

# Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

## SJR-11-05 (p.2)

<b>Date:</b>	6 July 2005
<b>Venue:</b>	National Assembly for Wales
<b>Title:</b>	Minister's Report

### Edwina Hart – Report to SJ & R Committee – 6 July 2005

#### 1. Transfer of CAF/CASS Accounts from Safer Communities Fund BEL to a New CAF/CASS Cymru BEL within the Social Justice & Regeneration MEG

I have agreed to:

- Create a new BEL within the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG titled CAF/CASS Cymru and to transfer the existing CAF/CASS accounts from the Safer Communities Fund BEL to the new CAF/CASS Cymru BEL

As, the committee will be aware, the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAF/CASS) was established on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001 in accordance with the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. It brought together the Family Court Welfare Services (part of the Probation Service), the Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officer Service (Panels funded by Local Authorities) and the Children's Division of the Official Solicitors (part of the Lord Chancellors Department).

Part 4 Sections 35-42 of The Children Act 2004 transferred responsibility for CAF/CASS functions in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales (Social Justice & Regeneration Group) with effect from 1 April 2005.

CAF/CASS Cymru have a small programme budget from which to pay grants. So that such expenditure may be scrutinised and in the interest of transparency it is proposed to set up a discrete CAF/CASS Cymru BEL. The new BEL will sit within the Safer Communities Spending Programme Area (SPA).

#### 2. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 (Consequential Amendments) (Wales) Order 2005.

The above SI will be scrutinised by the Equality of Opportunity Committee. All other Standing Committees are being notified of the SI as forthcoming legislation

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 received Royal Assent on 18 November 2004. The purpose of the Act is to enable same-sex couples to obtain legal recognition of their relationship by forming a civil partnership. Civil Partners will be subject to many of the same legal rights and responsibilities as spouses. The Coming Into Force date is 5 December 2005.

The purpose of the legislation is to amend Assembly delegated legislation that the Assembly has power to amend so as to include references to the new type of legal relationship created by the Civil Partnership Act 2004.

The DTI expect the Assembly to change its delegated legislation by the time the Act takes effect on 5 December 2005. If it failed to do so, the Assembly would risk breaching its duty under s.120 (1) Government of Wales Act 1998 (to secure equality of opportunity) and it would have to mention that in its annual report under s120 (2). There would also be challenges under the Human Rights Act 1998. In any event, the Assembly would probably be criticised for failing to recognise the existence of civil partnerships

### **3. Funding of a Seconded for the Living in Wales Survey (formerly the Welsh Household and Dwelling Survey)**

I have agreed to transfer £60,000 from the Welsh Household and Dwelling Survey account within the SJ&R Department Research and Evaluation BEL in the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG to the Staff Costs BEL in the Central Administration MEG.

Following the decision to undertake the Welsh Household and Dwelling Survey (now known as the Living In Wales Survey), it became necessary to appoint a project manager at the Local Government Data Unit (LGDU).

To fill this vacancy, in January 2002 a project manager was seconded from the Statistical Directorate.

To cover the associated costs for 2005/2006, a transfer of £60,000 is required from the Research and Evaluation BEL of the Research and Information Unit (Social Justice and Regeneration) to the staff Costs BEL within the Statistical Directorate.

### **4. Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 – Latest Developments on Leasehold Reform**

I wrote to all Assembly Members on the 6<sup>th</sup> June advising that the third package of legislation with regard to leasehold reform came into force in Wales on 31 May 2005, and that it made changes to the

residential leasehold system that will benefit leaseholders in Wales. The package brought into force various provisions of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002. I asked Members if there were any additional issues, to those identified, that they would wish to see addressed. I have received no further suggestions.

## **5. Communities First - Support to Partnerships**

In my written report in April I informed Committee Members that a review of the support mechanisms available to Communities First Partnerships was being undertaken.

This is being done based on evidence of need provided by Communities First Partnerships. Evidence is being gathered in two ways. First, through the Communities First Evaluation, being undertaken by Cambridge Policy Consultants, and secondly through the current mapping of support for Communities First Partnerships, being undertaken by the People and Work Unit. This work is providing evidence on what the Communities First Support Network (and other organisations) should provide in order to be most effective in support of the Communities First programme, and of Communities First Partnerships.

