

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING****Date:** Wednesday 8 May 2002**Time:** 2.00pm to 5.00pm**Venue:** Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building**Attendance: Members**

Gwenda Thomas (Chair)	Neath
Peter Black (Deputy Minister)	South Wales West
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
Janet Ryder	North Wales

In attendance:

John Bader	Housing Directorate
Sue Wood	Housing Directorate
Joanna Jordan	Crime Reduction Unit
Superintendent Pat Daley	British Transport Police
Simon Goss	Cardiff Custodial Bond Scheme
Melanie Williams	Cardiff Custodial Bond Scheme
Professor David Adamson	Expert Advisor

Secretariat:

Roger Chaffey	Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Deputy Clerk

Introductory Remarks

The Chair welcomed Colin Robbins and his colleagues from The Mount Resource Project in Pembrokeshire to the audience. Some members of the Committee had previously visited the project as part of its policy review on community regeneration. The Mount scheme was now twelve months old and the Chair thanked Mr Robbins for making copies of the progress report available to the Committee.

The Chair said that in the light of the Minister's unavoidable unavailability, it had been decided to postpone the proposed 12 June meeting in North Wales. Members confirmed that they wished to proceed with a meeting in North Wales but as the Minister's diary was full on scheduled committee days for the rest of this term, this would have to be postponed until the Autumn term.

The Chair said that the Committee timetable included a slot for an additional Committee on 30th May. As there was no formal business planned, she asked Members to consider whether there would be a benefit in resurrecting the proposed visit to the housing projects at Bettws and Brackla that day.

The Chair stated that she and other Committee Members had attended the earlier launch of the Community Housing Mutual Model by the Minister.

Item 1: Apologies and Substitutions

1.1 There were no apologies for absence or substitutions.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

2.1 The following declarations were made:

Peter Black: a Member of Swansea City and County Council.

William Graham: a Member of Newport City and County Borough Council.

Pauline Jarman: Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and a member of the Welsh Local Government Association.

Dai Lloyd: a Member of Swansea City and County Council.

Janet Ryder: a Member of Ruthin Town Council.

Item 3: Minister's Report

3.1 The Minister presented her report. She stated that in the course of her regular meeting with Police Chiefs from all welsh forces, concern was expressed about the high increase in the availability of Class A drugs, especially in South Wales. She added her concerns to this problem and suggested that the matter be discussed in greater detail at the next meeting when David A'Herne, Crime Reduction Director for Wales, would make a presentation to Committee. She also agreed to make regular reports to the Committee on her meetings with the Chief constables.

3.2 In discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Concern was expressed about the different messages that were being received from Chief Constables on the best way to deal with the problem. It was suggested that there was merit in inviting Chief Constables to a future Committee meeting.
- Wales needed a strategy, albeit it with regional variations, for dealing with the problem. Members believed the Committee and Assembly as a whole could have a major input in formulating strategy with police forces.

- The point was made that the problems associated with drug abuse affected all aspects of society and that discussion on the matter in the Assembly should not be restricted to the Local Government and Housing Committee. It was acknowledged that the Health and Social Service Committee would also wish to have an input and that a joint meeting with that Committee on the issue would be beneficial.

3.3 The Minister made the following response and offered to take the following action:

- She was pleased that police chiefs had raised this important issue with her. She added that Committee needed to be very careful with this agenda, as this was not a devolved responsibility. She noted members requested for police chiefs to address Committee and felt that the correct way to proceed was for David A'Herne to address Committee in the first instance and she would consider the possibility of police chiefs being invited to an informal meeting. The Minister agreed to inform the Committee of progress on the joint strategic approach being agreed by the Chief Constables in Wales to combat the growth in the use of class A drugs in Wales.

3.4 The Chair said that strong messages had been received from Members and that the consensus was to start with a presentation from David A'Herne, Crime Reduction Director for Wales. It was also agreed that members from the Health and Social Services Committee should be invited to join the Committee in considering this item.

