

## **MINUTES LGH-02-03 (min)**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**Date: WEDNESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2002**

**Time: 09.30am - 12.30pm**

**Venue: COMMITTEE ROOM 2, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING**

#### **Attendance:**

##### *Members*

Gwenda Thomas (Chair)	Neath
Peter Black	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 & Deeside
Janet Ryder	North Wales

##### *In attendance*

John Bader	Director of Housing
Geoff Marlow	Housing Directorate

Maureen Haire	Housing Directorate
Phillip Morgan	Director, Sunpipe
Mario Breeze	Director, Sunpipe
Phil White	Tower Colliery
Graham Lewis	Tower Colliery
Jane Hegginkbotham	Coal Merchants Federation & Solid Fuel Association

### *Secretariat*

Roger Chaffey	Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Deputy Clerk
Debra Carter	Members' Research Services

### **9.30am to 9.35am**

#### **Item 1: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**

1. The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.
2. The Chair reminded Members of the additional meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February to consider the draft report of the policy review. It was agreed that the meeting would commence at 1.30pm. She added that the South West Wales Regional Committee would be looking at the policy review at its meeting on 31 January and that anything arising would be fed into the review.
3. The Chair added that starting from today, she intended to seek ratification of the minutes at the start of the meeting but added that this was purely an administrative change and that protracted discussions on matters arising would not be permitted. Accordingly, the minutes for the meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, LGH-01-03(min), were agreed. Janet Ryder raised a point regarding paragraph 3.2 of those minutes and said she understood the Minister was scheduled to bring forward a paper with a timetable indicating how the Assembly would engage on

those issues the Committee has welcomed across the board. The Minister said the paper would be available for the next meeting.

1.4 The Chair asked Members for declarations of interest, in accordance with Standing Order 4.5.

None were made.

### **9.35am to 10.18am**

## **Item 2: Minister's Report**

### **LGH-02-03(p.1) Annex A, Annex 1, Annex 2**

1. The Minister presented her report and highlighted the following:

- Reorganisation within the Probation Service (South Wales area) – The Minister said she had met with representatives from the South Wales area on 27 January and noted that Committee was due to receive evidence from them at the next meeting on the reorganisation. She added that she had written to Hilary Benn MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, stating her dissatisfaction that the National Assembly had not been consulted or advised about the reorganisation and that further clarification was required. She said she would update Committee once a response had been received.
- Pensions for Members of local authorities – The Minister said that The Local Government Act 2000 amended the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, so as to give power to the Assembly to make regulations enabling councils to decide on councillors' eligibility for pensions. Prior to introducing such regulations, it is necessary for regulations to be made in the UK Parliament under the Superannuation Act 1972, to permit councillors to join pension schemes. Once the regulations are made in the UK Parliament, the Assembly will be able make regulations enabling councils to offer pensions schemes to members. It should be possible to ensure that legislation is in place in good time for the new intake of councillors in 2004. She said she would report back as necessary.
- Communication Workers Union Meeting – The Minister met the Communication Workers Union on 27 January. During that meeting she discussed the Union's concern about a number of issues including the future of both the Swansea and Cardiff mail centres and Royal Mail's traditional lack of investment in Wales. She added that the Union remained anxious about the future of both the Swansea and Cardiff mail centres and that she intended to pursue these issues further and report back.

- She suggested that Members would wish to be aware, prior to the presentation from Tower Colliery, that she had met with Tyrone O'Sullivan on 21 January regarding the use of coal in rural areas and that she would be commissioning further work to evaluate how solid fuel could be included in HEES. She added that she wished to see a level playing field for all energy providers.

