

MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE, LOCAL GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITIES (MRS EDWINA HART) AND REPRESENTATIVES OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKS

DATE: 14 March 2001

VENUE: Mrs Hart's Office, Crickhowell House, Cardiff Bay

PRESENT:

Mrs Edwina Hart, AM
Mr Peter Black, AM

Voluntary Sector:

Helen Buhaenko	Anti-poverty Alliance Cymru
Elizabeth Perret-Atkins	Anti-poverty Alliance Cymru
Gordon Gibson	Community Networks Group
Dave Maggs	Wales Association of County Voluntary Councils (WACVC)
Fran Targett	Advice Alliance
Catriona Williams	Children in Wales
June Burke	Welsh Assembly for Women
Phil Jarrold	WCVA
Alice Greenlees	WCVA

Officials:

John Bader	Housing Directorate
Wayne Woodhall	Housing Directorate
Kate Cassidy	Local Government Modernisation
Theresa Davies	Crime Reduction Unit
Alyson Evans	Community Regeneration & Social Inclusion Unit

PURPOSE: The National Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme requires that each Assembly Minister meets representative of relevant voluntary sector networks at least twice in any one calendar year.

SYNOPSIS

Specific actions for Ministers/Officials

- ◆ Officials to collate, and provide the Voluntary Sector with, details of what direct funding strands were available;
- ◆ Kate Cassidy (LGM Division, NAFW) to meet with the voluntary sector to discuss criteria for evaluating LA proposals for support to the voluntary sector, as part of their policy agreements';
- ◆ Kate Cassidy (LGM Division, NAFW) to organise a seminar to inform the Voluntary Sector of how Best Value works, and its focus etc;

- ◆ Alyson Evans (CRSI Unit, NAFW) to inform WCVA of outcome of enquiries with WLGA and the Ministerial decision on extending date by which local authorities and their partners are required to provide nominations of communities for inclusion in the Communities First Programme;
- ◆ Community Regeneration and Social Inclusion Unit officials to consider direct funding to community groups under the Communities First programme.

Specific actions for Voluntary Sector

- ◆ The Voluntary Sector would provide a paper detailing its concerns about indirect funding where the Assembly may have expectations of local authority funds going to the voluntary sector, but where money is not ring fenced;
- ◆ Voluntary Sector would provide a report on funding issues identifying problem area services, and other key points, that it had experienced, along with possible areas where it thought feedback from local authorities would be useful;
- ◆ Voluntary Sector would send Mrs Hart, and officials, a copy of the WCVA's Best Value Guide for comment;
- ◆ Voluntary Sector would provide Mrs Hart with a paper on issues arising from their perspective regarding policy agreements and other aspects of the local government modernisation agenda – before the Minister engaged with the WLGA;
- ◆ The Voluntary Sector would provide a paper with any good ideas to take forward the findings of the Social Inclusion Annual report;
- ◆ Voluntary sector will speak to Jane Hutt about a proposal that a forum be made available through which people could meet and voice their concerns/discuss suggestions, and which subsequently had the ear of Assembly Members and officials. The Voluntary Sector will also write a paper outlining the proposed structure for ensuring participation by a representative sample of people from across Wales.

Issues which may inform the Assembly as a whole in developing policy

- ◆ The Voluntary Sector are concerned about indirect funding where the Assembly may have expectations of local authority funds going to the voluntary sector, but where money is not ring fenced. The sector also feels there is a need for more effective planning to determine funding, and a mechanism put in place to monitor allocations;
- ◆ The voluntary sector consider they should play a full part in the development and implementation of the community strategy, and be involved with local authorities at the earliest stages of policy as well as service development as part of Local Government Modernisation agenda;
- ◆ The sector considers that it is important that they are involved in the mechanism of developing strategy, budgetary control, and partnership in Communities First. The sector considered the selection process to be too prescriptive and exclusive - more flexibility was needed, with the possibility of separate funding being allocated to which communities could have

direct access. In addition, they feel that a catalyst was needed in building capacity and participation, and that communities be encouraged to identify and develop projects themselves according to need, and support should be available.

- ◆ The sector consider that a forum be made available through which people could meet and voice their concerns/discuss suggestions, and which subsequently had the ear of Assembly Members and officials.

ISSUES RAISED

Current and planned Assembly funding for Local Government & Communities

The Voluntary Sector sought clarification on what current and planned funding the Assembly had available for the Voluntary Sector.

Mrs Hart explained that this was a quite complex issue that straddled many Minister's portfolios. However, if the sector would find it helpful, as Finance Minister, she could collate and provide this information.

ACTION: *Officials to collate, and provide the Voluntary Sector with, details of what direct funding strands were available.*

Mrs Hart asked if the sector had any concerns on funding. The sector had a clear picture on direct funding but were concerned about indirect funding where the Assembly may have expectations of local authorities but did not earmark funds specifically for the voluntary sector.

Mrs Hart would like to hear of any funding variables that could be taken up with the WLGA.

ACTION: *As a starting point, the Voluntary Sector would provide a paper on these variables.*

The sector expressed the need for effective planning to determine funding, and that there was no mechanism to monitor allocations. Mrs Hart felt it would be very useful to look into the various funding strands and identify good practice. Mrs Hart accepted that the policy of not hypothecating local authority funds may prove problematic for the sector. Mr Black stressed the importance of local authorities consulting the sector on strategic overviews, and the quality of local partnerships.

