

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday 20 March 2002

Time: 2.00pm to 5.05pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Gwenda Thomas | Neath |
| (Chair) | |
| Peter Black | South Wales West |
| (Deputy Minister) | |
| Jocelyn Davies | South Wales East |
| William Graham | South Wales East |
| Edwina Hart (Minister) | Gower |
| Pauline Jarman | South Wales Central |
| Peter Law | Blaenau Gwent |
| Dai Lloyd | South Wales West |
| Tom Middlehurst | Alyn and Deeside |

In attendance:

- | | |
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| John Bader | Housing Directorate |
| Brendon Hilbourne | Housing Directorate |

Tamlyn Rabey	Housing Directorate
Paul Webb	Housing Directorate
Frank Cuthbert	Local Government Modernisation
Ian Fox	Regional Manager for Wales, National Probation Service in England and Wales
Carol Moore	Chief Officer, North Wales Probation Service
Linda Summers	Regional Director, Community Legal Service
Bob Chapman	Planning and Partnership Consultant, Community Legal Service
Nigel Horrocks	NIACE Dysgu Cymru
Howard John	Director, Welsh Federation of Housing Associations
Vince Millband	Community Initiatives Co-ordinator, Gwalia Housing Group
Joy Garfitt	Community Development Manager, Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association
Roger Bonehill	Office of the Counsel General
<i>Secretariat:</i>	
Roger Chaffey	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

Introductory remarks

The Chair said that the visits to North Wales and South West Wales to inform the policy review of community regeneration had been informative and productive. Professor Dave Adamson, who had sent his apologies for absence, would be providing a written report on issues raised during the visits. This would be circulated as soon as it became available.

The Chair had received a letter from the Deputy Presiding Officer informing her that changes to the Committee timetable would take effect in the autumn term. All Members had received a copy

of the letter and were content with this proposal.

Following a letter from the Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee, Members agreed that a joint meeting should be held on Wednesday 1 May between the Committee and the Health and Social Services Committee to discuss domiciliary care.

The Chair welcomed Pauline Jarman to the meeting ahead of her formal election as a Member of the Committee. Pauline Jarman would replace Janet Davies, who would be moving to the Environment, Planning and Transport Committee. The Chair thanked Janet Davies for the valuable contribution she had made to the Committee during her membership.

The Chair announced that this was to be the last meeting for the Deputy Committee Clerk Liz Wilkinson who was transferring to take up similar responsibilities with the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee. She welcomed Liz's replacement Claire Griffiths. The Committee thanked Liz for all her past hard work, which had been much appreciated, and wished her every success in her new post.

Item 1: Apologies and substitutions

1.1 Apologies had been received from Janet Ryder and Janet Davies. Jocelyn Davies and Pauline Jarman were substituting.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

2.1 The following declarations were made:

Peter Black said that he was a Member of Swansea City and County Council;

William Graham said that he was a Member of Newport County Borough Council;

Pauline Jarman said that she was Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and a member of the Welsh Local Government Association

Dai Lloyd said that he was a Member of Swansea City and County Council.

Item 3: Minister's report

3.1 The Minister said that officials would be writing to the main town and community council associations in Wales informing them that they would need to consider their position regarding the introduction of the code of conduct. Any concerns should be addressed with their own legal advice or by consulting the Monitoring Officer of their county council.

3.2 The Minister agreed to provide a note on the number of councillors who had been debarred as

a result of not signing the code of conduct.

3.3 The Minister agreed that officials would provide advice to community councils on the model code of conduct for members and to inform the Committee of the timetable for doing so.

3.4 The Minister agreed to report back to the Committee in due course on proposals for taking forward the report 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness among Lesbian and Gay Youth', following the Deputy Minister's consideration of its implications for Wales.

3.5 The Minister agreed to provide a note on the Local Regeneration Fund Local Authority Non Match Funding Bidding Round 2002-03, including details of the allocation of £9.267 million, which had already been committed and the quality of the bids received.

