

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

### **REPORT TO PLENARY UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.9: MAY 2001 TO APRIL 2002**

#### **1 Introduction**

1.1 This report summarises our activities from May 2001 to April 2002. Copies of our reports, agendas, papers, minutes and transcripts of meetings can be found on the National Assembly website (1).

1.2 During the reporting period the Committee met 17 times.

#### **2 Membership**

2.1 Our current membership is: Gwenda Thomas (Chair), Peter Black, William Graham, Edwina Hart (Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities), Pauline Jarman, Peter Law, Dai Lloyd, Tom Middlehurst and Janet Ryder. Janet Davies was replaced by Pauline Jarman on 21 March 2002.

#### **3 Remit and Responsibilities**

3.1 Our remit is based on the portfolio of the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities, Edwina Hart. It covers local government policy and finance issues, housing, urban regeneration and crime reduction. The remit does not include Edwina Hart's responsibilities as Finance Minister.

3.2 The responsibilities of subject committees are set out in SO 9.

#### **4 Aims, objectives and priorities**

4.1 The Committee's aim is to achieve a better quality of life for the people of Wales and to promote better, simpler government. Our objectives are:

- to help local people, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas, develop confident communities, with decent housing, good local facilities and high quality environment, which is non-threatening and free from crime;
- to deliver value for money for the people of Wales, with better and more efficient services;
- to streamline the Assembly's work and give far greater weight to the needs and views of our partners and the public, including under-represented groups.

4.2 These aims and objectives correspond with those set out in *betterwales.com*, the National Assembly's strategic plan.

4.3 We attach particular importance to:

- the development of a national housing strategy, with a view to ensuring that everyone has a decent home and homelessness is eliminated;
- the modernisation of local government, including the development of new political management structures, the introduction of policy agreements, the development of the best value regime, the introduction of community strategies and consideration of the community leadership role of local authorities;
- the implementation and development of the revised standard spending assessment formula so that revenue support for local authorities is allocated on the basis of a fairer assessment of need.

## **5 Work and Achievements to Date**

### ***Policy development – Standing Order 9.7(l)***

#### **(i) *Policy review of community regeneration***

The Committee agreed to undertake an in-depth review of the policy and programmes aimed at community regeneration which have been adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government and its sponsored bodies. The main aim of the review is to make recommendations for streamlining the existing programmes, improving the arrangements for delivery and funding mechanisms. The review included a written consultation exercise that took place during the summer 2001. A number of oral consultation sessions were undertaken as part of the Committee's fortnightly meetings and two additional meetings were held which were dedicated to informing the review (2). In addition the Committee visited community groups and organisations throughout Wales. Following consideration of the emerging issues in the summer term, the final report, including recommendations will be published in July 2002.

#### **(ii) *Contribution to policy development***

We have continued to operate an open and participative style of working. We have been keen to hear the views of outside bodies and organisations to inform discussion and assist in our deliberations (3).

In addition to our own policy review, the Committee contributed to the key policy development being taken forward by the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities.

### ***Housing and community regeneration***

The Committee has continued to support the development and implementation of a national housing strategy, considering in detail responses

to the consultation paper *Better Homes for people in Wales* and the action plan, which is the principal means of measuring future progress of the strategy.

The Committee has considered many aspects of housing policy and was particularly keen to support the work of the Homelessness Commission and the Low Cost Home Ownership agenda.

The Committee has taken a close interest in the development of the *Communities First* programme, considering the responses to the second consultation, the draft framework for the guidance and the final policy framework and guidance.

### ***Local Government Modernisation***

The Committee considered the report on the operation of the Local Government Partnership Scheme during the financial year 2000-01. It continued to take a close interest in the programme for modernisation of local government, considering in detail the report from the Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham on councillors' allowances and local authorities proposals for the new political management structures.

In November 2001 the Committee received a presentation from representatives of the Wales Local Council Forum and considered the role of town and community councils ahead of the proposed scoping study.

### ***Local Government Finance***

The Committee continued to take an interest in the review of the local government finance system and, more recently considered in detail the proposed content of the Local Government Policy Paper, which is the equivalent of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions local government White Paper.

In May 2001, the Committee considered in detail Public Private Partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative. In doing so, representations were received from the Welsh Local Government Association and Wales TUC.

### ***Crime Reduction***

The Committee received a progress report on the Crime Reduction Programme for Wales in May 2001 and received presentations from the Fire Service in Wales, the Police Service in Wales and the National Probation Service in England and Wales.

### ***Cross-cutting issues***

The Committee considered the effects of policies and programmes within its remit on the Welsh language to inform the Culture Committee's policy review.