Analysis and discussions are taking place around the findings of the research and I aim to be in a position to detail elements of the future support structure in October.

## **6. LGH Reviews of Community Regeneration / Deputy Minister's Review of Communities First**

In January I agreed to provide the Committee with an update on progress on the Deputy Minister's Review of Community Regeneration and some of the outstanding recommendations from the LGH Reviews of Community Regeneration (many of which had been subsumed into the Deputy Minister's Review). As detailed in my January report, many of the recommendations had been completed, so this update focuses on those recommendations where work has been done over the past six months.

The issue of *good practice dissemination* was highlighted a number of times in both reviews. A group containing representatives of the Assembly, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations and the Communities First Support Network has now been established to look at this issue. Also, at recent Co-ordinators meetings, Co-ordinators have been encouraged to share good practice.

Building on this, I know that a particular concern of the Deputy Minister was the need to ensure that Partnerships themselves had the opportunity to share from good practice. Whilst it is the case that Partnerships can obtain funding to visit other Partnerships to exchange ideas, I recognised that more needed to be done. Therefore, to aid this process, the Communities First Support Network is about to issue a new quarterly Newsletter, called "Partner". This will highlight areas of good practice to all members of Communities First Partnerships.

A key recommendation in the first LGH Review was the need for the development of a plan for *Community Regeneration Capacity*. On this, Community Development Cymru (CDC), who are supported through Communities First, are currently developing a Community Development Strategy for the whole of Wales. A draft framework has been completed and it proposes that the process of developing the strategy is highly participative and has ownership across Wales. A series of workshops and seminars will be undertaken in the coming year. Representatives of CDC will also be discussing the Framework with all interested Assembly Divisions at the Officials Social Justice and Regeneration Policy Group in September.

The second LGH Review recommended that funding should be made available to *promote the development of ICT and internet based learning*. At the last Committee I informed members of the progress being made on Communities @One. When WEFO approval is given, this initiative will ensure this recommendation is achieved.

The Deputy Minister's review commented that the Assembly should institute an *annual report on Social Justice* and that milestones should be included in it. The 2005 Report was discussed on 18 May and today we will be discussing targets and milestones in relation to the 2006 Report.

## **7. National Housing Debate**

The national housing debate on independence and the housing needs of older people formally commenced on 30 November 2004 with a 15 week consultation exercise involving over 250 organisations as well as individual service users. Building on the comprehensive findings of the Committee's policy review, *Housing for Older People*, the consultation paper focused on the twenty key questions covering the whole gamut of housing for older people.

Over 50 statutory, voluntary and independent organisations responded together with some 100 service-users. Most of the representations were detailed - very detailed in some cases - but they were invariably clear and constructive although varied, often personal and sometimes diametrically opposed. The responses from service-users were particularly encouraging representing as they did direct and unfettered views.

Over 1,100 of the comments received feature in the summary of responses which have been made available to the Committee in hard copy. The latter represents a large corpus of information which will influence strategic direction across a wide cross-cutting spectrum, highlight future priorities and dovetail with on-going and projected research.

The main outcomes of the consultation were that:

- Older people prefer to live in their own homes and should be allowed to do so for as long as possible;

- Independent living should be seen as a priority wherever appropriate;
- There was a need for more choices and options for older people;
- There was a need for more integration and joined-up thinking on the part of the Assembly and the local statutory sector;
- Care and Repair services were widely supported and respected across the spectrum;
- There were mixed views on Disabled Facilities Grants centring on delays and complexity but when they worked they were very effective in fostering independence;
- Assistive technology and telecare was viewed positively;
- Equity release generally did not find favour particularly with service-users and some voluntary sector organisations. Although seen as another housing option any policy had to operate sensitively, with the needs of older people paramount;
- The Supporting People programme was generally welcomed;
- For services for people with dementia it was essential that there should be more, effective partnership working;
- Many existing sheltered housing schemes were no longer suitable; that there was variability in the quality of warden cover and there was a need for a fundamental remodeling of services;
- Extra care was generally welcomed and some excellent examples cited;
- Retirement villages were given a cautious welcome;
- There was almost unanimous support that older people should be involved in the design of their properties;
- Fuel poverty brought many adversities for older people and underpinned the strong linkage between poor housing and poor health;
- The preventative measures identified to minimise the fire risks faced by older people accord with Assembly policies;
- The needs of older BME people revolved around language, culture and unsuitable services;

- The problems of housing in rural areas also revolved around affordability, transport, support networks, low incomes and isolation.

