

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINISTER'S REPORT

The Homelessness Commission

1. The Homelessness Commission was proposed under the terms of the Partnership Agreement "Putting Wales First." It takes forward National Assembly actions to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in Wales; the substantial increase in resources to address the problems; new secondary legislation to extend the safety net for homeless people; more preventative work and outreach support; better local strategies.
2. The Commission gives a new focus to the National Assembly's work in this area, and will make urgent recommendations to achieve our objectives. It will play a vital role in the development of better, more strategic service delivery, and in targeting the increased investment (£3.5 million extra) through Section 180 over the next three years. The Commission will advise the Assembly on delivering the objectives in "Better Wales", and taking forward the recommendations of the "Rough Sleeping in Wales" report, and the Housing Strategy task groups relating to homelessness and rough sleeping.
3. The Commission will be a "task and finish" group. It will be constituted in November 2000 and will complete the tasks listed by early summer 2001. The Commission will advise the Assembly on:
 - Delivering the objectives in "Better Wales" to reduce (by 2003) the "number of homeless families in temporary housing to below 500," for "the need for rough sleeping to be eliminated," and to "improve the access to health services for those sleeping rough and the homeless."
 - Taking forward the recommendations in the Assembly report "Rough Sleeping in Wales" and the recommendations of the Housing Strategy task groups relating to homelessness and rough sleeping.
 - Delivering local homelessness strategies in all Welsh local authorities.
 - Setting targets and outcomes.
 - Measuring homelessness and rough sleeping - and to advise the Office for National Statistics in relation to the count of rough sleepers in Wales on census night 2001.
 - The options for the long term funding for homelessness services in Wales, particularly in

relation to "Supporting People."

Its tasks will be to:

- Map current information on homelessness and rough sleeping in Wales, and existing and planned provision, and identify gaps and overlaps.
- Devise a common methodology for counting rough sleepers in Wales.
- Consider definitions of homelessness and rough sleeping and propose definitions for Wales.
- To consider how to monitor single homelessness across Wales
- To consider targets (and the feasibility of targets) and outcomes for tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Wales.
- To review and evaluate best practice in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping, and to publish the review on the Assembly website.
- To develop a model local authority homelessness strategy.

4. Peter Black will chair the Commission. I will also be inviting the chairs of the Local Government and Housing and Health and Social Services Committees to become members. I will announce further details of the membership very soon.

Local Authority Visits

5. I visited Wrexham on 24 November to meet the Leader and Chief Executive of Wrexham County Borough Council and to see a regeneration project. On 30 November I shall meet the Leader and Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot and I shall be in Powys on 6 December to meet the Leader and Chief Executive there.

Disaggregation of Police and Local Authority Budgets

6. I have asked officials to advise on the implications of disaggregating police and local authority budgets. I want to make decisions about Assembly block grant support to both more visible, and disaggregation would enable the Assembly's decisions about police support to be transparent. Meanwhile, I will announce headline support for the police, in line with a parallel announcement by the Home Secretary, on Monday 27 November.

Study on Councillors' Allowances

7. I have decided to expand the scope of the study into Councillors' Allowances.
8. This is a valuable opportunity to look, not just at Councillors' Allowances, but at ways in which we can encourage and support a more diverse cross-section of the population to become Councillors.
9. There is a need to involve the young, people from deprived areas, minorities and all under-represented groups in shaping a council's policy.
10. The study will look at all the various issues which might hinder people becoming councillors and ways to overcome them: e.g. paying employers to release staff; pensions; e-mail access, claims for using own computers, travel and subsistence.

Best Value Performance Indicators

11. I was grateful to the Committee for supporting the principle of reducing the number of best value performance indicators, and for their comments on individual indicators. The consultation paper to be issued shortly reflects both the general view, as well the specific comments.
12. The Welsh Local Government Association also suggested a reduction of a further 20 indicators, the majority of which have been accepted. Only where it was felt that deletion would result in the importance of individual services being perceived as having a reduced prominence have we retained them. This is especially so in those on the cultural elements of local authority provision.