In doing so, the Committee received representations Cymuned on housing issues and the Welsh language.

Following the Committee's discussion of housing for the elderly and housing research programmes, Members felt that it was vital for the Strategy for Older People in Wales to have sufficient regard for the housing needs of older and elderly people. As a result, in January 2002 the Committee considered the housing issues to be addressed within the Strategy and forwarded its views to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

### ***Review of Expenditure and Administration (SO 9.7 (ii))***

The Committee scrutinised the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities via her fortnightly report to the Committee. The Minister continued to provide alternative oral and written reports as agreed by the Committee.

### ***Review of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) (SO 9.7 (iii))***

There are relatively few Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies within the Committee's remit. In the autumn term, the Committee considered the Local Government Boundary Commission's Annual Report and Accounts for 2000-01.

### ***Legislation (SO 9.8(i))***

The Committee was not invited to scrutinise any draft subordinate legislation in accordance with SO 22. However, the Committee is given an opportunity to comment on the timetable of forthcoming legislation within its remit, which is included in the Minister's monthly written report. The Committee has been advised of progress during various stages of the development of secondary legislation within its remit.

The Committee considered the proposed changes to private sector renewal arrangements prior to the plenary debate in April. The changes were being introduced using a Regulatory Reform Order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2000.

In the autumn term the Committee considered, and reported to plenary on, the implications of the Homelessness Bill for Wales.

### ***Budget (SO 9.8 (ii))***

In the summer term the Committee considered the commissioning paper for the 2001 budget round, as well as the Minister's issues paper. On the basis of these discussions, the Committee informed the Cabinet of its budget priorities.

Before commenting on the draft budget in the autumn, the Committee received a presentation from the Welsh Local Government Association that set out its views on investment in local government services and assets.

### ***Complaints (SO 9.8(iii))***

No complaints were referred to us during the reporting period.

### ***Public Appointments (SO 9.8(iv))***

Our public appointments nominees (4) were consulted on the appointments of the Chair and members of the local Government Boundaries Commission.

### **Forward Programme**

6.1 Looking to the future, our strategic work programme for 2002-03 and detailed work programme for May to July 2002 are attached at Annex A & B respectively.

## **Local Government and Housing Committee May 2002**

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### **Footnotes**

(1) See [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk) pages for Local Government and Housing Committee at the following address

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemlocalgov/index.htm>

(2) The following organisations attended oral consultation sessions: Age Concern, Amman Valley Enterprise, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Community Agents of Change for the Valleys, Community Enterprise Wales, Community Legal Service, Community Matters, ELWa, NIACE Dysgu Cymru, People and Work Unit, Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations, Rhondda Housing Association, Rhyl College, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Welsh Development Agency, Welsh Federation of Housing Associations, Welsh Local Government Association.

(3) The following organisations made presentations to the Committee: Best Value Housing Inspectorate, Care and Repair Cymru, Cymuned, Fire Services in Wales, National Consultative Forum on Housing in Wales, National House Building Council, National Probation Service in England and Wales, Police Services in Wales, RNIB, RNID, University of York, Wales Local Council Forum, Wales TUC Cymru, Welsh Federation of Housing Associations, Welsh Local Government Association.

(4) Current nominees are Gwenda Thomas and Janet Ryder.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

### STRATEGIC FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME MAY 2002-APRIL 2003

#### Introduction

1. The Local Government and Housing Committee is one of the National Assembly's seven subject committees.
2. Standing Order 9.9 requires subject committees to maintain a rolling programme of work covering periods of at least 12 months. The Committee must consult other committees and the Assembly Cabinet on the programme before notifying plenary. The Panel of Chairs has agreed that committees' work programmes should be strategic and cover an 18 month to 2 year time frame, supported by more detailed work programmes covering a three month period. This work programme sets out the Committee's strategic priorities between May 2002 and the next Assembly elections in May 2003.

#### Priorities

3. Priorities for the coming year are as follows:
  - Policy development (SO 9.7(i)) - the Committee will focus on those areas of policy development where it may be seen to complement, rather than duplicate policies being developed by the Minister. In the coming year it will continue its review of Community Regeneration and continue to contribute to policy development of ministerial strategies and initiatives across the full range of the Minister's local government and housing responsibilities. In particular:
    - the development and implication of the National Housing strategy, including the recommendations included in the Homelessness Commissions report;
    - the development and implementation of the Communities first Programme;
    - local government modernisation; and
    - local government policy and finance;

It will receive regular presentations from the Welsh Local Government Association and other interested organisations from the public, voluntary and community sectors to enhance its appreciation of all matters included in its remit.

