LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday 16 January 2002

Time: 2.00pm to 5.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members:

Gwenda Thomas	Neath
(Chair)	
Peter Black	South Wales West
(Deputy Minister)	
Janet Davies	South Wales West
William Graham	South Wales East
Peter Law	Blaenau Gwent
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West
Tom Middlehurst	Alyn and Deeside
Janet Ryder	North Wales

In attendance:

Norma Barry	Communities Directorate
Lynne Schofield	Communities Directorate
Paul Pan	Crime Reduction Unit

| Vince Armstrong | South Wales Fire Service |
| Adrian Gough | South Wales Police |

Secretariat:

| Roger Chaffey | Committee Clerk |
| Liz Wilkinson | Deputy Committee Clerk |

Introductory remarks

The Chair said that correspondence from the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority and the HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services had been circulated to Members.

It was agreed that the Fire Service should be invited to make a presentation to the Committee as part of the policy review of community regeneration.

The Committee agreed that, unless a convenient alternative date was available, application should be made to the Business Committee to use the informal session allocated for the 7 February to receive further oral evidence for the policy review.

Item 1: Apologies and substitutions

1. Apologies were received from Edwina Hart. On behalf of the Committee, the Chair said she wanted to pass on its sympathies to the Minister in the event of her recent family bereavement.

Item 2: Declaration of interests

2.1 The following declarations were made:

- Peter Black said that he was a Member of Swansea City and County Council;

- Janet Davies said that she was a Member of Llanhari Community Council;

- William Graham said that he was a Member of Newport County Borough Council;

- Dai Lloyd said that he was a Member of Swansea City and County Council and a general practitioner;

- Janet Ryder said that she was a Member of Ruthin Town Council.

Item 3: Presentation on Data Mapping and Crime Reduction

3.1 Paul Pan said that the Crime Reduction Unit were currently developing a new information infrastructure in association with the Home Office to assist the agencies and partnerships involved in crime reduction. This infrastructure would enable more effective data exchange and sharing of information. It would allow agencies and partnerships to work more closely together to formulate robust crime reduction policies based on sound evidence.

3.2 He said that crime reduction was primarily a problem solving process, which involved the identification of problems, analysis of information and the formulation of effective solutions. Data mapping was being developed as a tool to assist in this complex process. Detailed data obtained from a variety of sources could be used to identify emerging patterns of criminal activity and help determine factors affecting crime.

3.3 The development of the new information infrastructure, including data mapping, would facilitate a more pro-active approach to crime reduction. It would enable agencies and partnerships to intervene at the earliest possible stage and help provide crime prevention solutions.

3.4 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee supported the development of the new information infrastructure. It felt that data mapping could provide an effective tool in crime reduction and a more pro-active approach to crime prevention.

- Members agreed that a multi-agency approach, which had been adopted by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships established in all local authorities across Wales, was the most effective way in which to tackle crime. It was noted that all partnerships included a nominated Community Safety Officer.

- It was suggested that data mapping, particularly of violent crime, could be used by Crime and Disorder Partnerships to inform the planning of townscapes and the design of buildings. This could help minimise the risk of crime, particularly in urban areas.

- Members welcomed the co-operation of Partnerships, particularly in North Wales, which had contributed to the successful development of the new information infrastructure. It would be important to highlight the role and potential benefits of data mapping in crime reduction in order to encourage agencies to volunteer data. The development of a collective source of data would inform strategic planning and enable agencies to target resources effectively.

- The Committee noted that Crime and Disorder audits currently were carried out every three years. Paul Pan emphasised the need to regularly update data in order to produce accurate information, which could be used effectively to tackle crime.

- Members felt that data mapping could assist in the community regeneration process. In addition, it was suggested that Communities First Partnerships, which were being established to take forward the Communities First programme, would benefit from the involvement of the police and fire service.

3.5 The Chair thanked Paul Pan and the representatives from the Police and Fire Service for the presentation and for answering Members' questions.