3.6 The Minister agreed to provide a note on the Local Regeneration Fund Community and Voluntary Sector Bidding Round for 2002-03. The Committee welcomed the funding provision which would benefit deprived communities in areas ineligible for EU Structural Funding.

3.7 The Minister agreed to provide further details of Post Offices involved in the Start-up Capital Scheme and to include details of its operation and the action taken to publicise the scheme.

3.87 The Minister agreed to provide a note on the Policing Priority Pilot Area (PPA) for Wales, which had arisen out of the White Paper on police reform Rhyl West in North Wales had been selected as one of five areas in the UK to take part in the pilot project.

3.9 The Minister had written to the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the development of a policy framework for children's play and about the implementation of the recommendations of the Waterhouse report. Members agreed it was important for the Committee to discuss the implications, in particular financial implications, for local government of the implementation of the recommendations of the Waterhouse report and Carlisle report. The Minister was mindful of the need to address the recommendations in the Carlisle report and to involve the Welsh Local Government Association at the appropriate time.

Item 4: Private Sector Renewal Arrangements – Consideration of the Regulatory Reform Order: LGH-06-02 (p.1)

4.1 The Minister said that the proposed changes to private sector renewal arrangements had been subject to wide consultation and had received very positive support. The current renovation grant system was very prescriptive and had increasingly restricted the scope local authorities had to develop strategic solutions to tackling local housing issues comprehensively.

The new arrangements would replace the current range of grants with a new general and wide-ranging power enabling local authorities to give assistance to improve living conditions in their area.

4.2 The new arrangements were being introduced using a Regulatory Reform Order and were currently being scrutinised by Parliament and would be debated by plenary on 16 April 2002.

4.3 The Welsh Assembly Government would issue detailed guidance on housing renewal policies to local authorities during the summer. The guidance, which would be developed in consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association, was intended to assist local authorities in the developing their policies and would identify the overarching principles of housing renewal.

4.4 The Committee welcomed the new arrangements and the increase in flexibility for local authorities to develop strategic solutions to housing issues to address local pressures and priorities.

4.5 Members agreed that the new arrangements provided an effective tool to assist local authorities in tackling disrepair and poor conditions in the private housing sector, which were often a result of the age of properties. It would be necessary to continue to develop other measures such as licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, to further improve conditions, particularly within the private rented sector.

4.6 It was confirmed that there would be a transitional period of 12 months which would enable local authorities to develop their new policies. During that time the existing grant system would remain in place.

Item 5: Review of Foyers – Consideration of the Deputy Minister’s report: LGH-06-02 (p.2)

5.1 The Deputy Minister said that the review was intended to be a limited exercise, with a short timescale, which would take a quick snapshot of current provision and perceptions of Foyer provision. The purpose of the review was to inform policy responses to Foyer development and management by the Welsh Assembly Government.

5.2 The original concept of the Foyer had envisaged a client group with limited support needs which had not been realised and that in practice, demand for the provision was from individuals who shared the same characteristics as Supported Housing users. The high level of support needs demonstrated by tenants posed management problems within projects.

5.3 The report recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government continued to support a holistic model of linked accommodation, support and learning and work services. This support should be for services for young people and should include other vulnerable groups. In this context, it would be important to promote a model of Foyer which was within a continuum of supported accommodation and learning and work services.

5.4 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee welcomed the report and its recommendations. In particular, there was

support for the promotion of a dispersed model of supported accommodation and learning and work services for young people, which did not exceed 12 bedspaces in scale. It was felt that the provision of smaller units would assist in preventing the problem of voids, allow a common approach to be taken and enable best practice to be identified.