Item 4: Custodial Bond Scheme - Review of first year of operation LGH-08-02 (p.1)

4.1 The Chair stated that Simon Goss and Melanie Williams from the Cardiff Custodial Bond Scheme had been invited to "sit in" on this item and had agreed to answer any questions that members may pose.

4.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members agreed it was a good scheme with many benefits for both landlords and tenants.
- The decision to concentrate on student population to begin with was noted. Members asked how it was intended to develop interest from non-students into the scheme and to extend the scheme throughout Wales?
- The matter of how the scheme was publicised was also raised?

4.3 In response, Simon Goss advised:

- It was decided to concentrate on student population at inception of the scheme as they were easily accessible and the schema had received support from student bodies. It was intended to widen the scheme to include all sectors of private rented accommodation.

- The scheme was advertised in the local and regional press. Publicity material was available (in English and Welsh) but not yet available in other languages. The scheme also had a web-site that enabled leaflets and application forms to be downloaded.
- 4.4 The Minister said that the scheme had merit and agreed to produce a further progress report to committee in November. The Minister also agreed to circulate to members details of the study carried out in England of the tenancy deposit scheme once it is available. She stated her support of broadening the scope of the scheme and considered that the possibility of putting conditions in renovation grant approvals could be explored.

Item 6: Communities First - progress report on the implementation LGH-08-02 (p2)

6.1 The Minister introduced this paper advising that since she announced the first list of eligible communities in June 2001, good progress had been made in taking the programme forward. To date, £10.3m has been allocated under the Community First Budget. She added that a monitoring and evaluation strategy was currently being developed, as was a strategy to promote the programme. She asked for the Committee's views on the issues that needed to be addressed to develop the programme.

6.2. The following points were made in discussion:

- Members advised that they receive most queries about the funding element and felt that this was too bureaucratic.
- Members questioned how Local Authorities pull all funding streams together and whether officers should take ownership of projects once they have been identified.
- Members agreed that the scheme was making a difference to deprived communities throughout Wales but warned against the danger of creating expectations that could not be met with the size of awards available
- Some members expressed disappointment that money allocated to the programme in its first year of operation that remained unspent was not carried over to be available for spending in year 2.
- Concern was also expressed that within the organisations participating in community first projects there remained a fierce defence of boundaries which inhibited the success of the scheme

6.3 The Minister said that:

- She would share with the committee, her eventual proposals for monitoring and evaluating community first.

- She would arrange with officials to provide an information sheet on the value of partnerships with the "all Wales" networks.
- The Minister agreed to inform Committee of details of £2.2 m funding to Neath/Port Talbot, Gwynedd, Wrexham.

Item 5: Presentation from the British Transport Police

5.1 The Chair introduced Superintendent Pat Daley, Area Commander British Transport Police, South Western Area.

5.2 Superintendent Daley advised the Committee that his presentation was on an overview of the work of the British Transport Police (BTP) and the measures being taken in relation to crime reduction. Members received a copy of his slides. Then salient points were:

- BTP - national police force for the railways
- Wales is policed by 3 areas:
 - South Western (Cardiff) - South Wales, Heart of Wales Line
 - Midlands (Birmingham) - Cambrian Line
 - North Western (Manchester) - North Wales Line
- Since 01.01.2002, the Area Commander (S W Area) has been the designated point of contact for all Welsh issues
- Levels of crime and summary offences both decreased in Wales during 2001/02 but problem offences still remain (public disorder, criminal damage and drug related crime).
- Stressed that the policing of railways are not in isolation from the policing of the local community and this area of work/integration is increasing especially with the escalation of drugs being brought into South Wales from the Bristol and Somerset region by rail.
- Current approach to policing includes intelligence led and community based initiatives. Present BTP force in Wales has 55 officers. It works closely with Home forces and draws BTP personnel from whole S W region for Millennium Stadium events for example.

5.3 The Minister said that the Bristol connection with drugs reiterated an earlier discussion in Committee and she added that there was a common agenda with the home police forces and the BTP to reduce drug trafficking and vandalism on railways.