#### 1. Members made the following points:

- The stance the Minister had taken regarding the reorganisation within the South Wales Probation Service area was welcomed. She was asked to consider the future of the Youth Offending Teams.
- The work the Minister had undertaken on the issue of pensions for elected members was recognised. She was asked about remuneration for dual membership (of principal and community councils) and on the severance scheme.
- Concern was expressed that some postmasters had only recently received details about the Post Office Development Fund. It was noted that some postmasters had indicated they would undertake negotiations on behalf of clients who wished to retain receiving their pensions/benefits from the post office and that this had not been well publicised. It was suggested that the Communications Workers Union be invited to give evidence to Committee.
- Local authority functions and responsibility regulations – the Minister was asked for clarification on the executive functions.
- Supplementary credit approval for renewal areas – the Minister was asked to indicate how the grants had been allocated.
- Drug and alcohol action teams – assurance was sought that the restructuring would not detract from the good practices and working togetherness already established. The Minister was asked when improvements would be evident for rehabilitation treatments.
- Crime prevention partnerships – assurance was sought over the continued funding and whether unspent funding could be carried over into the next financial year.
- The update on *race hate* was welcomed. The Minister was asked if she had considered any schemes to protect places of worship which were increasingly becoming targets for this sort of crime.
- On Communities First, the Minister was asked if she would provide information on the partnerships set up to date together with their membership. She was also asked whether it would be possible to provide attendance records. The Minister was asked the proportion of the Communities First budget that is being spent on salaries and administration costs.
- Concern was raised over the Licensing Bill and the implications on local authorities when enforced. The eligibility of elected members not being able to determine applications related to their areas was discussed. Members returned to the issue of inviting a major brewer to Committee to give evidence on their marketing policies.
- The Minister was asked to revisit the issue of postcodes. Some areas had postcodes

listing them as liable to flooding, when they weren't, and this caused implications for household insurance.

- She was asked to confirm if she had signed off the Wales programme for Improvement.

1. In response, the Minister said:

- She would include an update on Youth Offending Teams in her next written report.
- On dual membership, allowances are not paid for community council duties performed within the community area although travel costs for members on community council business were refundable. Community councils had expressed the fear that if members of principal councils who were also community councillors could not gain recompense for community duties, they might consider standing down as community members. She said she would write to Peter Law on the implications of the new regulations.
- On the issue of the Post Office Development Fund, she said officials would make enquiries and report back.
- She advised that the Communication Workers Union had declined an invitation to attend Committee last term. She suggested that it might be useful to consider inviting them again.
- On the local authority functions and responsibility regulations, she said that the consultation exercise is due to end in March and is mainly concerned with technical issues. She added she would return to the issue when the analysis had been undertaken.
- She offered to discuss the points raised by Janet Ryder on supplementary credit approval for renewal areas outside of the meeting.
- She said that the reorganisation of the drug and alcohol action teams would not detract from the excellent work undertaken to date and said she would include an update in her next written report.
- She said she would include an update on Crime prevention partnerships in a future report.
- She said she would liaise with other Ministers on the problems of race hate and produce an action plan as it affects all areas of society. She added that she had not received any requests for funding security measures at places of worship.
- On Communities First, she said she would discuss with officials the information requested on partnerships as to the level of detail that could be easily provided. She agreed to provide information on the proportion allocated to wages and administrative costs.
- On the Licensing Bill, she said her officials would undertake further research as the latest stage and report back.
- She agreed to return to the issue of postcodes.
- She said she had agreed the protocol for the Wales Programme for Improvement Plan with the Audit Commission at the recent Partnership Council and would provide updates as necessary.

2.4 The Chair confirmed that arrangements would be made to invite the Communications

Workers Union and a major brewer to give evidence at Committee. She asked if there were any other suggestions for future presentations. Peter Law suggested the Boundary Commission for Wales as they are due to commence a review of the parliamentary boundaries in Wales.