The consultation was supplemented with two regional conferences earlier this month in Swansea and Llandudno. These focused on the wide-ranging issues covered in the consultation and attracted some 200 delegated and facilitators. Very positive feedback has been received and full written proceedings of the events will be available in due course.

The findings of the consultation and the conferences will feed into *the Strategy for Older People in Wales*. They will also influence the future direction of the Assembly's national housing strategy - *Better Homes for People in Wales* and inform the unfolding Wanless agenda. In addition, the debate will be discussed by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Older People at its next meeting.

## 8. Independent Commission to Review the Voluntary Sector Scheme

At a previous meeting I undertook to keep this Committee informed of developments. I am pleased to announce that progress has been made on the implementation of the Commissions' recommendations and the attached (**Annex 1**) have now been signed off and endorsed by the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council

## 9. Sheep Rustling

I undertook to let Committee have statistical data on the theft of sheep from farms and to let you know the extent of the problem of the theft of farm equipment.

### *Theft of Sheep from Farms*

The problem of the theft of sheep from farms is mainly confined to Dyfed Powys Police force area - Gwent, North and South Wales Police have all confirmed that they do not have a problem with the theft of livestock in their areas.

Recorded thefts of sheep (reported incidents) over the last 2 years in the Dyfed Powys Police area were:

	2003-04	2004-05
Powys	51	55
Carmarthenshire	7	6
Pembrokeshire	2	0

Ceredigion	1	5
<b>Force Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>66</b>

The problem within Dyfed Powys is mainly confined to the Powys Basic Command Unit (BCU) area: The action taken within the BCU includes:

- Establishing a rural crime partnership multi-agency group to combat rural crime.
- Working with partner agencies to gather information and promote awareness regarding sheep stealing.
- Promoting a rural crime road show at farmers' markets
- Appointing a Detective Sergeant to supervise investigation and management of enquiries into thefts of sheep

Dyfed Powys Police also encourage farmers to work with the Police in setting up local Farmwatch schemes. Farmwatch is a partnership between the farming community and the Police. It encourages vigilance and communication not only between individual farmers, but also with the Police.

Farmers can also sign up to Ringmaster, the new Farm Watch messaging service, at no cost; through this scheme Police can keep them fully informed of any local farm crimes.

#### *Theft of Farm Machinery*

Again the theft of farm machinery is mainly confined to the Dyfed Powys Police area. The number of incidents of recorded theft of farm machinery over the last year within Dyfed Powys 202. The number of offences recorded by South Wales Police was 6; North Wales, 29 and Gwent 24 incidents.

The vast majority of stolen plant in Dyfed Powys would be described as low value with 75% of property stolen during 2004-05 having a value recorded on the crime system as being less than £5,000.

## **10. Available Funding Streams for CCTV**

I undertook to let the Committee have information about the available funding streams for CCTV.

It has always been open to the police and local authorities to provide CCTV cover from their own funds and most of the older established schemes in Wales were funded that way. Wales's CCTV network has been substantially improved since 1999 with Home Office Crime Reduction Programme funding of over £10 million going to Community Safety Partnerships for CCTV to cover public places. Of the total, almost £1.5million was specifically directed to Communities First areas. These main funding rounds enabled the Bridgend Partnership, for instance, to provide comprehensive CCTV coverage of the town centre; a new control room; coverage of park and ride car parks and the visitor car park at Rest Bay, Porthcawl.

Home Office funding rounds specifically for CCTV ceased in 2001-02 but two new funding streams were introduced then – Communities Against Drugs (CADs) and Support for Small Retailers in Deprived Communities – both of which could be used for CCTV. Several Partnerships used some of their CADs money for mobile CCTV units to target and patrol hotspots; to reduce open drug use and sales and to back-up closure of public spaces linked to drug use and anti social behaviour. Certain of the retailers helped under the other funding stream chose to install CCTV recording systems within their premises.

