

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 12 January 2005

Venue: National Assembly for Wales Building

Title: EDWINA HART – REPORT TO S J & R COMMITTEE
– 12 January 2005

This is my first report of 2006 and a good number of things have happened over the Christmas and New-Year period. In view of this, and with the Chair's consent, I will make a fuller oral statement at the beginning of the meeting

1. Revisions within Social Justice & Regeneration Main Expenditure Group

The Committee will wish to note that the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services and I have agreed to revise the Revenue and Capital budget allocations within the Social Justice & Regeneration (SJ&R) Main Expenditure Group (MEG) for 2006-07 to 2008-09. These revisions will better reflect the operational needs across the portfolio. The affected budgets are as follows:

Revised proportionate Revenue and Capital budget allocations have been agreed within the Budget Expenditure Lines (BELs) for: Community Fire Safety; Rapid Response Adaptations Programme; Town Centre Regeneration; Community Facilities Programme; Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Domestic Violence Services Grant; and Social Economy. Details of the revised allocations are annexed.

The overall total budget within the SJ&R MEG remains unaltered by these adjustments. (Annex 1)

2. Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES)

As members will know, a number of ground breaking gas network extension projects in Wales in Llay and the Mount Estate, Milford Haven have already been completed. Under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) the Assembly Government is able to fund some of the costs of connecting an eligible household to gas. We have used this power to connect eligible households to the new network in Llay and the Mount Estate.

I understand that Denbigshire County Council will shortly be formalising arrangements with a gas transporter to allow the gas network to be extended to Bodelwyddan. The estimated total cost to extend the network is approximately £250,000 or £2,000 per household.

The Council plan to invest over £120,000 in the project to bring gas to the 57 properties, which they own, in the village. A further 69 owner-occupiers have also chosen to contribute to the cost of project themselves. The Assembly Government has made funding available through HEES. I believe energy suppliers will also make resources available from their Energy Efficiency Commitment programme.

I hope that the Bodelwyddan project will add to the body of experience from which other local communities in Wales can build.

However, energy markets and regulation of gas suppliers is a non-devolved area, reserved to DTI and overseen by the energy regulator, Ofgem. No central Government funding is currently available for projects, which extend the gas network. I will continue to work with UK Government to encourage the release of central Government funding for gas network extension projects.

I would also like to advise the Committee that I have recently approved the award of the contract for the role of HEES Scheme Manager to Eaga Partnership. Following an EU Procurement process the contract now been awarded to Eaga Partnership for a five-year period commencing on 11 December 2005.

Mapping Exercise for particular non-statutory services to elderly people in their homes.

I mentioned during the last Committee Meeting that I wanted to undertake a mapping exercise of what services are provided where in Wales so that I could see where there are gaps or duplication in services so that resources can be more efficiently targeted.

I am commissioning researchers to take on this task. Their remit will be to identify the organisations that provide the goods and, or services to the elderly in their homes. Examples of those organisations include, Care and Repair, HEES, Help the Aged, Age Concern, the Police through Bobby Schemes and the local authorities and health bodies, as well as a number of private organisations like the utility companies.

The type of service that I want included in the exercise ranges from physical services like minor repairs to homes, access and mobility adaptations, home security, heating and insulation improvements and also the provision of energy efficient appliances, as well as financial services in terms of advice to maximise benefits and advice on equity release for home improvements.

I anticipate this exercise taking about six months.

3. Right to Buy

I have given my approval for the Directorate of Legal Services to draft an Order specifying Church House Trust plc as an Approved Lending Institution for Right to Buy purposes. The Order will be made under section 156 of the Housing Act 1985 and will be submitted to the Assembly in due course.

I propose to make **The Housing (Right to Buy) (Priority Of Charges) (Wales) Order 2006** which will specify Church House Trust plc as an Approved Lending Institution for the purposes of section 156 of the Housing Act 1985.

The award of “Approved Lending” status gives the lender first charge on the property. This means that it can recover the value of its loan before the landlord can reclaim the discount granted on a sale to a tenant under the Right to Buy.

4. B & B Accommodation

In my report on 8th December on the introduction of new legislation to tackle the use of Bed and Breakfast premises for homeless people, I highlighted the issue of people placed in B&B by local authority social services departments which would not be covered by the proposed Order. I promised then to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services concerning this issue, and I have since done so. I will report back to you on the response I receive.

5. Designing-Out Crime

At Committee on 27 April 2004, following a discussion about the crime prevention value of CCTV, I undertook to provide information on work that is going on to design out crime. A paper on this is at Annex 2.

6. Risk Reduction Planning (RRP) Guidance for the Fire and Rescue Authorities – Wales a Safer Country

Following the presentation made to committee on 16th November we are currently in the process of consulting on Attendance Service Standards to Fires in the Home. However, Service Standards alone do not provide the necessary guidance to Authorities to enable them to plan holistically and to budget for local provision. To this end a further consultation commenced on 3 January on separate guidance for 'Fire and Rescue Service Risk Reduction Plan – Wales a Safer Country'. This will replace the existing Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Guidance that is currently in use.

The proposals are built on the following principles:

- the introduction of Service Standards, ensuring 80% of the population receives an attendance within 10 minutes to a fire in their home;
- the continuation of education and prevention activities and encouraging Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to develop new, innovative ways of delivering this essential service.
- the need for FRAs to assess both community and corporate risk.

- the need for formal and comprehensive consultation on the contents of an FRAs Risk Reduction Plan.
- the need for FRAs to engage with the communities they serve to communicate the mechanism by which FRAs plan to deploy resources within their area.

The closing date for responses to the consultation is 31 January 2006, to mirror the exercise currently underway in respect of Service Standards.