5.4 In discussion, Members made the following points:

- Were pleased to learn that Wales now have a central co-ordinator and acknowledged the valuable work the BTP do.
- The drug problem impacts on all areas of society and members questioned whether railways could fall into the Communities First initiative.
- Anti-social behaviour against transport personnel and vandalism on tracks is increasing. Do the BTP have education officers to talk to school children, youth clubs?

5.5 In response, Superintendent Daley said:

- BTP work closely with Railtrack and home forces to increase safety at stations and reduce the amount of drugs entering the area by train.
- There is a school liaison officer for North Wales and one for South Wales. These officers liaise with Education Authorities and visit schools in close proximity to rail tracks to stress importance of trespassing and vandalism. Another important sector to educate is farmers whose land adjoins tracks.

5.6 The Chair thanked Superintendent Daley for a most interesting and informative presentation.

Item 7: Policy review of community regeneration - consideration of emerging issues LGH-08-02 (p3) Annex

7.1 The Chair advised that this paper was written by Professor Adamson and was intended to seek the Committee's views on the wide range of issues that have emerged from the policy review on the role of community groups in community regeneration. The Committee's views are required to allow for a list of outline recommendations to be prepared for the next meeting which would then form the basis for the report on the review.

7.2 Professor Adamson said that the paper was not binding but felt that it formed a good basis for discussing the emerging issues. He added that the review had identified a number of core emerging issues and he had tried to identify a course of action which people/groups had requested.

7.3 The members discussed each option and agreed on the following:

1. General Issues

It was agreed that Option 3 would provide the widest scope and recognises the value of partnerships.

Option 3

The Local Government and Housing Committee identifies and supports the consensus in Wales for the social inclusion objectives of Better Wales and endorses Communities First as a means of achieving them. It recognises the value of partnership and community involvement and asks the Welsh

Assembly Government to promote it in all policies that impact on community regeneration.

2. Funding (a) Complexity of funding programme

The consensus of opinion was that Option 3 would provide the most flexibility.

Option 3

That the Welsh Assembly Government accepts a permanent co-ordinating role to develop harmonisation and integration of community regeneration funding throughout Wales. It should create a forum in which it, its Sponsored Bodies and other funding agencies in Wales (Eg Lotteries Commission), develop a funding regime which is co-ordinated in its objectives, methodology and timescales.

(b) Bureaucracy associated with funding

It was agreed to merge all 3 options.

Option 1

That decision dates are determined early and published in programme documents and that the dates are adhered to unless good cause exists for delay.

Option 2

That response times to bids are kept reasonable and in most instances are within six weeks of submission deadlines.

Option 3

That the Welsh Assembly Government reviews and streamlines all its funding procedures to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and that it encourages similar exercises in other major funding agencies in Wales.

(c) core funding issue

There was concern that the absence of a target/timescale for decisions could extend application periods considerably and the merits of the consultation process suggested in option 2 was questioned. Professor Adamson said that a consultation exercise allows organisations the opportunity to feel they have at least contributed to the ownership issue.

It was agreed that option 2 be selected. However, this was to be reworded to incorporate timescales for consultation processes.

Option 2

That the Welsh Assembly Government urgently develops a funding stream which enables core funding of established community regeneration projects and organisations. The Welsh Assembly Government should

consult widely with the sector to determine allocation methods, qualification criteria and administrative procedures.

(d) The scale of Funding for Community Regeneration

Members had a full discussion about this element as they were generally unhappy with the comparison with England and felt that if a comparison was to be included it should be with the UK or Europe. It was decided to opt for option 2 with the following amendment.

Option 2

That the Welsh Assembly Government [compares funding of community regeneration with levels of funding in England and] reviews the Communities First budget at an early opportunity to ensure that funding levels are sufficient to promote an active programme of community regeneration in Wales.

3. Capacity Development

It was agreed that all 3 options were suitable and they would be merged accordingly.

