

MINUTES LGH-13-02(mins)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Date: WEDNESDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2002

Time: 09.30 - 12.20

Venue: COMMITTEE ROOM 2, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING

Attendance:

Members

Gwenda Thomas (Chair)	Neath
Peter Black	South Wales West
Rosemary Butler	Newport West
William Graham	South Wales East
Edwina Hart (Minister)	Gower
Pauline Jarman	South Wales Central
Peter Law	Blaenau Gwent
Dai Lloyd	South Wales West
Janet Ryder	North Wales

Officials

Adam Peat	Director, Local Government, Housing & Culture Department
Kate Cassidy	Local Government Modernisation

Norma Barry	Communities Directorate
Mike Chown	Local Government Finance
Rob Hay	Local Government Finance
Joanna Jordan	Crime Reduction
Chris Hobday	Housing Directorate
David Fletcher	Local Government
Richard Shearer	Local Government Modernisation
Inspector Tony Rees	South Wales Police

Secretariat

Roger Chaffey	Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Deputy Clerk

9.30am to 9.30am

Item 1: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1. The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.
2. The Chair announced that the Assembly was entering its final year culminating in the elections in May and that both the Committee and the Assembly can be proud of what it has achieved to date. However, much work remains to be actioned particularly in the fields of drug and alcohol abuse, the implementation of the homelessness and fuel poverty strategies, fire protection, the implications of the draft Local Government Bill for Wales and the continued progress of Communities First.
3. The Chair added that the Committee's report on its policy review of community regeneration had been published and copies sent to all Assembly members as well as all those organisations that contributed to the Committee's considerations. The report will be debated in Plenary on 22nd October. She recorded her thanks

to all contributors plus the expert adviser, Professor Dave Adamson.

1.4 The Chair asked Members for declarations of interest, in accordance with Standing Order 4.5.

The following declarations were made:

- Peter Black, a Member of Swansea City and County Council and his wife is employed by a Registered Social Landlord (item 2)
- 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
- Janet Ryder, a Member of Ruthin Town Council
- Peter Law, Presiding Officer at Forum of Local Town and Community Councils in Wales
- Gwenda Thomas, her son is a fireman (item 2)

9.35am to 10.10am

Item 2: Minister's Report)

LGH-13-02(p.1) Annex 1, 2 3

Topic 1

1. The Minister presented her report and specifically referred Members to the section on Looked after Children. She added that the supporting Annex was not complete as not all Local Authorities had responded. She planned to try to obtain information from the LA's who had not responded and update Committee in her next written report. She also asked if Committee was agreeable to inviting the Minister for Health and Social Services to give a presentation at Committee on the overlap between the two portfolios.
2. The Chair said that it was important that the Committee received a Wales wide picture of how the Waterhouse recommendations were implemented by individual LA's and asked whether a consistency approach had been made or whether LA's had decided to implement the recommendations individually. The Chair added that she felt that some LA's had not highlighted corporate parenting adequately

and she queried whether Criminal Record Bureau checks were required for members. Members discussed this issue and agreed that a further report to Committee would be welcomed. Members also wished to record their appreciation to the staff who have a difficult job to do in this area.

3. In response, the Minister stated that it might be appropriate for the WLGA spokesperson on Social Services to attend Committee together with the Minister for Health and Social Services to discuss the implications of this matter and look to promoting good practice issues.

4. Members made the following comments on the written report:

- The amendments to the Local Authority Approved Investment Regulations were welcomed.
- They thought it would be useful to see the nature (not details) of complaints about Registered Social Landlords to ascertain if common trends were emerging.
- Members requested further details on the Social Housing Management Grant Programme.
- Members welcomed the initiative to provide disability ramp access at polling stations but questioned whether more publicity could be given for the rolling registers. Members also questioned whether there were any statistics to reflect the trend of polling clerks employment status.
- Members congratulated Peter Law for his work on the establishment of "One-Voice" All-Wales Association for Town and Community Councils.
- Members welcomed the initiative on the Post Office Development Fund and requested regular updates.
- The Minister was asked whether the updated guidance on Communities First reflected the Committees review on Community Regeneration.
- What evidence had the Minister received to reach her decision on petitions for elected mayors?
- Can the Communities First helpdesk telephone number be published?
- Could the Minister outline the direction for the forthcoming financial year on the Non-Domestic Rating Contributions Regulations?

1. In response, the Minister stated that:

- She would provide a note about the trends of complaints against Registered Social Landlords.
- She would report on the "good practices" emerging the Social Housing Management

Grant Programme at the next meeting.