Item 4: Interim Evaluation of the People in Communities Programme:

(LGH-01-02 (p.2)

4.1 The Deputy Minister said that the People in Communities programme was designed to demonstrate ways in which disadvantaged communities could achieve positive change. He said that the interim evaluation report identified some major successes as well as a number of shortcomings in the programme. The findings of the report were taken into account in the development of the Communities First programme.

4.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee welcomed the interim evaluation report of the People in Communities programme and the success achieved as a result of the approach adopted by the programme. Members agreed it would be necessary to learn from the shortcomings of the programme and to address these in the context of Communities First.

- It was felt that future approaches to community regeneration, in particular the Communities First programme, should encourage innovation and risk taking. The subsequent removal of the stigma associated with failure would encourage projects to take part in the Communities First programme.

- There was some discussion on the ability of Communities First to change the way in which mainstream services were delivered in order to meet the needs of deprived communities. It was felt that the future success of service delivery would largely depend on the adoption of a co-ordinated approach, which required the commitment of statutory sector representatives. It was suggested that each Communities First Partnership should include a designated representative from the local authority with the power to actively influence service delivery. Members noted that the Community Regeneration and Social Inclusion Policy Board had been established to advise on the strategic direction of social disadvantage programmes. The Board would ensure that a co-ordinated approach to community regeneration was being taken.

- Members felt it would be important to maintain flexibility in funding to reflect local needs and priorities. It was envisaged that the Communities First Co-ordinator would facilitate joined-up working at a local level and assist Partnerships to identify and gain access to appropriate sources of funding as they developed Community Action Plans.

- Members agreed it would be important to adapt programmes over time to take account of change and experience. It was noted that the Communities First guidance was a working document, which was subject to continuous review. It would be necessary for the Assembly to work closely with Communities First Partnerships and Co-ordinators in order to manage change. In addition, it was envisaged that the Communities First Support Network would play a key role in disseminating best practice and assist Partnerships in sharing experience.

- The Deputy Minister agreed to provide details of the indicators used to form the Multiple Index of Deprivation.

- The Deputy Minister agreed to provide further information on the Communities First Support Network.

Item 5: Policy Review of Community Regeneration:

Oral Consultation session

5.1 The Chair invited Lynda Bransbury of the Welsh Local Government Association, Gareth Hall of the Welsh Development Agency and Margaret Jervis and Graham Benfield of Wales Council for Voluntary Action to give their presentations.

5.2 Lynda Bransbury raised the following points:

- The WLGA endorsed the principle of area based regeneration underlying the Communities First programme. However, it would be important to identify way to extend the programme to include groups which were harder to define, for example Communities of Interest.

- The Assembly should identify appropriate means to assist deprived communities which have failed to benefit from programmes aimed at tackling deprivation.

- The WLGA welcomed the bottom-up approach adopted by Communities First. However, it would be necessary to encourage ownership within communities and learn lessons from communities about their priorities.

- The WLGA were concerned that the pivotal role of local government in community regeneration had been overlooked. The strategic role of local authorities would need to be

harnessed to obtain critical mass and assist in achieving sustainability. The new powers of local authorities to promote economic, environmental and social well-being, and their duty to develop community strategies provided a framework for their role as effective leaders in the regeneration process.

- It was felt that local authorities played a vital role in generating interest within deprived communities. They assisted communities in building capacity and gaining access to appropriate funding. Local authorities had a co-ordinating role to play in taking froward the community and could be regarded as a catalyst to the regeneration process.

- There was concern raised that the level of funding made available in Wales to assist community regeneration is disproportionate to allocations in England to take forward the comparative neighbourhood renewal.

- The WLGA felt that the plethora of funding streams combined with complex and lengthy application processes provided a significant barrier for projects involved in community regeneration. This resulted in inefficient use of time and resources in compiling bids and making applications. It was suggested that an increase in funding provision to at least a five year period would help overcome barriers and reduce these inefficiencies.

- It was suggested that the use of specific grants to fund innovative ways of working was becoming counterproductive. It would be important provide funding for work which built upon and improved existing projects as well as those which adopted shared practices with an established success.

- The WLGA identified the need to seek ways of attracting alternative large scale funding to achieve successful and sustainable regeneration. This would require the Assembly to encourage local and regional organisations to develop joint long-term regeneration plans.