## Action Points

- The Minister to update Committee on the reorganisation of the Probation Service (South Wales).
- The Minister to write to Peter Law on the issue of Community Councillor Allowances, including the matter of allowances for county councillors who are also members of town or community councils.
- The Minister to update the Committee in due course on developments regarding severance pay for retiring councillors
- The Minister to provide an update on Youth Offending teams in her next written report.
- Officials to make enquiries on the Post Office Development Fund and report back.
- The Minister to provide a note to Committee on local authority functions and responsibilities once the consultation exercise with local authorities is complete.
- The Minister to provide details of the allocation of Supplementary Credit Approval allocations.
- The Minister to discuss with officials what information could be easily provided to the committee on the Communities First partnerships that have been formed, the details of their composition and, if possible, attendance patterns.
- The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with details of the wages and administration expenditure under the Communities First budget.
- The Minister to update the Committee on Community safety officers in her next written report.
- The Minister to liaise with other Ministers to combat "Race Hate".
- The Minister to provide a note for Committee Members on the Licensing Bill.
- The Minister to update the Committee on the Drug and Alcohol Agenda in her next written report.
- The Minister agreed to return to the issues of postcodes.
- The Minister to report on the protocol agreed with the Audit Commission on the Wales Improvement Plan in a future written report.
- The Secretariat to invite the Communication Workers Union, to speak on the Post Office, Jobs and the Royal Mail.
- The Secretariat to invite representatives of the Brewing Trade to appear before the Committee.
- The Secretariat to invite the Boundary Commission for Wales (parliamentary) to speak on possible changes to parliamentary boundaries.

**10.18am to 10.35am**

**Item 3: Consideration of Code of Guidance for local authorities on allocations and homelessness**

**LGH-01-03(p.2)**

1. The Minister introduced the paper and recorded her thanks to Housing Directorate officials for the enormous task undertaken in preparing the draft Code of Guidance for local authorities. She invited Member's comments.
2. Members made the following observations:

- Members were united in their praise for the guidance adding that it would be an invaluable tool for local authorities.
- Felt it was essential that every local authority undertook a review on the level of homelessness and produced a strategy to alleviate it.
- Concern was raised over the number of priority needs categories listed in Chapter 13 and it was hoped that this exhaustive list would not diminish the term "priority". Further to that, it was noted that the list ensured that there were no discrepancies and ensured local authorities are aware of how to deal with some of the most vulnerable groups ensuring consistency.
- Interested to learn how many responses received to date and the nature of them.
- Important applicants are given a choice of housing although appreciate this is difficult with the limited amount of available housing stock.
- Important vulnerable groups, especially women in refuge centres, are aware of choice.
- The Chair said she was most concerned that no reference to the requirements of the Children's Act was contained on page 105 regarding applicants with children. She said it was essential that the requirements of the Act be adhered to and that all possible gaps where the tracking of children who "could be lost" be closed and that the guidance should reflect this.

1. In response, the Minister said:

- Thirteen responses had been received to date and most were favourable.
- Choice is an important issue and perhaps a review should be carried out 12 months after the enforcement of the guidance to ascertain how this is being implemented. She added that the Housing Directorate is currently looking at the housing difficulties encountered by people suffering domestic violence.
- The point re children was noted and the Minister said that the requirements of the Children's Act would be considered and that that part of the guidance strengthened.

- John Bader said that there was a difficult balance between choice based needs based lettings systems. There was a generally held view that needs based had contributed to the problems associated with social housing for example where low demand areas were used to provide permanent homes for homeless people. He said it was important to have on-going studies to examine the impact of any policy changes.
- The Minister that the comments received today would be considered and she advised that the guidance was due to be debated in plenary on 25 March and when published, would be available in loose leaf form.

### **10.35pm to 10.15pm**

## **Item 4: Policy Review of Community Regeneration – Capacity Building: Report of fact-finding visit to Ireland**

### **LGH-02-03(p.3)**

1. The Chair introduced the paper that had been prepared by Professor Adamson following the successful fact-finding visit to the Ballyfermot Partnership in Dublin as part of the policy review.
2. The Members who had participated in the visit enthused about the lessons Wales could learn from the Partnership and remarked how evident the joined up working between local and national levels had occurred. Barriers had been broken down to enable the strategies to proceed. The inclusion of childcare facilities at all the centres was noted and felt to be a tremendous success. This was an area that had transpired from the evidence received in Wales and an area to be tackled.
3. The high importance of Credit Unions was discussed and it was suggested that Wales could learn a lot from the Irish on how to establish such organisations. Many people were unaware of what a Credit Union is and there potential is not utilised because of this factor.