In 2003-04, two new funds were introduced replacing CADs and SCI, although the Small Retailers scheme ran once more. The new funding streams were:

- the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSC) £4 million (shared amongst all 22 Welsh Partnerships according to population and crime levels) for projects which tackle crime and drugs, and
- the Basic Command Unit Fund (BCU) £2.28 million (distributed between police basic command units by a similar formula to the BSC Fund) to tackle the problems which matter most to communities.

The BCU and BSC Funds are intended to assist Partnerships produce local solutions to local problems and projects must target known hotspots and tie in with the community safety strategy. Welsh Partnerships have shared £6.6 million Funding for BSC and BCU for 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2005-06.

In addition, the Assembly introduced its first community safety funding stream in 2003 – the Safer Communities Fund – worth over £8 million to the Partnerships over the 3 years to 2006, and £4.3 million in the current financial year. This is used for locally determined projects with a keen focus on youth crime and nuisance and may be used for CCTV provision if that fits the scheme's criteria.

In 2003, for Communities First areas, there was some scope for considering the provision of CCTV out of the £80,000 which went to each of the Communities First Partnerships for capital items and revenue installation costs of measures the communities saw as priorities, ranging from CCTV to skateboard parks. There is no Communities First funding which may be used for CCTV currently.

In conclusion, the main funding streams available for CCTV are Home Office and National Assembly community safety funding streams or the Partnerships' own resources. Small community groups wishing to provide CCTV might be able to access Welsh Assembly or WCVA administered funding schemes for community regeneration.

I also undertook to provide details of work going on to design out crime. This is a very broad area and covers not just housing design and layout but also secure bus and rail stations, town centres and car parks. I have asked officials to draw up a comprehensive paper covering all aspects of designing out



crime which I will present to Committee following the Summer recess.

## **11. Effectiveness of schemes for perpetrators**

At the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> April, I advised members that I would task the Working Group on Domestic Abuse to consider the effectiveness of schemes for perpetrators and would report back to Committee.

The Domestic Violence Working Group considered the issue of perpetrator programmes at the meeting held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005. Their initial views were that there are gaps in provision in Wales and there is not a lot of research available about the effectiveness of programmes. However, some key organisation, involved in perpetrator programmes e.g. Probation Service and NSPCC were not present at the meeting. There will be further discussions held at the next Working Group meeting to be held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2005. I will keep the Committee updated on progress.

## **12. Welsh Women's Aid**

At the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> May, I agreed that I would discuss with Welsh Women's Aid how local authority's performance in housing domestic abuse victims could be monitored and would report back to Committee.

My officials have met with the Director and the Chair of Welsh Women's Aid to discuss my suggestion that they monitor local authority's performance in the allocation of accommodation to women escaping domestic violence. At this meeting they expressed some reservations over their ability to carry out this role but felt that a way forward would be for them to compile a snapshot of the way that the allocations process is working by way of anecdotal evidence. This could be compiled by the end of September and if this snapshot raised concerns then a decision could then be taken as to the next step. I will keep the Committee updated on this.

## **13. Anti Social Behaviour Action Area Pilot Projects**

The Committee will be interested to know that I have recently agreed to promote four Anti Social Behaviour Action Area pilot projects. These will be innovative and will promote an holistic approach to the broad range of thoughtless or nuisance behaviour which can blight communities and make people's lives miserable. The projects will be evaluated and best practice will be widely disseminated.

Applications have been invited in respect of communities where there is evidence of: neglect and decay in the built environment; erosion of attitudes of good citizenship and respect; unacceptable levels of offending and nuisance behaviour and a need to reassure those made fearful by all this. Applicants must name a number of partner agencies who will commit to the projects; outline the range of interventions they propose to introduce and the extent to which these link in with existing community plans and any previous, or on-going, work to tackle anti social behaviour locally.

There will also need to be evidence of close joint working at the level of the community. Applicants are encouraged to be put forward innovative solutions and to show any links with other pilot projects in the area that may be addressing one particular issue – truancy, arson or environmental improvements, for example. There should also be a marked focus on youth disaffection issues and means of tackling youth nuisance problems, particularly when they are linked to drug taking or alcohol misuse.

