

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT OF THE HOMELESSNESS COMMISSION**

#### **PURPOSE**

1. This paper invites the Committee to consider the report of the Homelessness Commission. A copy of the report is attached at Annex 1.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. That the Committee considers the report ahead of a plenary debate on 20<sup>th</sup> November, and refers its views on the report to the plenary session.

#### **TIMING**

3. Subject to consideration of the Committee's views, a report will be prepared for the plenary debate for early November.

#### **BACKGROUND**

4. The Partnership Agreement contained a commitment to set up a housing commission to address the problem of homelessness. The Homelessness Commission was established at the end of 2000, and held nine meetings between January and August 2001. The Commission was chaired by the Deputy Minister, and comprised the Chairs of the Local Government and Housing and Health and Social Services Committees as well as representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors.
5. The report will be of great interest to those organisations that play a role in the provision of services to homeless people. In particular these include local authorities, which have statutory duties to homeless people, and voluntary agencies, which provide independent housing advice, shelter and support.
6. The importance of the report is enhanced by the progress of the Homelessness Bill, which will introduce new responsibilities on local authorities, particularly to carry out homelessness reviews and to formulate and publish homelessness strategies for their areas. The Bill is likely to be passed early in the New Year.

7. The WLGA, local authorities and a wide range of other statutory and voluntary organisations have been invited to provide initial comments on the report by 17<sup>th</sup> October. An oral update will be provided to the Committee with an overview on the responses.
8. Following consideration of the report by the Committee and in plenary, officials will continue discussions internally and externally on how the recommendations can be taken forward. This process will be reflected in a draft national homelessness strategy which will be presented to the Committee in March 2002, and which will form part of the National Housing Strategy.

## **CONSIDERATION**

9. The main themes identified in the report are as follows:
  - The broad spectrum of issues which interact with homelessness, and the need for a multi-service approach to tackling its causes and effects.
  - The importance of preventative work to help people avoid becoming homeless.
  - The need for strategic approaches to tackling homelessness, involving collaboration and joint-working between a broad spectrum of organisations working in the social services, health, probation, employment and other fields as well as housing.
  - The value of providing adequate resources to address the causes of homelessness and thus alleviating its damaging effects and its costs.
1. The key recommendations include:
  - Consulting on guidance to local authorities for local homelessness strategies.
  - Establishing a national strategy to tackle homelessness.
  - More detailed monitoring of homelessness and its causes.
  - Amending the targets in 'Better Wales' to focus on the length of time people spend in temporary accommodation, and to reconsider the timescale for eliminating the need for rough sleeping.
  - Inclusion of housing and homelessness on the National Curriculum.

- Promotion of housing advice services.
- Implementation of the recommendations in the report on exclusions by Joy Kent.
- A greater focus on housing and homelessness in health plans and social care plans.
- The need for substance misuse services to be more accessible to the homeless.
- The need for more outreach and resettlement services to support homeless people.
- Making recommendations to the U.K. government to enhance the effectiveness of the benefit system.
- The need for better funding of emergency and support services for homeless people by the National Assembly.
- More research on the causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of responses to it.

## **COMPLIANCE**

**11.** The National Assembly has powers to consider any matter relevant to its functions under s.40 of the Government of Wales Act. Under Section 182 of the Housing Act 1996, the Assembly may give guidance to local authorities on the exercise of their responsibilities in regard to homelessness. The relevant powers under the Housing Act 1996 have been delegated to the Assembly Minister.

12. There are no issues of regularity or propriety.

13. This submission has been copied to the Assembly Compliance Office.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

14. Local authorities and other organisations:

None at present. The views of the Local Government and Housing Committee will be referred to the plenary session of the National Assembly when it debates the report on 20<sup>th</sup> November. Any decisions that require additional resources will be made after that date, and in the light of comments on the report from local authorities and other organisations .

**15.** National Assembly:

There are no immediate financial implications for the Assembly, other than administration costs

that can be contained within the Housing Directorate's approved budget. Many of the recommendations carry substantial resource implications for National Assembly funding programmes and for departmental running costs. These additional costs will require further consideration as part of the process of evaluating each individual recommendation, and this will form part of the report to the Committee on the national homelessness strategy proposed for March 2002.

## **CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

**16.** The Homelessness Commission has examined homelessness in the context of the broad range of issues that cause, interact with and are affected by it. The result is a report that comments and makes recommendations on many areas of public policy and that has implications for several departments in the National Assembly as well as the U.K. government, local authorities, health authorities, and many other statutory and voluntary organisations. The report can only be addressed through a concerted cross-departmental effort by the Assembly and by joined-up working at the local level.

**Management, Homelessness and Support Branch**

**Housing Directorate**

**October 2001**