- Members were concerned that Foyer development had not taken place within the context of existing strategic planning mechanisms. It was agreed that Foyers should be supported where a definite need had been identified and within the context of local authorities housing strategies.
- It would be necessary to ensure that supported accommodation was available throughout Wales, including rural areas. It was felt that individuals with support needs should not be required to move away from their local communities in order to access suitable provision.
- There was concern raised about the problems of accessing funding to meet the costs of the learning and work aspects of the service. It was noted that Social Housing Grant (SHG) and Supported Housing Revenue Grant (SHRG) could not be used to meet the capital or revenue costs of the training facilities. The revenue costs of learning and work services were currently met from a variety of sources including European Funding and charitable organisations. It would be necessary to develop suitable funding streams to meet the costs of the learning and work aspects of Foyers. ELWa were undertaking a pilot project, which would map the needs and provision for this client group and involved meeting the costs of providing a dedicated training worker to be based in two Foyer projects.
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- The Deputy Minister said that many Supported Housing Schemes had significantly increased rent levels, utilising the availability of Transitional Housing Benefit to meet the costs of support needs. However, this would have implications on affordability of rent levels for those participating in projects which specifically intend to encourage individuals into paid employment. The funding of support costs would be addressed by the introduction of Supporting People in April 2003.
- On the issue of the regulation of Foyers, the Deputy Minister clarified that Foyers were subject to the same regulations as other Supported Housing schemes. The Welsh Assembly Government's Housing Directorate carried out these regulatory arrangements.
- The Committee endorsed the recommendation that the report should be considered by the Education and Life Long Learning Committee.

Item 6: Changes in the constitutions of local authorities following the Local Government Act 2000: LGH-06-02 (p.3)

6.1 The Minister said that 18 local authorities, including Ceredigion County Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council had been informed that their proposals for their new

structures fully met statutory requirements. The outcome of the consultation of both Ceredigion and Rhondda Cynon Taff had revealed strong support for the Fourth option, however the local authorities had decided to opt for a leader and cabinet model. To reflect the support for the fourth option, both authorities had undertaken to ensure that chairs of important scrutiny functions were allocated to members of opposition parties.

6.2 Further information was awaited from Cardiff, Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire, which was expected by the end of March 2002.

6.3 There was some concern raised the Torfaen had submitted proposals to opt for a model different to that favoured by the consultation. The Committee noted that follow up had been carried out to clarify the position and further information was sought about the consultation process prior to agreeing the proposals.

6.4 The Minister confirmed that for outstanding local authorities, in most cases, the areas of concern which gave rise to the need for further information were essentially of a technical nature.

6.5 There was some discussion on the review arrangements for the new political management structures. It was noted that recommendations would be made about the issue of a review in due course. Members felt it would be necessary to allow local authorities a period of stability following the significant changes introduced as a result of the modernisation agenda.

Item 7: Presentation from the Probation Service

7.1 The Chair welcomed Ian Fox from the National Probation Service in Wales and Carol Moore from the North Wales Probation Service to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

7.2 Ian Fox outlined the development of the National Probation Service in England and Wales since the establishment of the unified service in April 2001. He explained the governance of the Regional Probation Service in Wales, which involved four probation boards including members of local authorities and magistrates.

7.3 The role of the Probation Service included involvement at all stages of the criminal justice system and had facilitated successful multi-agency partnership working in the delivery of preventative and rehabilitation measures.

7.4 Ian Fox highlighted the need to work with the Welsh Assembly Government to achieve mutual objectives and to address the factors which influence crime such as health, education and homelessness. The Probation Service had an important contribution to make to Crime and Disorder strategies and in doing so would assist in the development of safer communities.

7.5 Carol Moore expanded on the contribution of the Probation service to community safety and

crime reduction in Wales. She highlighted the service provided, including the production of pre-sentencing reports to assess potential risk to communities, Community Rehabilitation and Community Punishment Orders, which involved environmental projects and the work with release offenders and those on licence. In addition, the Probation Service were involved in taking forward the 'What Works' initiative aimed at reducing offending, tackling dangerous offenders through their work with multi-agency protection panels and assisting victims of crime in the context of case management of individual offenders.

