

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-17-06(p.6)

Date: Wednesday 6 December 2006

Time: 09.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Draft Minutes from the Mid and West Wales Regional Committee

Report of the Meeting MWR (2)-04-06

Meeting date: Friday 17 November 2006

Meeting time: 10.00am to 12:30 pm

Meeting venue: Penybont Community and District Hall, Llandrindod Wells, Powys

Assembly Members in Attendance

Assembly Member	Constituency
Mick Bates (Chair)	Montgomeryshire
Kirsty Williams	Brecon and Radnorshire
Glyn Davies	Mid and West Wales

Others in Attendance

Name	Representing (if applicable)	Agenda item(s)
Chris Price	Homeless Strategy, Supporting People Manager Powys County Borough Council	2
Robert Powell	Homelessness Manager, Powys County Borough Council	2

Pamela Williams	Research Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Children and Young People Framework Partnership, Powys County Borough Council	3
Rebecca Unsworth	Youth Participation Officer, Children and Young People Framework Partnership, Powys County Borough Council	4
Angharad Newlands	Powys Youth Forum	4
Gwyn Bidgood	Powys Youth Forum	4
Konrad Ostoznik	Powys Youth Forum	4

Committee Service

Name	Job title
Steve George	Committee Clerk
Ruth Hatton	Deputy Committee Clerk
Joel Steed	Committee Support

Item 1: Introduction, Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed Committee Members and the public to the meeting. He also gave a special welcome to children from Crossgates Primary and Llanfihangel Rhydithon Schools and to a number of eminent community leaders who were present.

1.3 Apologies were received from:

Assembly Member	Constituency

Nick Bourne	Mid and West Wales
Tamsin Dunwoody	Preseli Pembrokeshire
Christine Gwyther	Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire
Elin Jones	Ceredigion
Helen Mary Jones	Mid and West Wales
Catherine Thomas	Llanelli
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr
Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas	Meirionnydd Nant Conwy

1.3 As only three members of the Committee were present the meeting proceeded as an informal meeting.

1.4 There were no declarations of interest.

Item 2: Homelessness and Rooflessness in Powys

2.1 The Committee received a presentation from Chris Price, Homeless Strategy, Supporting People Manager, Powys County Borough Council and Robert Powell, Homelessness Manager, Powys County Borough Council.

2.2 A copy of the presentation can be found at Annex 1.

2.3 The Chair thanked them for their presentation and invited Members to discuss the issues raised.

Assembly Members and public's questions to the Panel

2.4 The Members said they found the presentation informative and interesting. Members and individuals put the following points to the panel:

2.5 Kirsty Williams was concerned about how appropriate Bed and Breakfast accommodation is for under -18's. This accommodation could be part of a bar or pub if this was the only accommodation

available in an area. She asked how many under-18s had been placed in this type of accommodation. She was also concerned about the process for finding accommodation for young people in their local area. She was aware of problems in the Brecon and Llandrindod area and asked whether this was due to a lack of social housing revenue support. She also asked what the council was doing to improve joint-working between the housing department and housing benefit department. Finally, she asked how the Assembly could use its new powers after May 2007 to tackle homelessness in rural Wales.

2.6 In response, Chris Price and Robert Powell said that no-one in the age range of 16-17 was in bed and breakfast accommodation in the county. As far as possible, young people were given accommodation in their local area. However, where this was not possible, they would work closely with other agencies involved such as Foyers to minimise their length of stay. Young people are often given supported accommodation in the Llandrindod area, which is preferable to being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. There has been a capital bid for accommodation in Brecon and more people have been moved from temporary accommodation into single person accommodation. With regard to the new powers there are issues over how much accommodation is available. Powys is currently developing mediation services and working together with young people's partnership to acquire joint funding.

2.7 Glyn Davies commended Powys County Council on their approach in trying to prevent homelessness. He was concerned that funding for all services in Mid Wales were being affected due to curtailed budgets. He asked what effect this was having on the homeless strategy.

2.8 Chris Price was confident that the savings that had already been made, by cutting back on expensive bed and breakfast accommodation, and their general 'spend to save' approach would safeguard services. Robert Powell noted that they had also secured funding for the housing option advisors.

2.9 Derek Taylor, from Penybont and Chair of Powys Economic Partnership asked how the council officials are engaging with rough sleepers. He highlighted the need for employment as part of the solution and suggested that the housing department should link up with Employment programmes. Chris Price said that they would make sure that they engage fully with the Partnership and the voluntary sector in the run up to the rough sleeping count in March 2007, in which all local authorities will be participating.

2.10 Martin Williams from School Services, focused on mediation and making it a formal process as it has a track record of prevention in many service areas. Chris Price and Robert Powell responded by saying that they are looking for opportunities to improve the mediation service.

2.12 Summing up, the Chair explained that a report of the discussion would be sent to the Assembly's Social Justice and Regeneration Committee which was carrying out a policy review on these issues.

Action: Chair to write to Chair of SJR Committee reporting on discussions at the meeting.

Item 3: Life for Children and Young People in Powys – Audit of Need – First Steps

3.1 The Committee received a presentation from Pamela Williams, Research Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Children and Young People Framework and Partnership, Powys County Borough Council.

