

EDWINA HART – REPORT TO LG&H COMMITTEE – 13 November 2002

Community Mutual Model Rule Set

Since the official launch of the Community Mutual Model Rule Set (together with the equivalent Company Limited by Guarantee Model) in May the momentum has been maintained by a series of follow up publicity events..

Positive feedback has been generated by the CHM Model both in the media and amongst Assembly Members whilst several local authorities, in consultation with their tenants, are actively considering the role of the CHM Model in their option appraisal scenarios.

Discussions have been held between my officials and their equivalents within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Community Housing Task Force, the Scottish Executive and Communities Scotland. All have expressed great interest in the CHM concept

Since the CHM Model has now been made available to all prospective users the attention of the Welsh Assembly Government has now focused on the promotion of the Model and the need to provide the infrastructure to make it work.

Key elements of the CHM philosophy are involvement and training. The Assembly Government has been working in partnership with the specialist housing agencies such as CIH Cymru, TPAS Cymru , Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and also the Wales Co op Centre to devise appropriate training packages for tenants, shadow Board members and other interested parties in the process. These will be tailored to the specific requirements of CHMs with their unique constitutional emphasis on capacity building to ensure effective representation of all areas of the community.

In order to maximise the environmental and economic regeneration "spin offs" stakeholders with wider interests in the benefits of community mutuality have been brought into the process such as the Wales TUC , ELWA, CITB Wales and the WDA. Meetings have been held, and a working party set up, to consider effective options for the development of specific training initiatives focused at capacity building within the construction industry.

In addition, the beneficial impact of mutuality both within the social housing sector and in a wider Wales context will also be investigated by means of a Mutuality Research Project to be undertaken by the University of Glamorgan in collaboration with the Wales Co op Centre. The Welsh Assembly Government will provide the funding for this two year project which will seek to identify the ways in which lessons learned within the social housing sector can contribute towards achievement of the Assembly's wider social policy within Wales.

Complaints against RSLs

The Welsh Assembly Government regulates the performance of RSLs in Wales. Tenants and other individuals may complain about any aspect of a RSLs performance and service if it causes dissatisfaction and which the complainant considers does not reach the standards laid down in the Regulatory Requirements for RSLs in Wales.

All RSLs must have a clear and open complaints procedure, which must be exhausted before the Assembly can consider investigating the way in which the original complaint was handled.

Tables at annex 1 and 2 show the nature of complaint for the periods 1 April 2000 – 31 March 2001 (annex 1) and 1 April 2001 – 31 March 2002 (annex 2). The main areas of complaint are repairs and neighbour nuisance.

Special and Specific Grants

Attached at annex 3 is a list of the special and specific grants. Whilst the list cannot yet be considered as final it is a comprehensive and detailed list of the amounts that will be distributed to authorities in addition to the local government revenue settlement. The table includes equivalent amounts for the current financial year. Based on the information available, on a like for like basis, 2003-04 includes an estimated additional £150 million in specific and special grant funding for local authorities."

This list, with any updates, will be published as part of the provisional local government settlement on 28 November.

Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangement in Wales

Before the summer recess I launched a consultation exercise into the findings in the report of the Commission on Local Government Electoral Arrangements in Wales, also known as the Sunderland report.

The consultation end on 31 October. A good response was received to the consultation with over 100 replies being forwarded. These were mainly from individuals and county councils.

As many of the recommendations in the report were relevant to young people they were targeted separately for their views and twelve responses were received from youth organisations.

The consultation will be an agendered item for the Local Government and Housing Committee

meeting on 11 December, when I will present to the Committee a summary of the consultation responses.

Local Government Boundary Commission Orders

I expect to introduce a number of Orders to implement changes following reviews carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales. The Orders will be made under Standing Order 26 (subordinate legislation of a local nature).

The Orders fall into three categories, boundary changes, community boundary changes and electoral arrangements.

The boundary changes are between:

Pembrokeshire and Carmarthen in the area of Clynderwen

Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion in the area of St Dogmaels

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in the area of Grangetown Link Road.

The first two of these both involve the transfer of small communities into Pembrokeshire. The latter is a tidying review in keeping with the rerouting of the River Ely.

Community Boundary changes are between:

Dyserth, Prestatyn Rhuddlan and Rhyl in the County of Denbighshire

Llanbadan Fynydd, Llanbister and Abbey Cwmhir in the county of Powys

Malpas and Caerleon in the County of Newport

Electoral Arrangements for the counties of:

Ceredigion

Gwynedd

Monmouth

Torfaen

Vale of Glamorgan

Newport

These will complete the review of counties which began in 1995. The orders are being made in good time for the 2004 elections.

Looked after children

In my report in October 2002, I included preliminary results of a consultation conducted over the summer in which I asked authorities to provide information on the fulfilment of the roles and duties of officers and elected members in respect of looked after children. I agreed to come back to this meeting with a fuller response and this is attached to this report.

We should remember that authorities have just moved to new constitutions which have implications for social services. Although they are still required to have a Director of Social Services, they do not have social services committees any more as these functions are the responsibility of their executive or board. These will be accountable to overview and scrutiny committees.

The new ethical framework introduced under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 included the introduction of a statutory code of conduct for local authority employees. This refers to whistle-blowing procedures. In essence, this satisfies recommendation 8 of the Waterhouse report. Recommendation 9 advised authorities to make it a disciplinary offence if a member of staff failed to report abuse of a child and, although not specifically included in the Code of Conduct, sits naturally alongside it.

I believe that this consultation exercise has reminded authorities of their responsibilities. Some of them have undertaken to update their disciplinary procedures in line with Waterhouse and this is welcome.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy 2003-2004

For the purposes of consulting on their Housing Revenue Account Subsidy for 2003-2004, I have agreed that Local Authorities be consulted on an average guideline rent increase for Wales from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004 of 3.5%.

Such an increase is in accordance with Treasury assumptions for guideline rent increases for

the forthcoming financial year, and has the effect of giving priority to maximising management and maintenance resources for Local Authorities in Wales for 2003-2004.

My decisions on this guideline rent increase, and of giving priority to maximising management and maintenance allowances for 2003-04, mirror those agreed for the current financial year by the Committee at its meeting on 7 November 2001 (LGH-13-01(p2)).