- There was concern raised that the promotion of innovative approaches to regeneration, including risk taking, presented local authorities with a conflict of interests given their democratic accountability and their statutory obligations under the Best Value regime.

5.3 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee recognised that local partnerships could benefit from the professionalism and expertise within local government. It was suggested that the role of local government was to service rather than dominate partnerships.

- Members agreed it was imperative for local authorities to take account of community priorities in taking forward community strategies and other plans. This would be achieved by working in partnership with communities and with the adoption of a bottom-up. It was suggested that regeneration programmes should form an integral part of community

strategies, which were considered to be the overarching plan for the community.

- The Committee noted that investment in, and the development of the infrastructure which served communities was fundamental in achieving sustainable regeneration.

5.4 Gareth Hall raised the following points:

- The WDA's primary role of economic development made an important contribution to the regeneration process and could assist in achieving sustainable communities.

- The WDA's involvement in community regeneration is underpinned by a number of principles, namely: the need for the full input of the community in developing and delivering a holistic plan; the requirement for an effective partnership approach and; the requirement of a long-term commitment by the parties involved.

- The WDA had developed a flexible tool-kit for supporting community regeneration which was built on the best practice established through the Market Towns Initiative in Mid Wales, the Small Towns and Villages and Slate Valleys Initiative in North Wales and its support of the LEADER groups. This tool-kit could be employed at different stages of the community-led regeneration process.

- The WDA provided funding to help create capacity within the community to develop local partnerships and to plan and mobilise the wider community through social and economic activities; to assist with the cost of employing a development officer and training support for local volunteers; and for surveys, studies and consultancy support for preparation of regeneration plans.

- The WDA felt that investment in infrastructure, including ICT was important in taking forward community regeneration.

- There was a need to develop new, meaningful performance indicators to measure the progress of community regeneration. These indicators should measure both short and long-term success.

5.5 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee noted that the WDA had demonstrated a flexible approach to funding by applying mainstream budgets in an innovative way to assist projects aimed at community regeneration. The majority of the WDA's budget was currently spent on local level investment. This would inevitably contribute to the regeneration process.

- It was felt that the economic for a played a significant role in community regeneration at a regional level. The existing sectors of the for a could assist in the identification and

assessment of regional priorities, in particular the investment required within the regional infrastructure.

5.6 Margaret Jervis raised the following points:

- The WCVA felt it was vital to recognise the invaluable role of the voluntary sector in community regeneration. Volunteering provided an ideal opportunity for individuals to engage with their local community.

- Community regeneration which was dependent on project funding had been largely unsuccessful to date in tackling deprivation. There was a need for long-term funding and continuous investment in order to address deprivation and regenerate communities.

- The WCVA highlighted the need to develop effective evaluation methods for community regeneration programmes. These would assist in the timely identification of both shortcomings and good practice.

- The WCVA emphasised the role of local communities in the regeneration process. It was felt that local people were best placed to identify the needs and priorities of their communities. It would be necessary to establish genuine, equitable partnerships and to involve local communities in the decision making process.

5.6 The following points were raised discussion:

- There was some discussion about the current funding regime and the need to introduce long-term funding for programmes aimed at community regeneration. There was general agreement that consideration should be given to long-term funding. However, it would be necessary to continue to review funding on a cyclical basis in order to take account of changing needs and priorities.

- There was concern raised that delays in accessing funding as a result of lengthy application processes could lead to dissatisfaction and eventual apathy within local communities. The WCVA were currently involved in developing innovative methods to increase the efficiency of the application process for European Social Risk Fund.

- The Committee agreed that the most effective partnerships would be those constituted on the 'three thirds' principle. It was vital to promote equality between sectors within these partnerships and to avoid tokenism.

5.7 The Chair thanked the representatives for making their presentations to the Committee and for answering Members' questions.

Item 7: Minutes of the 5 December meeting: LGH-16-01 (min)

7. The minutes of the 5 December meeting were agreed.

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

1. The Deputy Minister agreed to provide details of the indicators used to form the Multiple Index of Deprivation.

2. The Deputy Minister agreed to provide further information on the Communities First Support Network.