3.2 A copy of the presentation can be found at Annex 2.

3.3 The Chair thanked Ms Williams for her interesting and thought-provoking presentation and invited Members to discuss the issues raised.

Assembly Members and public's questions to the Panel

3.4 Glyn Davies referring to the considerable amount of data highlighted in the presentation, asked how this would be updated and also how the information would inform local authority and Welsh Assembly Government decision-making. Pamela Williams said that the information is being used as a source to apply for funding and is also part of the 2008 young people's partnership plan. She said that the information will be updated through consultation.

3.5 Kirsty Williams expressed concern that the presentation suggested that children did not think that education met their needs. Pam Williams responded by saying that during the evidence gathering process it was noted that young people often find education constrained and don't think that they are achieving transferable skills.

3.6 Stuart Hulse, expressed concern about the shortfall people often face to meet housing costs. Chris Price responded that central government set limits on assistance with housing costs.

3.7 Sue Meeke, Headteacher Crossgates Primary School, noted the evidence that children often feel apprehensive going to high school. She said that this is often a result of poor transitional planning however in her local area transitional plans worked very well. Sarah, a year 6 pupil from Crossgates added that she felt very happy and excited about going to high school. Year 7 teachers have spoken to her and she has already made friends with other children who will attend the same school. She explained that this summer her class will go to high school for a week in preparation for the new school experience.

3.8 Councillor Derek Law, pressed Assembly Members to take on board the evidence in the presentation about young people leaving Mid Wales after completing statutory education. He argued that although school numbers are due to fall, the temptation to reduce funding to service areas must be resisted as there are additional costs connected with rurality.

3.9 County Councillor Anne Morgan, expressed concern at plans to close Builth Hospital. The Chair said that the Committee would write to the relevant Minister to convey these concerns.

Action: Chair to write to Minister for Health and Social services.

3.10 Penny Everett expressed concern about the gap between the average wage and the cost of local

housing.

3.11 The Chair then called a short refreshment break during which the pupils of Crossgates Primary Scholl collected approximately £75 for Children in Need. The Chair congratulated them on behalf of all present at the meeting.

Item 4: Powys Youth Forum

4.1 The Committee received an oral presentation from Rebecca Unsworth, Youth Participation Officer, Children and Young People Framework, Powys County Council, Angharad Newlands, Powys Youth Forum, Gwyn Bidgood, Powys Youth Forum and Konrad Ostozik, Powys Youth Forum.

4.3 The Chair thanked them for their excellent presentation and invited Members to discuss the issues raised.

Assembly Members and public's questions to the Panel

4.4 Members felt the presentation painted a very honest and accurate reflection of life for many young people in Mid Wales. Members and individuals put the following points to the panel:

4.5 The Chair asked the youth forum what one thing about growing up in Mid Wales they would change if they had the power to do so. In response, members of the youth forum identified a number of issues but there was general agreement that improved transport links and services would be a priority.

4.6 Rob Prince, a local resident was concerned about threats to services in Powys including transport. He agreed with the youth forum but also felt that these issues affected older people in the area.

4.7 Brian Rees, Radnor Young Farmers, highlighted the good work that Young Farmers' Clubs do in communities and the skills that young people can gain from them. He expressed concern about regulations around child protection and funding issues that put pressure on groups such as Young Farmers' Clubs. Members present echoed the important role that Young Farmers' Clubs have in rural areas. Rob Watkins, also felt that as much as possible should be done to encourage young people to stay in Mid Wales.

4.8 Yvonne Owen Newns, asked the County Council how they balanced funding to ensure development of services and long-term funding against dealing with short-term funding pressures. Chris Price responded by saying that local authorities have to balance statutory duties with funding organisations and services that were most needed. Although short-term funding pressures had to be dealt with longer-term and preventative services were not overlooked.

4.9 County Councillor Jones, Leader of Powys County Council explained that 6.8 million had been invested by the council for children's services. Mr Jones continued to explain the reasoning behind levels of funding going into service areas across Powys. Kirsty Williams, said that Assembly

Members were concerned about funding levels and are scrutinising the Assembly Government in the current budget planning round.

4.10 Bev Smith, Deputy Head of Crossgates Primary School explained that she had moved her family to Mid Wales as she believed it was the best place to grow up. The Youth Forum agreed that rural Wales was an excellent place to grow up although some would move farther afield for higher education and career purposes but that they all hoped to return at some point because it was such a superb environment

4.11 Roger Abley, expressed concern at planning regulations on dwellings in the working countryside. Clare Powell, Brecknock Young Farmers asked what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to keep young farmers in rural Wales, and suggested promoting incentives through European funding. Kirsty Williams, argued that farming needed to be made profitable. If it was, young people would stay in rural areas and in farming.

Closing Remarks

5.1 The Chair thanked Members, presenters and members of the public for their contributions to the meeting. The Chair also thanked the staff of the Severn Arms Hotel for their help and assistance. He commented that the community hall was an excellent facility.

5.2 The meeting noted the minutes of the previous meeting and the suggestion to meet in the Pembrokeshire area in February.

Committee Service
November 2006