Mrs Hart asked the sector to identify problem areas in services and other key points, so that she could write to local authorities seeking further information/clarification. The sector agreed that this would be helpful.

ACTION: *Voluntary Sector would provide a report identifying problem areas it had experienced, along with possible areas where it thought feedback from local authorities would be useful – which Mrs Hart could include in a survey from the Assembly.*

Local Authority and Voluntary Sector – working in partnership (Modernising Local Government)

The Voluntary Sector (Phil Jarrold) talked through its paper on Modernising Local Government.

It was explained (by Kate Cassidy, LGM Division, NAFW) that all authorities have agreed in principle to enter policy agreements. As part of the agreement they will have to set out how they will help the voluntary sector develop its capacity to play a full part in the development and implementation of the community strategy and involve voluntary organisations at the earliest stages of policy as well as service development. They will need to use mainstream policies and resources to do this rather than relying on the performance incentive grant.

Mrs Hart confirmed that she would be happy for officials to hold discussions with the sector regarding the evaluation of local authorities' proposals for supporting the voluntary sector as part of their policy agreements.

ACTION: Kate Cassidy to meet with the voluntary sector to discuss criteria for evaluating LA proposals for support to the voluntary sector, as part of their policy agreements'

It was agreed that it would be useful to take the Voluntary sector through Best Value proposals in Wales so that it could formulate suggestions, an agenda, and recommendations to enable a programme strategy. The WCVA planned to develop a Best Value guide for the sector.

ACTION: *Voluntary Sector would send Mrs Hart, and officials, a copy of the Best Value Guide for comment.*

ACTION: *Kate Cassidy (LGM Division, NAFW) to organise a seminar to inform the Voluntary Sector of how Best Value works, and its focus etc.*

It was agreed that Local Government Modernisation was a huge agenda. It was important that the Voluntary Sector impacted on local authority policy.

ACTION: *Voluntary Sector would provide Mrs Hart with a paper on issues arising from their perspective regarding funding, policy agreements and other aspects of the local government modernisation agenda – before the Minister engaged with the WLGA on this.*

Communities First

The Voluntary Sector (Gordon Gibson) talked through its response to Communities First.

The sector had consulted on the Communities First proposals, and responses had been very positive. However, there were several concern areas that it considered should be focussed upon, and in particular:

- the local authorities' role in the process – particularly as budget holders. It was important that the sector was involved in the mechanism of developing strategy, budgetary control, and partnership. The sector would endeavour to promote good practice;
- the selection process was too prescriptive and exclusive. More flexibility was needed, with the possibility of separate funding being allocated to which communities could have direct access;
- a catalyst was needed in building capacity and participation. Communities should be encouraged to identify and develop projects themselves according to need, and support should be available.

Mrs Hart explained that local authorities had to be a key partner, but would look into the possibility of funding from the centre directly to communities. Mrs Hart needed a defensible line on the selection process policy. Mrs Hart confirmed that she would expect to see evidence that local authorities had consulted properly with the voluntary sector and community groups on the subject of nominating communities for inclusion in the programme. It was raised that the deadline for nominations was to be extended. Alyson Evans explained that the issue had been raised in a recent WLGA meeting where it was evident that some LAs were unaware of this requirement. It was explained that officials were making further enquiries into this and would report urgently to the Minister. The WCVA asked to be kept informed.

ACTION: *Officials to inform WCVA of outcome of the “extension of deadline” issue. Officials also to consider direct funding to community groups under Communities First*

Social Inclusion Action Plan/Annual Report

The Social Inclusion Annual Report provides an overview of what has been done since the National Assembly's inception. It summarises the issues, sets out the vision for Wales and what the National Assembly has achieved to date and plans for the future. It is acknowledged that more work was required, and is subject to improvement.

ACTION: *Mrs Hart asked the sector to provide a paper with any good ideas*

Helen Buhaenko (Anti-poverty Alliance Cymru) made an initial suggestion that a forum could be made available through which people could meet and voice their concerns/discuss suggestions, and which subsequently had the ear of Assembly Members and officials.

Mrs Hart explained that she was not adverse to the concept but such an issue as poverty is very wide-ranging and spanned the portfolios of several Ministers. It may be best to approach the Minister primarily responsible for the Voluntary Sector Partnership (Mrs Jane Hutt) with proposals and a structural plan. Mrs Hart would be happy to be included in a twin-tracked approach.

ANNEX 3

Mrs Edwina Hart

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ACTION: *Voluntary sector will speak to Jane Hutt about the proposal and will write a paper outlining the proposed structure for ensuring participation by a representative sample of people from across Wales.*

Community Justice

As the Voluntary Sector representative was unable to attend the meeting, Mrs Hart's attention was drawn to its paper on Community Justice.

Theresa Davies (Crime Reduction Unit, NAFW) stated that David A'Herne (Crime Reduction Director, NAFW) would welcome a meeting with the sector to discuss various issues.

ACTION: *If they so wished, the Voluntary Sector could write to David A'Herne to arrange a meeting with officials.*