

MINUTES LGH-15-02 (mins)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Date: THURSDAY 7TH NOVEMBER 2002

Time: 11.00-13.00

Venue: THE CONFERENCE SUITE, UNIVERSITY OF WALES, BANGOR

Attendance:

Members

Gwenda Thomas (Chair)

Neath

Peter Law

Blaenau Gwent

Dai Lloyd

South Wales West

Tom Middlehurst

Alyn & Deeside

Janet Ryder

North Wales

In attendance

Selwyn Williams

Business and Regional Development
Faculty, University of Wales, Bangor

Sharon Warnes

Assistant Director, Corporate Policy,
Gwynedd County Council

Catrin Thomas

Corporate Policy, Gwynedd County
Council

Nia Jones

Community First Co-ordinator, Conwy
County Borough Council

Shan Ashton

Coed Bryn Meurig

Professor Dave Adamson

Expert Advisor

Secretariat

Roger Chaffey

Clerk

Claire Griffiths

Deputy Clerk

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

1. The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public. She said that members of the Committee were pleased to be in Bangor.
2. Apologies had been received from Peter Black, William Graham, Edwina Hart (Minister) and Pauline Jarman.

1.3 The Chair asked Members for declarations of interest, in accordance with Standing Order 4.5 as revised in Plenary on 5 November 2002. No declarations were made.

Item 2: Policy Review - Presentation from the Business and Regional Development Faculty of the University of Wales, Bangor

2.1 The Chair welcomed Selwyn Williams from the Business and Regional Development Faculty of the University of Wales, Bangor and asked him to make his presentation as part of the Committee's policy review.

2.2 Selwyn Williams thanked the Chair for inviting representation from the Faculty and a copy of his presentation is attached at Annex 1.

3. Members made the following points:

- The Chair advised that the report on the first part of the policy review on Community Regeneration had been debated in Plenary on 22nd October. She said she would arrange for a copy of the Minister's response on the recommendations is sent to him.
- Members appreciated that it was difficult to keep abreast of the number of programmes and funding streams available for Community Regeneration and that is why recommendation 4 suggested that a forum be created to co-ordinate such information. Members asked for expansion on the suggestion that a national body be created and how he envisaged it being formed.
- Some Members had reservations about the creation of a forum and said that it would be preferable to see local government empowering the programmes and facilitating a "bottom up" approach rather than the general reality that progress has to be actioned from the top down. Reference was made to Recommendation 13 where it was suggested that local authorities act as equal partners within a partnership structure.
- It was recognised that there was a shortage of trained people to take the programmes forward and the possibility of a bursary scheme for training (recommendation 12) was discussed.

2. The following points were made in response:

- Mr Williams said that the Faculty did not want to do more than instigate a discussion on the creation of a national body but felt that consultation on a Wales-wide basis would be required to ascertain what professionals in the field would wish such a body to be responsible for. He added that community redevelopment needed a catalyst and that perhaps a national body would provide this. He gave an example of where a participative body in Sweden has enabled Quango's to work in different ways and more to the requirements of the programmes.
- It was felt that many of the recommendations were about Wales' organisations promoting community regeneration and it was suggested that a rationale towards a body that would promote different working practices and structures for agencies and quango's in the field would be beneficial. It was suggested that a paradox to strengthen the centre of the programmes would then enable community regeneration to be supported and promoted effectively and efficiently.
- Mr Williams said that he had no specific thoughts on a bursary scheme but in principle it sounded fine.

Item 3: Policy Review - Presentation from Gwynedd County Council

3.2 The Chair welcomed Sharon Warnes and Catrin Thomas from Gwynedd County Council and asked them to make their presentation as part of the Committee's policy review.

2. Sharon Warnes thanked the Chair for inviting representation from the local authority and a copy of her presentation is attached at Annex 2.
3. Members made the following points:

- The Chair said that this was the first time, from recollection, that she had heard how a local authority had looked at how they worked internally and felt that was refreshing and good practice not only for this area of responsibility but for all local authority responsibilities. She asked what feedback had been received.
- Local authorities have a key role to play and have a capacity on which we need to build. It was felt that the programme needed a kick-start and then gentle withdrawal but that the LA remained as an equal partner. The whole essence of Communities First is to break down barriers and Members asked what early lessons could be learnt from this stage of the programme.
- Members appreciated the sensitive and supportive way Gwynedd County Council (GCC) was managing the programme and the manner in which GCC gives a tapered leadership.
- It was suggested that local authority officers required a culture change and training to ensure that all people in society and especially in the programme where confidence, literacy is generally poorer, received adequate support.
- It was noted that most deprived areas have a high increase of poor health amongst the inhabitants and that there was a moral duty to improve the health of people living in these areas. Members asked how key people in the community are found to work on the programmes.

2. In response, Members heard that:

- It was too early to evaluate the findings on the research into how the local authority performed but officials have been shocked at the poor image and perception people in the deprived communities have of GCC. A lot of time has been invested in improving relationships and building bridges to help both sides of the partnerships work together.
- GCC's approach to locating key people was to become visible in the community and speak to people. They found that the same names kept being suggested and those people were then approached to work on the programmes. GCC felt that the inhabitants

had to trust the key players and found that individuals who were trusted were the ones suggested.

