

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Thursday 15 November 2001

Time: 1.30pm to 3.30pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members:

Gwenda Thomas Neath

(Chair)

Peter Black South Wales West

(Deputy Minister)

Janet Davies South Wales West

Peter Law Blaenau Gwent

Dai Lloyd South Wales West

Tom Middlehurst Alyn and Deeside

Janet Ryder North Wales

In attendance:

Sarah Stone Age Concern

Angela Pulman Community Enterprise Wales

Cath Beaudette Community Enterprise Wales

Hayley Fidler Community Matters

Joanne Jones	Community Matters
Sarah Lloyd Jones	People and Work Unit
Pat Dunmore	People and Work Unit
Constance Adams	Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations
Lottie Miller	Rhondda Housing Association
Gaynor Jones	Rhondda Housing Association
Professor Dave Adamson	Expert Adviser
<i>Secretariat:</i>	
Roger Chaffey	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Apologies and substitutions

1.1 Apologies were received from Edwina Hart and William Graham.

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 and Chair of the Homelessness Commission;
- Janet Davies said that she was a Member of Llanhari Community 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: Policy Review of Community Regeneration: Oral Consultation Session

3.1 The Chair invited representatives to make their presentations to the Committee.

3.2 Sarah Stone from Age Concern outlined the existing and potential importance of older people to communities and community regeneration. She said that to date community regeneration initiatives had paid insufficient attention to the presence of older people living in communities. Older people played an essential role within communities.

3.3 She highlighted several examples of ways in which older people were involved in community initiatives. These focused mainly on intergenerational work where older people work closely with children and young people. It was recognised that intergenerational work played an important part in community regeneration and renewal.

3.4 The need to involve communities in the regeneration process was fundamental. Involving people in all stages of the regeneration process, from consultation and planning to implementation, would result in communities taking ownership of the strategies they helped develop. Such a sense of ownership was a prerequisite for its success.

3.5 Sarah Stone reiterated the need for the Assembly to address the way in which older people were involved in the process of community regeneration. It was important to view older people as a valuable resource within communities and not simply as a group of people with needs.

Gaynor Jones from Rhondda Housing Association highlighted the changing role of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) from being merely providers of housing to proactively engaging in community regeneration. She felt that RSLs could play a more integral role in regeneration strategies in Wales and further assist in social economic and community regeneration.

3.6 Social housing allocation policies often resulted in the concentration of people with few resources onto particular estates. Such estates were often in the most deprived and socially excluded communities. It was imperative to find appropriate ways of engaging with tenants in order to successfully regenerate such communities.

3.7 Gaynor Jones emphasised the need to encourage tenant participation and work with tenants in many socially excluded communities. Tenant participation policies adopted by Rhondda Housing Association had enabled them to establish routes into communities, which, in turn, would assist in the delivery of the community regeneration agenda.

3.8 In order to deliver the broader community regeneration agenda, Rhondda Housing Association adopted different ways of working and utilising its resources. Some examples of this included employing local labour to regenerate a council estate in Tonyrfail and working with the People and Work Unit to train disaffected young people in building skills.

3.9 Gaynor Jones felt that the work of RSLs in the area of community regeneration needed to be recognised and developed further. She outlined several factors which demonstrated RSLs' ability to contribute to tackling social exclusion and to help regenerate disadvantaged communities. These included their established presence in the community and their existing relationship with

socially excluded populations.

3.10 Lottie Miller emphasised the need to develop effective partnership working in taking forward community regeneration. She suggested that the success of ambitious community development strategies was dependent on the establishment of diverse community partnerships. In addition, partnerships with tenants were crucial in securing the success of community regeneration initiatives.

3.11 The following factors would be required to achieve a successful partnership:

- Genuine commitment and willingness to be open to change
- Shared aims and vision
- Joint training involving all partners
- Inclusive approach which facilitated capacity building
- Open and honest relationship
- Sharing of information
- Acknowledging the key role of grassroots workers
- Flexibility

3.12 Angela Pulman of Community Enterprise Wales outlined the importance of economic models of development in the community regeneration process. She highlighted the need to assist communities in becoming socially and economically independent. This would best be achieved via partnership working involving the National Assembly, other statutory bodies and the voluntary sector. These partners were key players in community regeneration, however the community remained the crux of the process.

3.13 It was felt that defining communities was a complex task. In order to tackle differing needs and interests between and within communities, an adaptable approach would be required. She suggested that large community development projects often failed sufficiently to address the needs of the community. This was counter-productive and often led to further discontent within communities.

3.14 Angela Pulman felt that the simplification of funding streams was required. This would allow greater accessibility, particularly for small community groups. In addition, subsequent evaluation should be made more meaningful to community members.

3.15 Hayley Fidler of Community Matters said that mutual trust and respect underpinned relationships within community regeneration initiatives. If processes did not result in positive action, communities would develop mistrust and apathy.

3.16 The benefits of working with local authorities to help support the community were outlined.

However, there were concerns raised about the proposed introduction of the new cabinet system of local government. It was suggested that this would increase bureaucracy, which would exacerbate existing communication difficulties between local government and community associations. This could be overcome by improving the relationship between elected members who were not in the cabinet and local community activists.

3.17 Hayley Fidler expressed concern that communities were uncertain how to interact with democratically elected representatives on both a local and national level. Both the National Assembly and local authorities should not presume that the mechanisms and procedures for making contact are known. Promoting these procedures more widely would assist communities to access information, support and guidance.

3.18 It was important for communities to acknowledge their role and responsibilities in the regeneration process and for others to recognise the benefit of face to face information sharing in motivating communities.