Option 1

That the Committee commends the Assembly on its development of support structures for community capacity associated with the Communities First programme and recommends it takes all opportunities in delivering Community Action Plans and Capacity Development Plans to ensure that community capacity is developed and enhanced.

Option 2

That the Welsh Assembly Government works with all relevant agencies to promote high standards of community based practice in the delivery of public services in Wales.

Option 3

That the Welsh Assembly Government hosts a forum in which all relevant partners and agencies develop a National Plan for Community Regeneration Capacity. The Forum would include WLGA, WCVA, Communities First Support Network, ELWa, WDA, FE Colleges, Universities and a range of community based organisations.

4. Shortage of community regeneration staff

It was agreed to accept both options.

Option 1

That the Welsh Assembly Government work with FE, HE, ELWa, the Consortium for Community Regeneration Training and community organisations to map current provision, develop innovative short courses

and work-place learning to promote rapid skilling of new entrants to the sector.

Option 2

That the Welsh Assembly Government underpins this process with a bursary scheme to encourage new entrants to training programmes. This should be designed to enable community volunteers to move into paid learning in their own communities.

5. Relationships with statutory sector partners

It was agreed to accept all 3 options.

Option 1

The Local Authority takes the lead role in regeneration, determining in consultation with the community appropriate measures and actions. It is funded directly by the Welsh Assembly Government to do so.

Option 2

That the local authority co-ordinates resources, acts as banker and manages community regeneration within in a partnership structure.

Option 3

That local authorities act as equal partners within a partnership structure. Funding is given to the partnership and controlled by partnership decisions which are binding on all partners.

6. Resourcing community regeneration by the statutory sector

It was agreed to select option 2 but substituting grant for hypothecated.

Option 2

That the Committee recommends to the Welsh Assembly Government a grant component of funding for 'community provision' by the statutory sector which will be derived from an additional element of funding over and above past funding levels.

Option 2

That the Committee recommends to the Welsh Assembly Government a hypothecated component of funding for 'community provision' by the statutory sector which will be derived from an additional element of funding over and above past funding levels.

7. Advancing the communities first approach

A full discussion took place on this aspect as members appreciated that groups require some funding to get established within the community. It was agreed to

select option 1 but to incorporate the fact that groups require some establishment resources.

Option 1

That the Welsh Assembly Government considers ways to extend the principles of partnership and community participation which underpin Communities First to all communities in Wales.

8. The role of the Welsh Assembly Government

Option 2 was selected

Option 2

That the Welsh Assembly Government develops a body of community regeneration expertise 'in house' to establish effective working relationships with the community regeneration sector. This may be created by recruitment of staff from the community regeneration sector, secondments, job shadowing and in house training of Assembly personnel.

Promotion of best practice

Option 1 was selected.

Option 1

That the Welsh Assembly Government develops appropriate monitoring techniques to promote minimum standards of all agencies engaged in community regeneration.

Item 8: Minutes of the 22 April meeting LGH-07-02 (min)

8.1 It was noted that William Graham was a member of Newport City and County Borough Council (paragraph 2.1). Otherwise the minutes were agreed.

AOB

9.1 Peter Law asked that officials investigate why the IT failed for the presentation.

Summary of action points:

1. David A'Herne to address the Committee concerning Crime Reduction Partnerships on 22 May, this will include an outline on the strategy for dealing with Class A Drugs.
2. The Minister to inform Committee of details of £2.2 m funding to Neath/Port Talbot, Gwynedd, Wrexham.
3. The Minister to share with the committee, her eventual proposals for monitoring and evaluating community first.
4. Officials to draft publicity on the Tenancy Deposit Scheme. Draft publicity to be presented to the Committee within six months.
5. The Chair to circulate to Members details of the study carried out in England of the tenancy deposit scheme once it is available.
6. The Minister to provide a further update on the Cardiff Custodial Bond Scheme in November.
7. The Minister to provide the committee with information on conditions which local authorities could impose on landlords in receipt of renovation grants.