4.4 The Chair said she had written on behalf of the Committee to thank all involved with the visit.

### **10.45am to 11.00am**

The Committee agreed to break for 15 minutes.

### **11.00am to 11.30am**

## **Item 5: Presentation from The Welsh Sunpipe Centre**

1. The Chair welcome Mario Breeze and Phil Morgan of the The Welsh Sunpipe



Centre adding that they had been invited to inform Committee about their innovative lighting and ventilation system. She invited them to make their presentation.

2. Members had been furnished with information on the company and product prior to the meeting. The Sunpipe system is a revolutionary way to pipe natural daylight from rooftops into buildings to brighten areas where daylight from windows cannot reach. The product can be integrated into the electric lighting system of buildings to save energy. The Company is also expanding into solar water heating and photovoltaic systems. The photovoltaic systems enables electricity to be produced from a panel and be stored until needed either in batteries or transferred onto the National Grid. Company feels interest towards renewable energy systems is increasingly and will do so over the next few years.
3. Members asked what the average cost of installation was and whether planning permission was required.
4. Phil Morgan said the average cost of supplying and fitting one Sunpipe was approximately £500. Planning permission was not normally required except for a Listed Building or if the property was located within a conservation area.

5.5 The Chair thanked them for their presentation.

## **11.30am to 12.15pm**

### **Item 6: Presentation from Tower Colliery**

6.1 The Chair welcomed Phil White and Graham Lewis from Tower Colliery and Jane Hegginbotham from the Solid Fuel Association. She advised Committee that they had been invited to demonstrate how they are contributing to tackling the fuel poverty issue and invited them to make their presentation.

2. Members had received briefing on the economic, environmental and social benefits of coal prior to the meeting and received detailed information packs from both Tower Colliery and the Solid Fuel Association. Jane Hegginbotham emphasised the following points:
  - People should have choice of the method of heating used to heat their homes and be aware that improvements can be made to solid fuel systems to make them more energy efficient. She added that health benefits exist with solid fuel system due to the required ventilation. She said that coal merchants play a role in community life and provided a valuable service. Budgeting for coal is easier as it can be bought weekly, rather than in bulk for oil or pay in arrears for gas and electricity.

- Alternative fuels such as wood pellets were discussed although it was felt that there is a way to go before this can become a widely available alternative fuel source.
- In summary, Phil White said that Tower Colliery was a forward thinking company committed to improving methods and reducing coal waste and to strengthening their links with the community.

## 2. Members made the following comments:

- Agreed coal was an important area and that it must not be forgotten when discussing fuel sources. It was noted that Tower Colliery had a prestige attached to it in Wales.
- Suggested that an Assembly sponsored conference is considered to promote the use of coal and the alternative coal based products being developed. Felt that coal had been forgotten as an energy source and an opportunity to market it would be useful.
- Members were impressed with the research and development work being undertaken by Tower Colliery.
- People need to be re-educated that coal is not a messy, dirty fuel.

2. In response, the Minister said that the presentation had raised a number of areas outside of her remit that she would bring to the attention of Andrew Davies, the Economic Development Minister. She reiterated that she was considering the use of solid fuel in the HEES programme and following her recent meeting with Tyrone O'Sullivan, had written to Sir Harry Jones at the WLGA suggesting they initiate discussions with Tower on how local authorities could utilise coal in public buildings.

6.5 The Chair thanked the presenters for attending Committee.

## Action Point

- The Minister to speak to the Minister for Economic Development about the possibility of the Welsh Assembly Government supporting a Conference on energy policy, including the benefits of Solid Fuel.

**12.15pm to 12.25pm**

## Item 7: Members' Research Service

1. **The Chair welcomed Debra Carter from the Members' Research Service who gave an update on the enhanced services offered by the Members' Research Service following the acceptance of this suggestion from the Assembly Review of Procedure.**
2. **Members welcomed the enhanced service adding that it was already**

**proving to be a valuable extension to the research facilities available.**

3. The Chair thanked Debra Carter for the information and said she would feed back at the next Panel of Chairs meeting.

Committee Secretariat

January 2003