- *Scrutiny of the Minister (SO 9.7(ii))* - the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities will provide a written report to the Committee monthly on current developments within her portfolio. At the intervening meetings, she will also provide an oral report of developments that have taken place. Once a year the Committee will scrutinise the Minister on performance against targets, but may also undertake thematic

scrutiny sessions from time to time. The Committee also intends to carry out the following 'scrutiny':

- the Social Inclusion Report.

The Committee also wishes to examine the possibility of carrying out a scrutiny of the implementation of the Waterhouse Report insofar as this affects local authorities. The Committee recognises that the implementation of Waterhouse is outside the remit of the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities. It also recognises that the implementation of the report also has a significant impact on local authorities.

- Scrutiny of sponsored bodies (SO 9.7 (iii)) - there are very few ASPBs within the Committee's remit. However, it will continue to receive reports on the work of the Local Government Boundary Commission.
- *Other items (SO 9.8)* - the Committee will continue encourage the co-ordination of local services through its links with the Welsh Local Government Association and the developing Wales Local Council's Forum. The Committee will also consider each year a report reviewing the implementation of the Local Government Partnership Scheme, prior to the consideration of the report by plenary.
- *Proposed legislation affecting Wales (SO 9.8(i) and 22)* – each term the Minister will outline forthcoming secondary legislation to enable the Committee to identify areas where it wishes to be consulted. Following the National Assembly's consideration of the Queen's speech, the Committee will consider any draft primary legislation remitted to it by plenary. The Committee will also consider draft secondary legislation referred to it by the Business Committee.
- *Proposals for the Assembly's budget (SO 9.8(ii))* – the Committee will indicate its budget priorities in the summer term and comment on the draft budget in the autumn term.
- *Complaints (SO 9.8(iii) and 21)* – the Committee will consider any complaints referred to it.
- *Public appointments (SO 9.8(iv) and 20)* – the Committee's two public appointment nominees will take part in the process of appointments to public bodies as vacancies arise.
- *Other matters referred by the Assembly (SO 9.8 (v))* – the Committee will consider other matters referred to it by the National Assembly, but would ask Members to consult the Committee Chair before tabling motions inviting plenary to remit work to the Committee.

**Committee Secretariat**  
**January 2002**

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

## DETAILED FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: SUMMER 2002

Meeting	Item	Agenda Items
Wednesday 24 April 2002	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Minister's report (written) Update on actions being taken by the National Assembly following the report of the Homelessness Commission Review of exclusion from social housing – Consideration of final report Waterhouse report – implications for the implementation of the recommendations of the Waterhouse report Forward work programme – Consideration of final strategic forward work programme Policy review of community regeneration – presentation from the Fire Authority Progress report to plenary
Wednesday 8 May 2002	1 2 3 4 5	Minister's report (oral) Custodial Bond Scheme – Review of first year of operation Presentation from the British Transport Police Communities First – Progress report on implementation Policy review of community regeneration – consideration of emerging issues

Wednesday 22 May 2002	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Minister's report (written) Comparison of local authority performance in England and Wales (including presentation from WLGA - TBC) Community Fire Working Safety Group report Crime and Reduction Partnerships – Progress report Home energy efficiency in rural areas Policy review of community regeneration – consideration of draft recommendations Presentation from Syniad on the training available to local authority members and officers in the context of new political management structures Consideration of PSS data for SSA formula for 2003-04
Thursday 30 May 2002		Scope for informal Committee activities or, subject to Business Committee agreement, a formal Committee meeting or off-site visits
		<b>WHITSUN RECESS 3 - 7 JUNE 2002</b>
Wednesday 12 June 2002	1 2 3 4	Minister's report (oral) Local Government Policy – Consideration of responses to the Local Government Paper 'Freedom and Responsibility on Local Government' Policy review of community regeneration – consideration of draft report Review of Tenants Participation Advisory Service – Consideration of report
Wednesday 26 June 2002	1 2 3 4 5 6	Minister's report (written) Social housing rent levels – Consideration of results of research project [Presentation from Rent Assessment Panel] Update on 'Rethinking Construction' [Presentation from Health and Safety Executive] Impact of equal opportunities policy on local government purchasing and construction
Thursday 4 July 2002		Scope for informal Committee activities or, subject to Business Committee agreement, a formal Committee meeting or off-site visits

Wednesday 10 July 2002	1 2 3 4	Minister's report (oral) Budget – Consideration of Minister's issues paper Supporting People Policy review of community regeneration – final report

Committee Secretariat  
April 2002