I am making £200,000 available from the Social Justice and Regeneration budget to fund four Action Areas. Each area will receive £45,000 over a 12-month period. £20,000 will also be set aside for independent evaluation. The funding will be for pump priming; a co-ordinator post and funding for discrete parts of the project – a project to involve schoolchildren, for example. Applications to bid have been invited from all 22 Community Safety Partnerships. I hope to announce the successful projects in the Autumn.

#### **14. Plans to assist young people affected by domestic abuse.**

At the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> June, I agreed to report back to Committee on any plans to assist young people affected by domestic abuse.

"Tackling Domestic Abuse – The All Wales National Strategy" to address domestic abuse in Wales was launched on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2005. A key aim of the Strategy is to protect children and young people and provide them with support and information. We have already taken steps to assist children affected by domestic abuse. The following projects are some examples: \_

- As part of the £1.1million crease the Welsh Assembly Government has awarded Wrexham Community Safety Partnership £6,355 capital expenditure from the Welsh Assembly Government Domestic Abuse Services Grant for 2005/06. The grant will be used to re-surface a play area at a refuge and purchase and upgrade current play equipment, which provides continued support through play to children living at the refuge.\_
- Education also has a vital role to play and is part of the strategy. The information booklet for schools 'Good Practice on Domestic Abuse' was published at the end of March 2004, and has been circulated widely to schools, local education authorities, teaching bodies and youth organisations. This builds on existing child protection procedures and is aimed at assisting teachers and support staff to recognise and understand children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse. A leaflet for children and young people has also been produced, and is available on the Welsh Assembly Government's website ([www.wales.gov.uk/subicrimeprevention/index.htm](http://www.wales.gov.uk/subicrimeprevention/index.htm)).
- Dyfed Powys has developed a children's website called [www.notyourfault.org](http://www.notyourfault.org). The website has lots of local and general information to support children who witness domestic abuse and it also

promotes the All Wales Domestic Abuse helpline number. The site is interactive and bi-lingual, mouse mats and wristbands with the web-site address and information has also been produced.

- Womankind as part of their national pilot has agreed to work with 3 groups of pilot schools, 2 in England and 1 in Wales, Bedwas Comprehensive School in Caerphilly. The campaign consists of CD packages that are aimed at years 9 10 and 11 to raise the awareness and provide sufficient knowledge about violence against women. Schools will be invited to comment on materials in development and to join the pilot.
- Statistics have proved that domestic abuse often starts or escalates in pregnancy. An All Wales Networking Group was set up at the end of 2003 to review domestic abuse within pregnancy, and met for the first time in January 2004. Membership comprised of Assembly officials, Midwives and Health Visitors from every NHS Trust in Wales. The Group recommended that a Care pathway be developed. A midwife was seconded to the Assembly for 6-months and developed an "All Wales Care Pathway" setting out 10 minimum standards to protect women and unborn children, an information card providing information on domestic abuse services and a training pack for nurses and midwives. The Pathway was launched in March 2005 and is now being rolled out across Wales.

I am sure that more projects supporting children and young people will be developed as the strategy is implemented across Wales.

## **15. All Wales Domestic Abuse helpline**

At the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee of 16<sup>th</sup> June, I agreed to check on the caller details being kept as part of the All Wales Domestic Abuse helpline in particular geographical information; nature of abuse; sex and age of callers etc.

The All Wales National Helpline is regularly monitored and is being reviewed this year.

Welsh Women's Aid do maintain statistics which include monthly call rate, times of calls, language of line, caller details, agencies who contact the helpline, adults or children, male or female, age of caller, disability, relationship of abuser to abused, type of abuse, callers who have children and the information requested/given to caller.

Welsh Women Aid will be producing an Annual Report in September 2005, which I will share with the Committee.

## **16. Co-Housing Young People**

At the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee of 16<sup>th</sup> June, I was asked to consider whether young substance misusers who have been rehabilitated together could be housed together.

My officials are currently working on two modules as part of the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework. One module will offer guidance on Homelessness and Accommodation, while the other will deal with Children and Young People.