7.6 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee agreed it was crucial to ensure that the needs of Wales were taken into account by the Home Office in taking forward the National Probation Service for England and Wales. The local probation boards had a role to play in ensuring that this was achieved. Ian Fox said that the National Director had met with the Minister and was keen to ensure that Welsh issues were addressed.
- It would be necessary to provide adequate resources to address long-term aims in dealing with offenders in Wales and to meet the additional demands of partnership working as a result of devolution. The Minister agreed to make representations to the Home Office for additional resources for the Probation Service in Wales to allow the Service to engage fully in the devolution process.
- Members felt it was vital for the Home Office to develop and implement a Welsh language scheme in a timely manner. Carol Moore said that individual probation areas had established schemes. She said it would be important to ensure that the Home Office Welsh language scheme reflected the existing schemes, which aimed to address the needs of local communities.
- Member expressed some disappointment about the methods used to appointment local government representatives to the four probation boards in Wales. It was felt that the Welsh Local Government Association would have been best placed to co-ordinate nominations from local authorities, which would have replaced the need to advertise the positions.
- There was some discussion on the need to protect children who were under threat of abuse. Carol Moore said that area Child Protection Committees and Public Protection Panels considered issues involving child abuse. The Public Protection Panels included representatives from health and social services sectors.
- On providing information to victims of crime, it was noted that various agencies had a role to play. The Probation Service worked in partnership with Victim Support and provided information at critical points as the offender progressed through the Criminal Justice process. Members felt that some victims of abuse would not be picked up by official support services if their individual cases had not been brought to court.

- There was some discussion about the link between re-offending and homelessness. This was a particularly relevant issue in Wales, particularly in the case of offenders who have been sent to prisons in England due to the lack of a women's prison in Wales and the absence of a prison in North Wales. Members noted that there was a close working relationship between the Probation Service and Prison Service in Wales. A joint release plan should be drawn up and appropriate measures put in place to ensure suitable accommodation is available to an individual once released.

7.7 The Chair thanked Ian Fox and Carol Moore for making their presentations and for answering Members' questions.

Item 8: Policy review of community regeneration: LGH-06-02 (p.4)

8.1 The Chair welcomed representatives from Community Legal Service, NIACE Dysgu Cymru and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations to the meeting and invited them to make their presentations.

8.2 Linda Summers from Community Legal Service (CLS) outlined the responsibilities of the Legal Services Commission. She said that the CLS provided information, advice and representation about civil rights. In doing so it played a part in combating social inclusion and rebuilding deprived communities.

8.3 Linda Summers explained the background which led to the development of the CLS. She said that advice services had been random and fragmented, which had led to gaps in provision and 'advice mazes'.

8.4 She highlighted the main aims and vision for the CLS which included a network of quality assured providers, co-ordinated funding, services to local communities and effective needs assessment. The importance of adopting a partnership approach was emphasised.

8.5 Linda Summers explained the existing structures and tools which would assist in building CLS. These included developing alternative methods of service delivery to ensure maximum accessibility.

8.6 She outlined the impact that the development of CLS had made on civil legal advice and representation services in Wales.

8.7 Bob Chapman provided examples of case-studies which demonstrated some of the different ways in which advice providers made a difference to the lives of individuals and communities through working as part of local CLS Partnerships.

8.8 The Committee noted that following the initial needs assessment which had taken place across all local authorities, it was envisaged that local CLS partnerships would continue to identify

needs and to ensure that these were met with adequate service provision.

8.9 Linda Summer agreed to provide Members with a copy of the CLS Directory.

8.10 Nigel Horrocks said that NIACE Dysgu Cymru was a multi-agency partnership whose mission was to support and promote the development of lifelong learning in Wales focussing on the needs of adult learners. He said that the partnership comprised of 110 organisations including local authorities, colleges, universities, community and voluntary organisations and individual members throughout Wales.

8.11 The key priorities of NIACE Dysgu Cymru were its role of advocacy on behalf of learners and adults who were least skilled; influencing policy which affected adult learners and; conducting research and development and piloting innovative approaches to engaging adults in learning.