Edwina Hart November 2000

NOTE OF MAIN ACTION POINTS FROM THE MEETING OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE ON 15 NOVEMBER

Action	Progress
Report to the Committee on the funding arrangements for police authorities.	Paper scheduled for 7 February meeting.
Raise with the police authorities at a future meeting whether there would be benefits from having greater consistency in the Memoranda of Understanding with exist between each police authority and probation services, local authorities and health authorities in relation to sex offenders.	This will be discussed at the next meeting of the Police Authorities for Wales.
Consult all party groups on the terms of reference for the independent study of councillors' allowances, and also make the timetable for the study available to the Committee.	Draft terms of reference currently being drawn up.
Seek the Local Government Partnership Council's views on the possibility of the Committee establishing a programme of visits to local authorities.	This has been noted for discussion at the next Local Government Partnership Council on 11 December 2000.
Ensure that information on successful bids under the Local Regeneration Fund was made available to Committee Members.	Arrangements now in place for Committee Members to receive copies of press releases announcing successful projects as they issue.

Bring forward a paper on the convergence of rents for social housing, together with the links to Social Housing Grant as well as the relationship to Housing Benefit.

Paper scheduled for 14 March meeting.

Provide Members with a background note on the 'Secured by Design' initiative.

This is in hand and will be provided within the next three weeks.

Take account of the Committee's views in taking forward the consultation document on the national housing strategy, and the Minister agreed to provide a background note on the technical points raised by Members.

This has been actioned and incorporated into the revised draft. The Minister has also written to the Chair answering the specific technical issues raised by Members.

Provide a detailed breakdown of the resources available to local authorities from all areas of the National Assembly's budget, as well as an indication of the distribution mechanisms for specific grants.

Finance Planning Division has begun work on identifying BELs that are wholly or partly used to fund local authorities.

Take account of the Committee's views on both Best Value Performance Indicators and the publication date for Best Value Performance Plans.

Committee's views on specific indicators have been considered and will be reflected in the consultation paper. Best Value authorities will be informed of the Assembly's decision to accept the view of the WLGA that only one Best Value Performance Plan should be published, and that will be on 30 June each year.

NOTE OF MAIN ACTION POINTS AGREED AT PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL MEETING ON 16 OCTOBER 2000

Action point	Status
1. Agreed to share outcome of Partnership Council with Local Government and Housing Committee.	Done.
2. Mrs Hart to visit Neath Port Talbot at invitation of Cllr Crowley.	A visit has been arranged for 30 November 2000.
3. Mrs Hart undertook to meet fire, police and ambulance services in due course.	Mrs Hart has met with the Police Authorities. A meeting with the Fire Authorities is being arranged and a meeting with all three services together will be arranged after that.
4. Agreed that the timetable for implementation of new political management structures would be extended by 3 months.	A revised outline timetable is included in the Committee paper for 29 November (agenda item 7).
5. There will be full discussion about the shape of the "fourth option" with local government, the model will not be imposed from above.	Consultation document to be discussed at LGH Committee on 29 November (agenda item 7) and issued as soon as possible thereafter.

<p>6. Mrs Hart and Sir Harry Jones to write to the Home Office on behalf of the Partnership Council expressing concerns over lack of consultation, use of private sector landlords (which did not help coordination of other support services), voucher system, need for Home Office to firm up its estimates rather than expect local government to guess.</p>	<p>Letter issued – copy sent to Chair of LGH committee.</p>
<p>7. Mrs Hart to write to Jane Davidson about including fire safety in the schools curriculum.</p>	<p>Done.</p>

<p>8. Agreed in principle to set up group to look at how to narrow the gap in performance between schools. Added children in care to its remit.</p>	<p>On agenda for next Partnership Council meeting, 11 December.</p>
<p>9. Agreed to tell First Minister of local government concern at not appearing in portfolio title.</p>	<p>Done: title is confirmed as Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities.</p>
<p>10. Agreed to schedule a contribution from police authorities and from community councils to Partnership Council discussions as soon as possible [there was a previous commitment to have the community councils' contribution in December].</p>	<p>A paper from the Community Councils Associations is on the draft agenda for the Partnership Council 11 December 2000.</p>