulatory workload was found to have increased.

Stock transfer landlords have become some of the most efficient developers of social housing, although many have had to undergo extensive change in order to meet the requirements of lenders, regulators and tenants.

Stock transfer has developed opportunities which have been demonstrated by enhancing performance, particularly in relation to repairs.

2 studies included in the analysis argued that transfers had ‘made significant impacts at a wider social economic and community level’.

It is recognised that ‘remortgaging the whole stock’ is an expensive way of achieving positive outcomes and can result in fragmented local governance.

The Scottish experience more often shows that stock transfer has regenerated communities, levered in private funding and empowered local residents due to the public subsidy level.

The study acknowledges that more research is needed to assess the long term regenerative effects of stock transfer but also that this is difficult to ascertain due to the absence of precise benchmarks.

This information could be updated by commissioning further research but it does provide a historical perspective from the 1980s. However, Paskell and Power and Gibb et al do much to address the knowledge deficit. They focus on 12 representative case studies involved in the stock transfer of former Scottish Homes in 1989. Overall, the transfer was considered to have:

generated additional investment;

raised housing quality standards;

developed staff responsibility, business management and private finance skills;

encouraged tenant involvement and community engagement; and

facilitated wider housing choice and diversity.

Warden Resource Centres

Warden schemes have been developed by local authorities in many areas since the 1980s , but have been centrally funded through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now the Department for Communities and Local Government) within the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. In 2005 there were at least 500 warden schemes in operation across England and Wales. Included in this figure were 5 local authority-wide schemes funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The interim evaluation of New Deal for Communities notes the use of warden schemes in around 30 NDC areas. Whilst warden schemes are noted as being a supplementary service to the police, their

role can be far wider. Further NDC research on warden resource centres shows that whilst not one single model exists, the role has developed to a level where the engagement of residents is important. They have a traditional role in crime prevention, environmental improvements, housing management but have moved further into community development.