

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Wednesday 22 May 2002

Time: 2.00pm to 5.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

Attendance: Members

Gwenda Thomas (Chair)	Neath
Peter Black	South Wales West
Geraint Davies	Rhondda
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 and Deeside
Ann Jones	Vale of Clwyd (Item 4)

In attendance:

David A'Herne	Crime Reduction Director for Wales
Jeff Davies	Community Regeneration
Rob Hay	Statistical Directorate
Jonathan Rae	Statistical Directorate
Colin Everett	Syniad
Professor David Adamson	Expert Advisor

Secretariat:

Roger Chaffey	Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Deputy Clerk

Introductory Remarks

The Chair reminded Members that Members from HSS Committee had been invited to attend for Item 4 and she welcomed Ann Jones and Geraint Davies. Geraint Davies was also substituting for Janet Ryder.

The Chair advised members that unfortunately, it had not been possible to arrange a visit to the housing projects at Bettws and Brackla on 30 May. However, the Committee has a further slot for a scoping day on 4 July. Members were content to pursue the visit on that day which the Clerk would arrange.

The Chair advised that the failure of the IT at the last meeting had occurred as unfortunately the presenter had not brought his own laptop and officials had been unable to arrange a compatible substitute in time. She added that all the equipment was working for today's presentation. Peter Law was not content with the explanation and requested a written reply. The Chair agreed to this request.

The Chair advised that the Committee would receive a presentation from the Institute of Civil Engineers on Rethinking Construction Centre for Wales at the 10 July Members. As this has an impact for EPT Committee, she asked for members consent to invite members from EPT Committee for that item. Members were in agreement.

Item 1: Apologies and Substitutions

1.1 Geraint Davies substituted for Janet Ryder, who had sent her apologies.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

2.1 The following declarations were made:

Peter Black: a Member of Swansea City and County Council.

William Graham: a Member of Newport City and County Borough Council.

Pauline Jarman: Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and a member of the Welsh Local Government Association.

Dai Lloyd: a Member of Swansea City and County Council.

Geraint Davies: Member of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council.

Item 3: Minister's Report LGH-09-02(p.1)

3.1 The Minister presented her report highlighting the recent meeting she had had with representatives from the Voluntary Sector.

3.2 In discussion, Members raised the following points:

- How will it be shown that new arrangements are in place for the service for looked after children? It was also noted that most councillors are well aware of the current arrangements regarding rotational visits to residential homes but the Waterhouse Report indicated the need to downsize residential homes. Looked after children are also cared for through foster parents and other carers and there is a requirement to avoid institutional care as far as can be achieved. A letter from the Minister for Health and Social Services had previously been circulated on residual concerns on the roles of individual members with responsibility for the welfare of children and that the new arrangements need to be clarified as to how they will accommodate this.
- The report on different arrangement regulations was welcomed and Members agreed that it was essential to ensure stability. Members also felt that a

mandatory review after 12 months of the new arrangements being in operation would be a useful audit.

- Members welcomed the promotional leaflet on becoming a councillor and asked the Minister if she was considering simplifying future voting arrangements?
- Members asked if further identified communities resulting from the 2001 Census, would be included in the Communities First programme?

3.3 The Minister made the following response and offered to take the following action:

- All details were carefully considered when the guidance was prepared for looked after children. The Minister asked officials to provide details of specific examples where, in their new constitutions, authorities had provided robust arrangements for the fulfillment of the roles and duties of officers and elected members in respect of looked after children.
- The Minister to consider the advice from the Minister for Health and Social Services and Legal Officers to clarify the responsibilities of officers and members in relation to children in residential homes
- She said that local authorities had adapted well to modernisation in Wales and that leaders of local authorities were investing a great deal of effort into ensuring stability. She added that recent elections for Mayors in England had been costly and she hoped that good sense would prevail in Wales.
- The Minister to discuss with the WLGA and possibly survey a sample of local authorities on the working of the new political structures, after they have been operating for twelve months.
- She said that the Electoral Commission was advising central government on maximising participation in future elections. The Equal Opportunities Committee had looked at this issue especially in relation to disabled people and she understood that positive changes might be implemented for the 2004 Local elections in Wales. She agreed to report back in July on [progress made in discussing possible changes.
- She said that she was eagerly waiting for the results of the 2001 Census and will review the impact these figures have on the deprivation index.

3.4 The Chair asked Members to note that Annex 2 of the Minister's Report includes the LGH Subordinate Legislation Programme for the remainder of the year. She added that she sees the scrutiny of subordinate legislation as a key function for the Committee and she intends asking the Committee's Legal Adviser to provide advice before determining whether any of the proposed regulations should be included in the Forward Work programme. Members were invited to suggest items worthy of further consideration.