- She shared members concerns about accessibility at polling stations adding that she was determined to do her best to assist in this matter. She said she would look whether there were any trends regarding polling clerk's main employment status. She added that she would ask the WLGA to advertise the rolling registers more fully.
- She said that the establishment of "One-Voice" All-Wales Association for Town and Community Councils was a long awaited development and that she would keep Committee updated on its research work.
- She agreed to update Committee on the Post Office issues at the next meeting.
- She confirmed that the revised Communities First guidance would reflect the recommendations in the Committee's report.
- She advised that she reached her decision on petitions for elected mayors from the evidence received.
- She agreed to advise all Assembly Members of the Communities First helpdesk telephone number.
- She agreed to send a copy of the Non-Domestic Rating Contributions Regulations together with an explanation to William Graham.

1. The Chair thanked the Minister for a comprehensive report and reminded members that if they wished to debate any subordinate legislation to advise the Clerk accordingly.

Action Points

- The Minister to provide a note about the trends of complaints against Registered Social Landlords.
- The Minister to report on the "good practices" emerging from the Social Housing Management Grant Programme at the next meeting.
- The Minister to look whether there were any trends regarding polling clerk's main employment status.
- The Minister to write to the WLGA asking them to advertise the rolling registers more fully.
- The Minister agreed to keep Committee updated on the research work of "One-Voice" All-Wales Association for Town and Community Councils.

- The Minister agreed to update Committee on supporting Post Offices in deprived/ isolated communities at the next meeting.
- Officials to advise all Assembly Members of the Communities First helpdesk telephone number.
- The Minister agreed to send a copy of the Non-Domestic Rating Contributions Regulations together with an explanation to William Graham AM.

10.10m to 11.00

Item 3: Consideration of the Draft Budget

LGH-13-02(p.2) Annex 1, 2

1. The Minister presented her draft budget outlining the effect on local authority services. She said that it had not been possible to set out the detail in advance of the budget debate in Plenary on 15th October but asked the Committee to comment on the considerations contained in Annex 1 of her paper.
2. The Chair thanked the Minister for presenting her paper and said that she believed it was an excellent budget for local authorities.
3. Members welcomed the budget and made the following points during a detailed discussion:
 - How will budgets be affected following the on-going pay settlements, particularly fire fighters?
 - Could the effects of the new census data have a major impact on some LA's?
 - Members welcomed the establishment of a working party to consider the free access scheme for children and young people to local authority leisure centres during school holidays but requested further details on costs and terms and conditions.
 - Would the Minister consider allocating further funding to the Homebuy Scheme?

- Members asked if the Minister could advise on the breakdown of the specific grant schemes.
- Concern was raised over the social services budget, which historically has been underfunded, and with the additional pressures connected with children's services, asked whether the Minister could increase that particular budget.
- Members requested further information on the drug issue and specifically whether there were any statistics available to detail on resources spent to date.
- The Minister was asked if she could specifically allocate funding to alleviate the substance misuse problem in Rhyl West.
- Members requested that the Minister further consider an extra allocation for the Coalfield Regeneration Trust.
- Would church/chapel halls situated in wards not located within Communities First programme but which community groups located in the programme used, be able to benefit from the relaxation of the scheme rules?

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1. In response, the Minister said:

- Fire-fighters pay was not a devolved issue and will be dealt with by LA's.
- The Minister advised that she had agreed with the WLGA that the provisional settlement would be announced later than usual at the end of November. This will allow more time to properly consider the effects of the new census data.
- The Minister said she would await a report from the working party on the access to leisure facilities scheme.
- The Minister advised that she is currently reviewing the operation of the Homebuy scheme and will consider making adjustments once the findings are available.
- The Minister agreed to provide a breakdown of the specific grant programmes.
- The Minister said that there was to be a substantial increase over the next three years to address the historic shortfall in the Social Services budget.
- The Minister advised that the Task Group established to examine the delivery of the substance misuse treatment services in Wales is due to report shortly. She added that this would enable her to consider the funding requirements.
- The Minister agreed to look at additional funding to tackle the problems of substance misuse in Rhyl West.
- The Minister said she would continue to provide funding for the Coalfield Regeneration Trust but will consider the level of funding on an annual basis. She added that she was prepared to consider any views the committee may have on future funding levels for the Trust.
- The Minister made the point that many Faiths owned buildings are used as community centres and that previously they had not been able to access Assembly funding. She advised that the new Community Facilities and Activities Programme would provide this funding and be available on an all Wales basis.

Action Points

- The Minister to review the operation of the Homebuy scheme and consider making adjustments once the findings are available
- The Minister to provide a breakdown of the specific grant programmes.
- The Chair to write to the Minister in response to the budget proposals.

11.00am to 11.15am

The Committee agreed to break for 15 minutes.

