

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-05-07 (p7) Annex 1

Report to Assembly 2006/07

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 2006 to 31 March 2007.

2. Membership

2.1 During the year membership was:

Janice Gregory (Chair)	
Mick Bates	
Edwina Hart (Minister)	
Mark Isherwood	
Laura Anne Jones	
Trish Law	From 07.11.06
Huw Lewis (Deputy Minister)	
Sandy Mewies	
Leanne Wood	

3. Meetings

3.1 During the period the Committee met formally in public on 16 occasions. Three of these meetings were held outside Cardiff, in New Tredegar, Newport and Merthyr Tydfil. The Committee also met jointly with Health and Social Services, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and the Equality of Opportunity Committees to discuss the Children's Commissioner Annual Report for 2005-06.

4. Visits

4.1 The Committee visited New Pathways in Merthyr Tydfil and Members of the Committee undertook visits in connection with its review on youth homelessness during the autumn term of

2006. The Chair visited Aquila Housing in Cardiff.

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 communities in Wales, in particular those communities that are most disadvantaged. It includes:

Communities 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 2006 to April 2007, which was approved following the meeting on 8 June 2006.

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 15 February 2007.

Substance Misuse

8.2 The Minister updated the Committee on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee Report (published in March 2006) into treatment and treatment services on 18 January 2007.

8.3 The Committee agreed to leave the second phase review into substance misuse, specifically looking at prevention in the legacy paper for the third Assembly during its meeting on 19 October 2006.

Restructuring the Constabulary

8.3 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. The Report was published on 27 June 2006.

Youth Homelessness

8.4 In the autumn of 2006, the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee agreed to undertake a review into youth homelessness. The Report was published on 30 January 2007 and launched on 7 February 2007.

The Review considered the issues surrounding youth homelessness in Wales in particular:

The provision of services for young homeless people by local authorities and the voluntary sector, including the identification of good practice;

The role of local authorities in applying relevant legislation to youth homelessness issues, including the identification of good practice;

The Report was debated in Plenary on 7 February 2007 and the Minister responded on 22 March 2007.

Other issues of policy development and review

8.5 In addition to its own policy reviews, the Committee has contributed to key policy developments being taken forward by the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration. From the outset the committee identified housing as the key element in the whole Social Justice agenda. It 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 Communities First initiative in redressing the balance by helping to regenerate the poorest communities in Wales. It receives regular reports on progress.

8.8 The Committee received presentations from a number of different organisations whose work impacts on that of the Committee. These include

Cardiff Trading Standards, Commission for Racial Equality, Communication Workers Union, Keep Wales Tidy, Legal Services Commission, National Offender Management Service, Office of National Statistics, Police Liaison Officer and Stonewall Cymru.

8.9 As part of the policy reviews undertaken by the Committee, evidence was received from the following organisations:

Substance Misuse All Wales Police School Liaison Programme Manager, Cardiff Alcohol and Drugs Team, Dangerpoint, Flintshire Youth and Community Services, HYPE Project, Merthyr Tydfil, National Public Health Service for Wales and Powys Drug and Alcohol Centre

Restructuring the Constabulary Chief Constables of Wales, Denbighshire County Council, Police Authorities in Wales, Police Federation Welsh Region, Police Superintendents' Association and Welsh Local Government Association

Youth Homelessness Barnardos Cymru, Cymorth Cymru, Dr Kay Saunders, Gisda, National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, Pembrokeshire Care Society, Shelter Cymru, Wallich Clifford and Welsh Local Government Association

8.10 During the year the Committee submitted formal responses to two consultations:

2011 National Census

Post Office Network

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 covers 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:

Draft Regulations on Home Information Packs

Draft Rent Rebate Subsidy Deductions Direction

Draft Housing Revenue Account Subsidy and Item 8 Determinations for 2007/08

Fire and Rescue Services (Charging) (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 October 2006, the Committee noted that Social Reality Stocktaking, Green Paper on the Establishment of the Second Phase of the Common European Asylum System, Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council designating 2010 as the European Year of combating Poverty and

Social Exclusion. The Committee also agreed to receive progress reports on the priority areas highlighted from 2006 namely Rights of the Child, Drugs Policy, Alcohol-Related Crime and Postal Services.

Primary Legislation

10.4 Following the Queen's Speech, there were no items remitted to Committee for consideration.

11. Appointments (Standing Order 9.8)

11.1 Janice Gregory and Mark Isherwood were the Committee's nominees for public appointments. Appointments made in the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007 where subject committee nominees have been consulted were:

Appointment of Members To The Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (13.10.06)

CAFCASS Cymru Advisory Committee: Appointment of Chair (24.10.06)

Recruitment of 6 professional members to the Residential Property Tribunal (31.10.06 and 27.02.07)

CAFCASS Cymru Advisory Committee: Appointment of Chair (18.01.07)

12. Budget (Standing Order 9.8)

12.1 The Committee considered and commented on the Assembly Government proposed budget for 2006-2007. The Chair's letter of 10 July 2006 conveying the Committee's recommendations is attached at Annex 2.

13. Cross Cutting Issues/Joint Working

13.1 On 8 March 2007, 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 2005-06.

13.2 On 19 October 2006, the Local Government and Public Services Committee attended a joint item on Communities First.

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 on 18 January 2007 on how the Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio was meeting the Assembly's Equality duty

14.2 Equality issues are mainstreamed in the normal working operations of the Committee who scrutinised the Social Justice and Regeneration Department's contribution to the Welsh Assembly Government's Seventh Annual Equalities Report.

14.3 On sustainable development, the Committee received a report at its 15 February 2007 meeting on how the Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio is mainstreaming sustainable development.

15. The Future Programme

15.1 The Committee will be leaving a Legacy Paper with its recommendations for priority subjects to be taken up by a successor committee.

Janice Gregory
Chair

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:

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 2006-07 (dated 25.05.05)

Budget Planning Round 2006

I am writing to formally record the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's views on your paper on the budget planning round 2006 that was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 6 July 2006.

May I first of all put on record the Committee's appreciation of the paper, which reflects the fact that the Finance Minister has made clear that there are only very limited resources available for 2007-08 and 2008-09 and has only invited proposals to meet any inescapable programme and capital pressures.

On the inescapable pressures – Programme (revenue), Committee agreed that the areas highlighted in your paper must continue to receive funding.

The Committee were unanimous in their agreement that housing must be the portfolio's number one priority. Members referred to the importance of spending on social housing, the Homebuy Scheme and supported housing

Members also agreed that any additional budget priorities would result in the budget being spread too thinly across too many areas resulting in inadequate funding for some or all of the priority areas.

On the inescapable pressures – capital, Committee felt that the areas highlighted reflected the main priorities for the portfolio.

Members asked that the high level of savings in the Health and Social Services budget, brought about by the expenditure on extra care housing as recommended in the Wanless report, should be acknowledged.

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

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