3.5 The Minister said that she would welcome any comments on the format of her reports.

Item 4: Crime and Reduction Partnerships LGH-09-02 (p.2)

4.1 The Chair welcomed Ann Jones to the meeting. She invited the Minister to introduce the 2 papers for this item adding that Crime Reduction Director for

Wales, David A'Herne, would be making a presentation. Jeff Davies accompanied him from the Community Regeneration Unit. Mr Davies is on secondment to the National Assembly from the Dyfed-Powys Police Force.

4.2 The Minister introduced the two papers that had been submitted. The first, *Crime reduction and social inclusion*, resulted from the 21 November 2001 meeting, when the Committee requested regular reports on crime reduction initiatives and their links to the wider social inclusion agenda. The second, *Crime and disorder reduction partnerships*, reflected the discussion that occurred at the 8 May meeting when the Minister reported the concerns in the increase in the availability of Class A drugs in Wales. The Minister added that she was trying to arrange an informal meeting between the Committee and Chief Constables on this issue.

4.3 David A'Herne said that his presentation would feature on the concerns regarding the increase in the availability of Class A drugs in South Wales. The main points were:

- Drug misuse is a problem that is here to stay but its use can be reduced with a combined approach from all relevant agencies.
- Police intelligence has confirmed that the escalating problem of misuse and related violent crimes in Bristol and the surrounding area could spread to South Wales. The drug culture in Bristol had now reached saturation point. The drugs in question are heroin and crack cocaine.
- Chief Constables appreciate the seriousness of the impact this could have on the South Wales and wish to be fully ahead of the game.
- Agreed that the approach to dealing with this problem is by a joined-up process from all parties connected with formulating a single strategy. This strategy would not only focus on law enforcement, but education, prevention and treatment for existing addicts.
- Solutions cannot exist in isolation. View is to manage an agreed strategy as a project with a Chief Executive controlling all the involved partners on a day to day basis. This system was likened to the method employed with the Y2K Millennium Bug project.
- Conclusion was that the employment of a wholly joined-up system would eventually have a positive impact on drug misuse in Wales.
- Members were advised that a Commons Select Committee was publishing a report on drug misuse later that day.

4.4 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members were in agreement that this information painted a very disturbing picture and welcomed the initiatives that the Police Forces and other agencies were working on.
- Members agreed that a joined-up approach was the only way to deal with the misuse of drugs and that a partnership of all parties must be encouraged.
- Any strategy must include education, from parents and at schools from both teachers and police officers. Law enforcement was a necessity at all sectors of the drug market; local dealers, wholesalers and importers. Treatment for addicts needed to be focused upon, as there was a shortage of rehabilitation and detoxification places on programmes.

- Members felt that this issue has a crosscutting impact on not only this and the Health and Social Services Committee but also the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Assembly as a whole. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the First Minister on the need to adopt a "joined up" approach, involving all agencies to counter the threat of increased to counter the influx of Class A drugs, particularly in South Wales.
- Members also discussed the problem of drug misuse in other areas of Wales, particularly the Rhyl area and asked what initiatives were being taken there to combat the problem.
- Members also said how well received the Safer Homes this Winter Scheme had been and asked if it as available throughout Wales.
- Members asked if there was an appraisal on the Cardiff Alcohol Related Street Violence Project (TASC) available.
- Members were in support of the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas scheme reporting that much positive feedback had been received from constituents.

4.5 The following responses were received:

- The Police Force does not perceive there to be a threat to North Wales from the problem highlighted in Bristol. It is a fact that one area of Rhyl has a reputation for drug misuse but a recent initiative by the North Wales Police removed a large number of dealers and agencies in the area are focusing on treatment for users.
- Acknowledged that the Safer Homes this Winter scheme had a major impact on reassuring communities, particularly the elderly.
- A report was currently being compiled on the evaluation of the TASC scheme. On publication, it will be made available to the Committee.
- The Small Retailers in Deprived Areas scheme had made a positive impact and £1m has been allocated to Wales for the next 3 years.
- The Minister agreed to report to next Committee meeting progress on discussions between the home Office and the Treasury on the capital/revenue split for "Community Against Drugs" funding.

4.6 The Chair thanked David A'Herne for the presentation and the Committee for a most constructive discussion.

Item 5: Presentation from Syniad

5.1 The Chair welcomed Colin Everett, Head of Improvement at Syniad. Syniad has been integrated into the WLGA but has maintained its identity. Syniad is fully grant-aided by the National Assembly.

5.2 Colin Everett advised that his presentation would focus on the work of Syniad in supporting elected members and their development needs in the light of the new constitutions and responsibilities. Syniad has 7 active members of staff who are involved on member's development. The main points were:

- Expectations: emphasis to be placed on people and people development.