11.15am to 11.20am

Item 4: Update on Local Government Bill

LGH-13-02(p.3)

1. The Minister introduced her paper adding that negotiations with the UK Government are still ongoing as regards the Wales proposals and that the final outcome will not be known until the end of October. She added that it would not be prudent to pre-empt these decisions but stressed that she kept a daily watch, as did her officials on developments. She said that all representations from both the Assembly Government and Committee had been forwarded as requested.

4.2 Members appreciated the Minister's position and agreed it would be sensible to await further information when available.

Action Point

- **The Minister to update Committee as appropriate.**

11.20am to 12.00pm

Item 5: Presentation on the Targeted Alcohol and Street Crime Project

5.1 The Chair introduced Inspector Tony Rees from South Wales Police who had been invited to give a presentation on the Targeted Alcohol and Street Crime Project in Cardiff (TASC).

5.2 TASC is a Home Office led targeted Policing project that was planned to run for three years. It was led by South Wales Police and is already being replicated elsewhere. The project team continues to receive visits from forces from the UK. The project has been assessed and evaluated and the report submitted to the Home Office. It will be published shortly. A copy of Inspector Rees' presentation is attached as an annex to the minutes.

3. The Minister said that she was very impressed with the project and will continue to lobby the Home Office for continued funding and hopes to receive a favourable response. She added that she would like to see the scheme extended to other parts of Wales with a high population. She felt that alcohol abuse raises a number of serious issues and expressed concern at the way alcohol is marketed especially towards young, influential people. She praised the excellent work South Wales Police has undertaken with this area.
4. Members were united in their commendation for this project and the excellent work undertaken. They raised the following points in discussion:

- What pressure can be put upon licensed premises to use unbreakable drinking vessels?
- Members were concerned about promotional evenings and "happy hours" which were

targeted at young people and felt that the wrong signals about alcohol were sent out with such events.

3. In reply, Inspector Rees said:

- The use of unbreakable drinking vessels is an area the project has looked at. Glassware is cheap and plastic expensive. Also, plastic containers can also shatter into sharp shreds. He advised that there is a company who manufacture unbreakable drinking vessels but they are expensive. Members were interested to learn that when Cardiff is hosting a large event, licensed premises use plastic drinking vessels. He added that increasingly, young people drink directly from glass bottles and that the project has researched using plastic bottles in place of glass.
- Inspector Rees noted member's concerns adding that the major brewers, public house chains glamorise alcohol with marketing promotions.

Action Point

- **Secretariat to invite major brewers to Committee**

12.00pm to 12.10pm

Item 6: Policy Review on Capacity Building

LGH-13-02(p.4) Annex 1, 2

6.1 The Chair introduced this paper in which Committee was asked to approve the Policy plan for the review. She added that the plan included an extra day. The Committee agreed to the extra day and the plan.

2. The Chair added that last term, the Committee suggested holding a formal session in North Wales but with the change of Plenary to Wednesdays, that possibility is reduced. If the Committee was in agreement, the additional day scheduled for 7th November could be used to hold a formal evidence gathering session in North Wales and would also enable the Committee to visit one of the preferred reference sites suggested by Professor Adamson at Bangor University. The Committee was in agreement with this proposal and the Secretariat was asked to make the arrangements.
3. Members welcomed the possible visit to North Wales and suggested visits to Tai Eryri and Ty Pwt Llangefni.
4. The Chair said that with Committee agreement, she wished to forward a copy of the report to the Culture Minister to consider as part of her on-going consultation exercise on the distribution of National Lottery Funds.

Action Point

- **Secretariat to make arrangements for evidence gathering session in North Wales.**

12.10pm to 12.20pm

Item 7: Consideration of Forward Work Programme

LGH-13-02(p.5) Annex

1. The Clerk introduced this paper and invited comments from the Committee on the suggested forward work programme for the autumn term. He added that the programme had been designed to reflect the Committee's priorities on Drug and Alcohol abuse, diversity, housing issues and the policy review. The WLGA had received an open invitation to appear before the Committee and have indicated their intention of doing so. The programme also includes a mix of papers and presentations from the Welsh Assembly Government and outside bodies.

7.2 The Chair suggested that the ALGA be invited to discuss the Waterhouse

recommendations on looked after children and that the Minister for Health and Social Services be invited to attend the same meeting. Members were in agreement to this and agreed the forward work programme.

7.3

Action Points

- **Secretariat to invite Minister for Health & Social Services to 13th November meeting.**
- **Secretariat to suggest WLGA focus on the Waterhouse recommendations regarding children's services during their presentation to Committee on 13th November.**

Item 8: Minutes of previous meeting:

LGH-12-02(mins)

1. The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting and noted progress on outstanding action.

Committee Secretariat

October 2002