

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

HOMELESSNESS COMMISSION - PROGRESS REPORT

1. In October 2000, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities announced the establishment of a Homelessness Commission, to advise the Assembly on:

- Delivering the objectives in "Better Wales" to reduce homelessness including rough sleeping;
- Taking forward the recommendations in the Assembly report "Rough Sleeping in Wales" ("the Bevan Report") 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;
- The options for the long term funding for homelessness services in Wales, particularly in relation to "Supporting People."

2. The Commission has determined that its main tasks are:

- To map current information on homelessness and rough sleeping in Wales, and existing and planned provision, and identify gaps and overlaps;
- To devise a common methodology for counting rough sleepers in Wales;
- To consider definitions of homelessness and rough sleeping and propose definitions for Wales;
- To consider how to monitor 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.

3. The Commission has been meeting monthly and has held four meetings in Cardiff, Llandrindod Wells, Cardiff and Swansea. These meetings are open to the public. The Commission intends to hold meetings in North and East Wales during its existence.

Progress To Date

4. Three pieces of work are being undertaken by Dr Elaine Mullan of the Health Promotion Division. It is intended that these reports will be complete by early May. They are:-

- a) Existing research and information;
- b) Best practice in tackling homelessness UK wide;
- c) Developing a Model Homelessness Strategy.

a) Existing research and information

Dr Mullan has compiled tables of available figures for single homelessness, rough sleepers and family homelessness for each local authority. Most local authorities have been able to supply figures for single homeless, though currently they are not collated separately – the Assembly return WHO12 does not require this, although the form is currently being amended to take account of the new priority needs groups. Those that could not supply figures did not have the resources to do so (applications not computerised; non-user-friendly recording system). Many were able to supply figures for rough sleepers. This information was supplemented by voluntary sector information (e.g., Newport Action for Single Homeless, "NASH") where available.

Dr Mullan has also compiled a table of existing projects, services, strategies, working groups, rough sleepers counts and section 180 funded projects for each local authority. This information was gained mainly from Housing Strategy and Operational Plans, telephone conversations with homelessness/housing officers and Paul Bevan of NASH (the adviser to the Commission). Based on this, the service, research and strategy needs in each local authority have been noted.

b) Best practice in tackling homelessness UK wide

Dr Mullan is currently undertaking a trawl of the most recent 'best practice' literature. The main sources are Fitzpatrick et al. (2000). *Single homelessness: an overview of research in Britain* and Klinker et al. (2000). *A review of single homelessness research: research summaries*. Dr Mullan is also considering the response in Wales (main source: Hutson (1999). *A decade of youth homelessness*. In Dunkerley & Thompson (Eds) *Wales Today*).

This report contains the following sections:

- Background (the extent of the problem; local authority figures; single homeless; young

homeless);

- The response in Wales (the voluntary sector; the statutory sector);
- Research (in Wales; in general; research needs);
- Policy/legislation;
- Multi-agency working;
- Beneficial schemes and initiatives;
- Young homeless;
- Resources (availability and allocation).

c) Developing a Model Homelessness Strategy

It is intended that this report will contribute to Homelessness Commission task 'g': to develop a model authority homelessness strategy. The main sources are McCluskey (1997). *Where there's a will: developing single homelessness strategies*; Draft guidance from the Scottish Executive; and Evans et al. (2001), *Essential guide to monitoring single homelessness*.

5. The Commission has contacted each local authority to establish whether they already have Homelessness Strategies in existence. It was reported that seven local authorities claimed to have a homelessness strategy with fourteen authorities not having a written strategy. Of the twenty-one authorities that responded, nine are developing new strategies and three are revising existing strategies. The Commission requested copies of these strategies from local authorities and the Commission has considered these for the purposes of the model strategy.

6. It is the Commission's intention to involve as many external homelessness organisations in its work, as well as getting the views of homeless people themselves. The Commission has received a research paper from a voluntary organisation that allowed it the opportunity to consider the views of homeless people. A representative from both the Association of Directors of Social Services and the local health groups has recently made a presentation and representatives from the NHS Confederation, the Benefits Agency and the Probation Service will attend future meetings. The Commission has also met with young people from a user group in Swansea, to gain a first hand perspective of the problem.

7. The Commission has worked with the Office of National Statistics ("ONS") to ensure that the guidance issued by the ONS for the counting of rough sleepers on Census night is reinforced to local authorities.

8. Members were presented with a copy of the "Supporting People" Consultation Paper and were given the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process;

9. On the 27th February 2001 the Assembly made The Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001 which came into force on the 1st March 2001. The Order, which applies only to Wales, extends the descriptions of persons as having priority need so that they now

also include:

- A care leaver or person at particular risk of sexual or financial exploitation, 18 years or over but under the age of 21;
- A 16 or 17 year old;
- A person fleeing domestic violence or threatened domestic violence;
- A person homeless after leaving the armed forces;
- A former prisoner homeless after being released from custody.

This Order will have an effect upon persons presenting at the local authority as homeless. The Commission has been given the opportunity of considering the Provisional Guidance relating to this Order.

10. The Welsh Affairs Committee, sitting at its 1999-2000 session, stated that Wales has housing of poor quality, which contributes towards social exclusion. The Committee accepted that housing in Wales is the responsibility of the Assembly, but did make certain observations, which it asked the Assembly to address. These included:-

- Care Leavers;
- Bond Schemes; and
- Domestic Violence.

The Committee heard evidence from Welsh Women's Aid (that included a case study from Black Association of Women Step Out, "BAWSO"). The Homelessness Commission has considered these representations and will be ensuring that these are taken into account in its final recommendations.

Work in Progress

- The Commission will be considering the funding of homelessness schemes at a future meeting;
- The Commission will be reviewing all the recommendations made in both the Bevan Report and the Assembly's Task Group;
- Developing a model homelessness strategy;
- Considering the reports on Exclusions and the Housing Advice Audit;
- Providing a definitive definition of homelessness;
- Providing a framework for monitoring homelessness.

The Commission will conclude its activities by mid Summer and its final recommendations and report will be available by the Autumn.