8.12 Nigel Horrocks highlighted the strengths of NIACE Dysgu Cymru, in particular the promotion of adults' learning through organising campaigns and promotions; supporting practitioners through organising staff development and; the provision of information and publications.

8.13 He outlined the outcomes of the NIACE Surveys on Adults' Participation in Learning 2001 and the relationship between poverty of education and poverty of aspiration.

8.14 It would be necessary to seek ways to effectively engage adults in learning from social classes D and E. It was felt that this would best be achieved through community development activity. Nigel Horrocks highlighted the importance of appropriate bench marks, performance indicators and performance measures for engaging with the group most highly resistant to learning. He suggested a specific fund, which would draw together a range of funding streams to support a strategy to focus on engaging with this group.

8.15 Nigel Horrocks said that NIACE Dysgu Cymru had recently organised a conference 'Empowering Communities First' which aimed to address the need for people in communities to engage with their partners on an equal level.

8.16 NIACE Dysgu Cymru with the support of ELWa were establishing pilots aimed at engaging adult learners and to enable them to contribute to and shape future strategies.

8.17 The Committee emphasised the importance of appropriate publicity campaigns to encourage adult learners. It was important to recognise that some adults chose not to take up learning opportunities because they had previously experienced difficulties with learning. Nigel Horrocks suggested that an incremental approach to learning was a way of attracting people to take up adult education opportunities.

8.18 Howard John from the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations said that the development of the Housing Associations Community Development Network highlighted the change in

emphasis for housing associations from the core activity of housing provision to a more holistic approach to building communities.

8.19 He said that the majority of housing associations currently employed community development workers. It was felt that the Network could make a valuable contribution to the Communities First programme and would provide an effective channel through which communities could be reached. The majority of members of the Network were actively involved in Communities First and were working to establish strong relationships with local authorities in taking forward the programme. He emphasised the need to actively engage with the Communities First Network.

8.20 Howard John highlighted the need to establish community development as a core function for housing associations. This would require continued investment in the development process.

8.21 The following points were raised in discussion:

- It was suggested that the success of community development initiatives was dependent on true and meaningful partnerships. It was crucial for local authorities and housing associations to engage in effective partnership working to take forward community regeneration. Howard John said that the Network recognised the need to establish good relationships with the Welsh Local Government Association.
- The Network acknowledged the role of local authorities in administering funding for community regeneration programmes and initiatives. However, it was felt that, in some cases, community development organisations would be best placed to administer funds where successful capacity build had been achieved through the development process.
- There was a definite role for housing associations in empowering people in communities. This had been well established through the work of Tenant Participation Compacts, which helped to develop trust between local communities and housing associations.
- There was some discussion about the drawbacks of defining communities in terms of geographical area. The Network suggested it was important to allow communities to identify their own boundaries instead of using local government wards or county borders. However, it was noted that the Communities First programme was designed to encompass these issues. Current definitions were chosen in recognition of the fact that it was necessary to define communities using statistical data which could be validated. It was accepted that there would always be deviation in some areas.

8.22 The Chair thanked the representatives from the Community Legal Service, NIACE Dysgu Cymru and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations for making their presentations and for answering Members' questions.

Item 9: Minutes of the 6 March meeting: LGH-05-02 (min)

9.1 The minutes of the 6 March meeting were agreed.

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

1. The Minister agreed to provide a note on the number of councillors who had been debarred as a result of not signing the code of conduct.
2. The Minister agreed that officials would provide advice to community councils on the model code of conduct for members and to inform the Committee of the timetable for doing so.
3. The Minister agreed to report back to the Committee in due course on proposals for taking forward the report 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness among Lesbian and Gay Youth', following the Deputy Minister's consideration of its implications for Wales.
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8. The Minister agreed to make representations to the Home Office for additional resources for the Probation Service in Wales to allow the Service to engage fully in the devolution process.