

# **Social Justice And Regeneration Committee**

**SJR(2)-07-06(p.1)**

**Date: Thursday 4 May 2006**

**Time: 9:30am to 12:30pm**

**Venue: Senedd, National Assembly for Wales**

**Title: Edwine Hart – Report To S J & R Committee – 4 May 2006**

## **1. Crack Cocaine Misuse**

The All Wales Database does not indicate there is a significant problem with crack cocaine use across Wales. Twenty-one of the twenty-two Community Safety Partnerships indicate very low rates of crack cocaine use. Between April 2005 and January 2006 the number of clients referred for treatment in all of these partnerships has ranged between 0-4 clients only for each quarter of the year. Across the whole of Wales crack cocaine referrals comprise less than 2% of all referrals for drug misuse (excluding alcohol referrals).

In Cardiff, the number of referrals is higher than the rest of Wales. Between April 2005 and January 2006 crack cocaine referrals for Cardiff as a whole across five treatment agencies have been in the range of 18-30 clients per quarter. Of the 108 crack cocaine referrals in Wales between April 2005 and January 2006, 73 were in Cardiff. This equates to 8.0% of all referrals for all drug misuse in Cardiff (excludes alcohol referrals).

Whilst these figures are low, it is just as important that these individuals can access the appropriate services for their needs. Clearly, specific provision is a matter for Community Safety Partnerships to determine but at the All-Wales level, the Welsh Assembly Government funded a conference in March this year, for commissioners and providers on crack cocaine treatment. The conference aimed to explore the role of the primary and secondary healthcare services, the role of the voluntary sector and discussed best practice in treatment interventions. I understand this conference was well received.

I will keep this issue under review in the coming months using the information from the All Wales Substance Misuse Database.

## **2. Communities @One**

The Communities @One initiative is now up and running with Community Brokers appointed to work with a community organisation in all Communities First areas. Communities @One is jointly funded

through European Structural Funds, with the match being contributed from the Communities Purposes budget. The local authority areas of Wrexham, Flintshire, Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan are not designated either Objective 1 or 2 status; in order that Communities @One may operate in all the Communities First areas across Wales, I have agreed to make available £464,772 from the Communities Purposes budgets over the three-year period of the programme. This amount will enable Community Brokers to work with organisations in the Communities First areas in the four local authorities and enable those organisations to bid into the Communities @One grant fund.

### **3. Legal Services Commission (LSC): Welsh Specialist Support Service**

I reported to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on 15 March, that I had written to Bridget Prentice on 2 and 27 February expressing my strong concerns about the decision to terminate the specialist support contracts. In the light of judicial review proceedings, the LSC has now decided to review this decision. The Commission wrote to providers on 22 March informing them that their contracts will now continue after 19 July 2006, assuming providers are willing to continue to provide them.

The Commission will be publishing its five-year strategy for the Community Legal Services shortly. The Commission subsequently intends to formulate proposals about the future of the specialist support initiative. Unfortunately, the Commission has not ruled out the possibility that there will be further changes to, or termination of, the service. However, it has signalled all options will be considered and that proposals will be fully consulted on. The Welsh Assembly Government will feed into the consultation process in support of this valuable service. I can also assure you that Welsh Assembly Government officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with the LSC in taking forward the Community Legal Services Strategy in Wales.

### **4. Migrant Workers**

I promised to report back to you on the impact of migrant workers on homelessness.

There are no records of the numbers of migrant workers in Wales, and no separate records are kept on homelessness amongst migrant workers. Local authorities would not normally owe them a re-housing duty, although would be expected to offer housing advice. My officials have carried out some investigations with local authorities, who were asked to provide details of the impact of homelessness as a result of migrant workers in their area. Ten nil responses were received, and a further 11 local authorities indicated that there had not been a significant impact.

Bridgend indicated a significant impact on homelessness in the area as a result of migrant workers from Poland, Malta, Latvia and Lithuania although the impact of this was not quantified. Pembrokeshire has particular issues due to the development of the LNG plants around the Milford Haven Waterway. Tenants are being asked to leave their premises in order for local landlords to let their properties to contract/migrant workers at higher rents. The impact therefore, has been twofold; first resulting in rising

rents in the private rented sector rendering this sector unaffordable for local people and second reducing the supply of and access to housing in the private rented sector for local people.

## **5. Possible hypothecation of resources for Housing Renewal and Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)**

I undertook to consider the possibility of hypothecation of resources for housing renewal and DFGs in the light of the Committee's concerns about the level of resources some local authorities were allocating and the impact this was having on vulnerable people.

I raised this at my meeting with the WLGA on 15<sup>th</sup> February and subsequently wrote to the WLGA Chair on 23<sup>rd</sup> February. The letter drew attention to the Committee's concerns that an increasing number of authorities appear to be reducing the resources they are allocating for housing renewal and DFG. I asked the WLGA Chair to consider these concerns and to let me have his comments. A separate paper on this issue will be tabled in the summer term.

In the meantime I undertook to let the Committee have figures on the amounts local authorities are allocating. These are set out in the attached tables which were provided by local authorities in July 2005.

Table A shows expenditure on housing renewal and DFGs for 2004-2005. Table B shows the amounts local authorities intended allocating in 2005-2006. This could change in the light of actual expenditure for 2005-2006.

We do not yet have information for 2006-2007.

## **6. Transfer of Resources for Statistics**

I have agreed to transfer £30,000 per annum from the Social Justice & Regeneration programme budget to Central Administration Main Expenditure Group (MEG) from 2006-07.

This will fund the provision of an additional Statistical Officer post within the Statistics Directorate. This is a new post which has been created to assist in taking forward an enhanced fire and rescue service statistical provision. This includes a phased approach to implementation with specific functions being taken forward from 2006, including the production of "Welsh Fire Statistics" annual publication, the production of quarterly "First Releases" on provisional Fire Statistics for Wales, the publication of Fire Statistics on "Stats Wales" and the introduction of a system for collecting, analysing and publication of operational "corporate" statistics for the FRS in Wales.

## **7. Right to Buy Statistics: October- December 2005**

Key results for the October to December quarter 2005:

- There were 727 RTB claims during the quarter, a decrease of around 420 from the previous quarter and around 340 less than a year earlier.
- There were 449 completed RTB sales, 470 less than a year earlier.
- The number of outstanding applications has also decreased with only 2,700 applications outstanding at the end of December 2005 compared with 3,896 a year earlier.

## **8. Private Secretary Renewal Activity 2004-5**

The main points are as follows:

- Overall, during 2004-05 local authorities in Wales spent £84.4 million on providing help to private owners and to tenants in their area for home improvement and repair. This was a small decrease on the £85.3 million spent in 2003-04
- During 2004-05, 4,600 Mandatory Disabled Facilities grants, with a total value of £28.5 million, were completed by local authorities in Wales.
- Expenditure on activity under the 2002 Order during 2004-05 was £43.1 million.
- During 2004-05 the total value of residual payments on completed grants under the 1996 Act (excluding Mandatory DFGs) was £12.7 million.