- Defining development: elected members recognise the need for investment and the different types of requirements.
- Demands: falls into knowledge and skills.
- Take-up 2000-02: there are 1200 elected members in Wales - the majority of whom have taken up some training and development. Pleased to note that 13 out of 22 unitary authorities have signed up to Member Charter.
- Issues: need to balance local and national issues.
- National Strategy: requirement to research and establish development needs for both members and managers. Important requirement to evaluate programmes after been delivered.
- The Association's Role: The Welsh Assembly Government will pursue with the WLGA, the strengthening of both strategic and practical support for the training and development of leaders, managers and staff.

5.3 The following points were raised in discussion:

- Members agreed that this had been a refreshing and frank discussion and that Syniad was a very valuable tool in the WLGA. They felt that members are in the public eye and with the introduction of increased fees and allowances are open to more scrutiny from the electorate and should be encouraged to attend relevant development courses.
- Members noted that 13 local authorities had signed up to the Members Charter and felt that this was a move in the right direction. Members asked what was contained in the Charter.
- Members asked whether a peer review had been conducted and if so, would it be commended to councils.
- It was noted that many councilors have employment commitments that make it difficult for them to undergo training during office-hours and Members asked if training was available at other times.

5.4 The following responses were given:

- Colin Everett said he would send copies of the Members Charter to the Chair for distribution to members.
- Local authorities have drawn upon peer experience where appropriate and a wealth of experience can be obtained and disseminated using this method. However, advise caution in that authorities are careful how they manage this method of development.
- Syniad are content to run sessions to suit delegates, be it in the evening or at weekends. Training is not centered in Cardiff but held locally.

5.5 The Chair thanked Colin Everett for his presentation.

Item 6: Consideration of PSS Data for SSA formula for 2003-04 LGH-09-02 (p.3)

6.1 The Chair welcomed Rob Hay and Jonathan Rae from Statistical Directorate (SD) to the meeting. She said that this item was an action point resulting from the 30 January meeting when SD were asked about the possibility of

incorporating some of the changes in the personal social services data in the 2003-04 settlement.

- 6.2 The Minister advised the Committee that unfortunately it had not been possible to obtain all the required data in the correct format to obtain a settlement in readiness for 2003-04.
- 6.3 Members accepted that this was an extremely difficult exercise but asked whether the current format could be adjusted until the revised formula is ready.
- 6.4 Clarification was also sought on two issues contained in sub-paragraph (vii) of paragraph 8. What is meant by modelling and how has responsibility for nursing care changed.
- 6.5 The Minister said that the current format would not be changed in the interim. Rob Hay advised that the whole formula would be based on an aggregate from across all the 22 unitary authorities models. In answer to a question from the Chair, he explained that the reference to a change of responsibility for nursing care was included to reflect the budget sharing arrangements that had been introduced.

Item 7: Policy review of community regeneration - consideration of draft recommendations LGH-08-02 (p4)

- 7.1 The Chair welcomed Professor Dave Adamson to the meeting. She said that at the last meeting on 8 May, the Committee discussed the emerging issues that had arisen from the policy review and had considered a number of options for recommendations to be included in its eventual report. This paper brings those recommendations together and comments on the considerations that have led to them being adopted.
- 7.2 A revised paper had been circulated incorporating the revision as recorded in paragraph 8.1 of these minutes.
- 7.3 A request was made to change the word *manpower* in the third line of draft recommendation 2.1. This was agreed and the Committee confirmed that they were content with the recommendations.

Item 8: Minutes of the 8 May meeting LGH-08-02 (min)

- 8.1 It was noted that item 7, Section 5, Relationships with Statutory Sector Partners was incorrect. It should read: "It was agreed to accept option 3."
- 8.2 The minutes were agreed.

Summary of action points:

1. The Minister to provide details of specific examples where, in their new constitutions, authorities had provided robust arrangements for the fulfillment of the roles and duties of officers and elected members in respect of looked after children.
2. The Minister to consider the advice from the Minister for Health and Social Services and Legal Officers to clarify the responsibilities of officers and members in relation to children in residential homes
3. The Minister's reports to include reports of her meetings with the voluntary sector when appropriate.
4. The Minister to discuss with the WLGA and possibly survey a sample of local authorities on the working of the new political structures, after they have been operating for twelve months.
5. The Minister to provide a progress report on electoral arrangements for the local government elections.
6. The Minister to report to next Committee meeting progress on discussions between the home Office and the Treasury on the capital/revenue split for "Community Against Drugs" funding.
7. The Chair to write to the First Minister on the need to adopt a "joined up" approach, involving all agencies to counter the threat of increased to counter the influx of Class A drugs, particularly in South Wales.
8. The Minister to report on progress of the TASC scheme.