3.19 The importance of partnership working was reiterated. It was felt that successful partnerships acknowledged and valued the skills, experience, commitment and knowledge of community groups.

3.20 Hayley Fidler suggested that, although the targeting of funding had some benefits, it could be detrimental to surrounding areas which failed to secure funding allocation. It was suggested that, in these cases, a scheme could be run alongside the targeted funding which would allow communities to apply to a more general fund. This would enable communities to gain invaluable experience of small projects allowing capacity to grow along with confidence to manage larger projects. It would also allow for a bottom up approach, whereby communities determine their priorities and set their own performance indicators.

3.21 In addition, core funding must be available to existing successful projects and innovative practices should be supported and funded alongside good practice.

3.22 Sarah Lloyd Jones from People and Work Unit emphasised the need to link community regeneration into the life-long learning strategies currently being developed by the National Assembly. She said that education was a route out of poverty and knowledge was a way of empowering communities. The most effective way to ensure sustainability in community regeneration was to provide incentives to organisations to employ and train local people to enable them to play a central role in community regeneration.

3.23 It was vital for training strategies to include apprenticeships and training linked to qualifications at an appropriate level in order to encourage sustainability. She felt that too many existing schemes led only to NVQ Level 1 and that there was a need to promote NVQ Level 3 outcomes. There was an increasing number of training opportunities available structured around modular learning, however they continued to be delivered on an annual basis starting in September. Increased flexibility in learning opportunities was required to accommodate new

learners and people with fluctuating work pressures.

3.24 The increase in employment opportunities in community development and regeneration as a result of community regeneration initiatives would need to be met by an increase in the provision of suitable training for staff. The introduction of incentives to create trainee posts alongside new posts would enable local organisations to train local people to lead future projects. These trainee posts would require sufficient funding.

3.25 Sarah Lloyd Jones highlighted the need to adopt a holistic approach to community regeneration. Where an area had been identified as being in need of regeneration it was vital to provide assistance to the whole community.

3.26 The following additional points were made:

- Working with the most excluded communities would require additional funding on a long-term basis in order to produce effective results;
- It would be important to fund programmes which addressed the needs of individuals. This would include the provision of independent advice and support;
- Although local authorities were often the most suitable vehicle to deliver funding locally, the National Assembly must take responsibility for effective monitoring and support to ensure funding reached communities in most need;
- There were benefits in delivering funding locally, however it would be important to allow cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches between local authority areas;
- Service provision must be high quality, particularly for individuals from deprived communities who were often reluctant to get involved in training or community projects.

3.27 Constance Adams from Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations emphasised the need for programmes of community regeneration other than Communities First. She said that rural and sparsely populated areas had failed to be included in the Communities First programmes because they did not register on the Multiple Index of Deprivation. It was suggested that rural areas should be recognised as Communities of Interest.

3.28 It was felt that participation and involvement of local residents, voluntary organisations and community groups was fundamental to the success of community regeneration. The need to empower communities was essential. This would involve ensuring community members were given the opportunity to gain appropriate skills and have access to adequate resources.

3.29 Constance Adams outlined the key role played by voluntary organisations in the community regeneration process. There was a need to offer support to organisations within the voluntary

sector to enable them to increase staff levels and improve management systems. In addition, long-term, guaranteed funding should be made available.

3.30 In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- Sustainable funding for capacity and relationship building was essential. The three year allocation of European funding which included annual targets often failed to take into account the complex nature of capacity and relationship building. It was suggested that funding for a five year period should be considered in conjunction with more sophisticated outcome measures. Funding structures and measures would need to reflect the time taken to build relationships, particularly during the first year of operation.
- There was some support for funding to be administered by Community Voluntary Councils because of their local knowledge. It was felt that CVCs were best placed to identify priorities within the local communities.
- The SPIRIT grant scheme operated by PAVO was highlighted as an example of good practice in enabling smaller organisations and groups in the voluntary sector to gain access to funding. The scheme served to simplify the funding process. In addition, it sought to build capacity by combining local knowledge with the promotion of specialist grant making and administration skills.
- Funding should be determined by the need of individual projects. The diverse range of project needs would best be addressed by maximising funding flexibility.
- Funding for capacity building should be built into the funding application for individual projects.
- The availability of suitable training opportunities for local people to equip them with the skills and qualifications to take forward community regeneration was essential. It was felt that access to suitable, accredited training would be essential for securing job opportunities for local people, which would in turn promote economic growth.
- RSLs were undertaking a broader strategic role in combating social deprivation and assisting in community regeneration. RSLs were eager to build on current activities and to gain support for their work in the area of community regeneration. The role of RSLs in community investment and neighbourhood regeneration had been well-documented in recent publications by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Successful tenant participation facilitated capacity building and encouraged the development of transferable skills, which could be used to benefit the community.

- It was vital that structures were in place to ensure effective communication between the National Assembly, local government and grassroots organisations. It was essential that grassroots organisations had access to information, which would assist them in their work. Many local authorities lacked a cohesive community development strategy. This was exemplified by the absence of a single point of contact within local authorities for grassroots organisations requiring information or advice relating to community regeneration. It was important to raise awareness within local authorities, promote inter-departmental working and encourage training.
- The ‘three thirds’ principle of partnership working was viewed by some as too rigid. Increasing flexibility within working practices could help to encourage partnership working. Examples might include arranging meetings for times convenient to all members and making available resources to cover transport costs. The need for genuine and equitable partnerships, with credit being attributed to all sectors, was crucial.
- The regeneration of communities must take account of cultural diversity and have sufficient regard for bilingualism.

3.34 The Chair thanked all representatives for making their presentations and for answering Members’ questions.