- The Minister was asked to confirm which index would be used to determine the deprivation fund.

Item 4: Policy Review - Presentation from a Communities First Co-ordinator, Conwy County Borough Council

4.1 The Chair welcomed Nia Jones, a Communities First Co-ordinator at Conwy County Borough Council and asked her to make her presentation as part of the Committee's policy review.

2. Nia Jones thanked the Chair for inviting her to make a presentation as part of the policy review. She explained that she has a local government background and is the communities first co-ordinator for 5 areas in Llandudno. The areas are close together but remain separated by the inhabitants as no one wishes to share any resources with other areas. Nia Jones made a visual presentation, the main points being:

- Local newspapers refer to the estates as "Beirut", having states of anarchy. This obviously has a negative effect.
- Estates have frequent arson attacks on property and vehicles.
- One-third of all properties are currently void.
- Estates suffer from a dumping problem; domestic refuse, discarded furniture and from builders who dump their rubble there rather than at the designated refuse sites.
- Positive points included the community uniting to hold a jubilee party, young children who have learnt (and are continuing to do so) British Sign Language so that a deaf child is not excluded, newsletters being prepared for all areas to unite communities, active role tagged offenders have played in removing rubbish from alleyways and generally helping to clear the open areas.

4.3 She added that problems recur involving young people who have dropped out of the education system. She has arranged practical workshops for these people (eg motor vehicle repair days) which have been well supported. The local college has been approached to run courses in practical subjects but to tailor the length of course so that benefits are not reduced or stopped. She also highlighted the active roles the community police officers have played in helping to unite the communities and earn respect from the inhabitants. A community training course has been recommend for community police officers which was felt to have helped

break down barriers. She said that some service industry providers have little respect for people who live on the estates in question which was wrong and work was required to change this way of thinking.

4.4 Members raised the following points:

- The majority said they could relate to similar areas within their constituencies and had incurred similar headlines for such estates.
- Members agreed that society and in particular, local government's perception of had to be improved and that a culture change was required. Members added that was unacceptable for some estates to be treated differently because they had problems. However, dictatorship was not the answer, equality between all partners was the way forward to expose and improve weaknesses.
- The Chair asked Nia Jones if she had seen the recent report on arson, "Up in Flames" and suggested she perhaps comment on the report.

Item 5: Policy Review - Presentation from Coed Bryn Meurig (Community woodlands, Bethesda)

5.1 The Chair welcomed Shan Ashton and asked her to make a presentation as part of the Committee's policy review.

5.2 Shan Ashton thanked the Chair for inviting representation from Coed Bryn Meurig. She explained that she was standing in for Dafydd Cadwallader, the owner of the community woodlands at Bethesda who had sent his apologies. She added that Mr Cadwallader would be sending written evidence to the committee and she would just outline the project.

3. The project started when woodland in Bethesda became for sale. Bethesda suffers with poverty but was not deprived enough to be included in the Communities First programme. The community felt that this could lead to the loss of the woodland if a house developer, for example, purchased the woodland. The Cadwallader family purchased the woodland on behalf of the community. The land is used in two ways: Part is used on a commercial basis (growing & cutting of trees) and the remainder is used as a community resource. The land is used as an open air classroom resource for the education system. Primary schoolchildren visit the woodland to learn about nature etc and young people who have dropped

out of the education system have been included to help maintain as woodland and take an interest in "their" woodland. This has been approached from the thinking that by taking pride in the scheme, it would help prevent dumping and vehicle fires from taking place and figures can justify that this has happened. The young people have also learnt many skills including becoming literate where necessary and have found employment in the woodland.

5.4 Shan Ashton added that the project has adequate capacity but required funding to enable the successful work achieved to be continued. She welcomed the possibility of a forum as there were so many agencies involved in the programme and felt that bureaucracy had taken over.

4. In discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Please to see an environmental project as the whole community will benefit from aesthetically pleasing projects. The work undertaken in Bethesda was admired and welcomed and it was suggested the local Assembly Member be contacted on the funding issue.
- It was suggested that the Minister be asked how the grant system could be simplified and how course funding at Further Education colleges is provided in conjunction with the programme.
- It was pleasing to note that this project had the capacity but needed supporting from the agencies.

Item 6: Closing remarks

6.1 The Chair thanked all presenters for attending committee and contributing to the policy review on capacity building. She also thanked the University for their assistance in facilitating the meeting. She added that the presentations had highlighted a number of areas that will be considered when preparing the report.

6.2 Professor Adamson said that the presentations had confirmed that a lot of lessons had been learnt which affected both ends of the equation. He added that a constant theme had emerged on the need for culture change which the National Assembly and key agencies would have to consider.

Action Points

- Secretariat to send a copy of the Minister's response on the recommendations in Part I of the review to Selwyn Williams.
- The Committee to consider what assistance could be given to help facilitate the culture change required on attitude.
- The Committee to consider raising with the Minister how the grant system could be simplified and how course funding at Further Education colleges be provided in conjunction with the programme

Committee Secretariat

November 2002