

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Legacy Report 2003 to 2007

Introduction

The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's broad remit is based on the portfolio of the Assembly Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration and is provided for by the Assembly's Standing Order 9 to consider policy development; scrutiny of Ministers and Assembly Sponsored bodies; scrutiny of legislation and advises on budget allocations. The portfolio covers the governments programme for regenerating the communities of Wales in particular those suffering the greatest disadvantages including Communities First, anti-poverty initiatives, the social economy, the voluntary sector, community safety and relations with the police, the fire service, drug and alcohol misuse, youth justice and housing.

This report is made under Standing Order 9.9, which requires the Committee to report to the Assembly from time to time in addition to submitting its annual report¹. It gives an overview of the strategic priorities and work activities of the Committee during the Second Assembly and includes key issues that its successor may wish to consider during the Third Assembly.

Copies of all the Committee's reports, agendas, papers, minutes and transcripts of meetings can be found on the National Assembly website.

Remit and Responsibilities

The statutory basis for the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee is set out in the Assembly's Standing Order 9.

Work and Achievements

The work of the Committee during the Second Assembly can be found in the Committee's Annual Reports to plenary.

LEGACY TO SUCCESSOR COMMITTEE(S)

The following items are ones which the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee has considered as important. We suggest that future Committee(s) may like to consider these issues when setting their forward work programmes for the Third Assembly.

¹ The Committee's Legacy Report 2003-07 is made separately from its Annual Report 2006-07

Strategic Issues

Housing

The Committee identified housing as a key area from its inception in 2003 and has maintained this view. We believe that housing is a cross cutting issue which impacts on a number of social issues. We suggest that the successor Committee(s) could consider the following areas when carrying out scrutiny:

- Affordable housing – including the Social Housing Grant, the impact of Right to Buy legislation and the condition and supply of social housing in both the public and private sectors;
- Grants for home improvement, adaptation and renovation;
- Mobile home legislation
- Fuel poverty / home energy efficiency;
- Housing stock transfer;
- Homelessness, including the recommendations from the Committee's final policy review report.

Policing

The Committee undertook two reviews in response to "*Closing the Gap*" and even though the proposed mergers programme was not progressed by the Home Office, the Committee has maintained an interest in possible rationalisation of the Welsh forces and the potential cuts in services due to the cost implications of the mergers programme. We believe that the following should be monitored:

- Cost and implications of merger
- Funding
- Numbers of police and staff employed by police forces

Community Safety

Community safety affects everyone and we recommend that the successor Committee(s) could consider:

- ASBO (and other orders which target anti-social behaviour)
- Statistics on criminal and antisocial behaviour activity
- The night time economy

Refugees and Asylum seekers

Committee believes that all refugees and asylum seekers should be treated fairly and humanly and has welcomed the Welsh Assembly Government's work in this sector. We are pleased to see the work coming to fruition in the Refugees Inclusion Strategy and suggest that frequent regular updates are available especially early on in the Third Assembly.

Poverty

We endorse the Welsh Assembly Government's targets to eradicate poverty, especially child poverty, and recommend at the Committee(s) in the Third Assembly continue with this work, specifically:

- Statistical indications of reduction of poverty
- Carers and poverty
- Fuel poverty
- Impact of initiatives on child poverty
- Overindebtedness

Prisons and prisoners

We are very aware of an increasing prison population and wish to see innovative ways of reducing this. We are mindful of the revolving door scenario with re-offending and applaud the work of the National Offender Management Service Wales (NOMS). We suggest that NOMS and their work is included in any scrutiny of the Criminal Justice System in Wales.

We also consider the following issues to be important:

- The improvement of literacy and numeracy skills amongst people serving custodial sentences;
- Prison population, including Welsh prisoners held in English prisons or Young Offenders Institutes;
- UK and WAG policy regarding prisoner rehabilitation, open prisons and social support

Detailed issues

Communities First

We have maintained a close interest in this initiative and recommend the following areas for scrutiny:

- Monitoring and progress against the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation;
- Expenditure;
- Impact (including impact for particular groups such as children and indicators used to measure impact);
- Monitoring of projects

Post Offices

We have maintained a watching brief on post office issues and have supported a number of campaigns to keep these vital social institutions open in Wales. We would encourage a successor Committee(s) to maintain this

interest especially with the outcome of the DTI consultation on Postal Network which closed in March 2007.

Substance misuse

Following the detailed review undertaken on treatment services and barriers to treatment, we commenced on a review looking at prevention. We made a decision to defer completing this review but believe that the work should be taken forward as we feel prevention work should be encouraged in the education of not misusing substances. The Committee has been very concerned about the increasing misuse of alcohol and recommends that this issue is also taken forward in the Third Assembly including:

- Comparisons in approach between England and Wales;
- Targets for the Welsh substance misuse strategy;
- Public concerns about the location of substance misuse facilities;
- The Scottish Executive's research into alcohol consumption post smoking ban.

Credit Unions

The Committee believes that Credit Unions have a defined role in communities and we wish to see support for their network to expand.

Policy Reviews:

The Committee carried out three policy reviews during the Second Assembly:

Housing for Older People

Substance Misuse – treatment services

Youth Homelessness

We recommend that successor Committees develop a mechanism for scrutinising the implementation of the reports' recommendations across the relevant portfolios.

Cross cutting issues

Gypsies and Travellers

The Committee welcomed the recent setting up of the new Gypsy and Traveller Unit. We recommend that gypsy and traveller issues continue to be monitored in conjunction with the Equality of Opportunity Committee.

Sustainable Development

The Committee has taken a keen interest in the effect of housing policy on climate change especially the HEES and low carbon building schemes. We recommend this as an area for further scrutiny in the Third Assembly.

Equality of Opportunity Issues

We recommend that annual progress reports on the equality schemes implemented by the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services are forwarded by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

We also recommend that the successor Committee(s) continue to consider equality issues in their work programme.

European Issues

The Committee has received regular updates on European issues affecting the portfolio. We recommend that future Committee(s) continue to be aware of developments affecting their work.