I will ensure that the issue of co-housing young people who have undergone detoxification together is raised with both Specialist Sub Groups currently working on these modules.

I will be sent both modules for approval in April 2006, at which point they will be released for consultation.

## **17. Violent Crime Reduction Bill**

Members will be interested to know that the Home Office published the Violent Crime Reduction Bill on the 8 June. This provides a comprehensive package of measures for combating violent crime and ensures that the Police and local communities will have the necessary powers to reduce crime involving imitation guns, knives and alcohol in their neighbourhoods. These are the key provisions:

- Make it illegal to manufacture or sell imitation firearms that could be mistaken for real firearms;
- Bring in higher sentences for carrying imitation firearms;
- Create tougher manufacturing standards to ensure that imitation firearms cannot be converted to fire real ammunition;
- Increase the age limit for buying or firing an air weapon without supervision from 17 to 18;
- Make it an offence to use other people to hide or carry guns or knives;
- Increase the age limit for purchasing a knife from 16 to 18;
- Introduce powers for Head Teachers and other members of staff to search pupils for knives;
- Introduce Alcohol Disorder Zones (ADZs) which will require licensed premises to contribute to the cost of alcohol related disorder in specific areas where it has been identified as a problem;
- Exclude individuals responsible for alcohol related disorder from certain areas and licensed premises by imposing 'Drinking Banning Orders' which could run for up to 2 years;
- Create powers for Police to ban the sale of alcohol at licensed premises for up to 48 hours for selling alcohol to under 18's; and

- Provide Police with the power to exclude individuals at risk of carrying out alcohol related disorder from a specific area for up to 48 hours.

## **18. Social Justice Annual Report**

During Committee's consideration of the 2005 Annual Report on 18 May some members expressed the view that we should seek to build on the progress made in this year's Annual Report by including outputs and, where possible, targets in the 2006 Report. In view of time constraints last time I undertook to return to the issue at this meeting.

I welcome the views of Committee members on this issue. As a cross-cutting Report any outputs and targets would need to cover key policies and programmes across the Assembly Government aimed at combating social exclusion. Clearly, I would need to discuss those proposals with my Ministerial colleagues. One option would be to use the various Operational Plans for each Assembly Department as a basis of identifying and measuring outputs and targets for key policies and programmes. However, there are difficulties in this approach because the outputs for some programmes are not very specific.

Within my own portfolio, the Communities First programme is the Assembly Government's flagship programme for improving opportunities and quality of life for people living and working in our poorest areas. Communities Directorate will continue to work with other policy divisions to monitor the impact that their policies and programmes are having in engaging and supporting people from Communities First areas and more specifically the Communities First process.

Intermediate outcome indicators, which are emerging from the evaluation of Communities First, will provide long term targets for the programme. These targets will primarily focus on the outcomes of the preparatory and capacity building stages of the programme and seek to demonstrate the level of capacity developed through Communities First at the local and national level. More detail will emerge as a result of the evaluation stage ending in May 2006, which could feed into next year's Social Justice Report. There is also the opportunity to include some of the more specific targets we have developed, for instance, in relation to the new Social Enterprise Strategy which I launched recently.

The 2005 Report is an improvement on previous years with its emphasis on our achievements in 2004-05 and identification of key objectives for 2005-06. The Report has also been strengthened by the inclusion of new indicators to provide a statistical context and track progress year-on-year. However, I accept that there is always room for improvement and I welcome the views of Committee members on the way forward.

## **19. HOUSING BUSINESS PLANS**

I have previously advised the Committee that all 21 local authorities required to produce a Housing Business Plan have now done so, and these have been analysed by my officials. Each council will be

provided with feedback and, where clarification or further information is required, this will be identified. In these cases I will impose deadlines for the relevant information to be provided.

Essentially, the result of the Business Plan falls into two categories;

- Those where there is a major financial shortfall in resources to achieve WHQS, an option appraisal is the next stage.
- Those where the Business Plans currently demonstrate that WHQS can be achieved by 2012.

12 out of the 21 Business Plans indicate significant difficulties in bridging the funding deficit to achieve WHQS. (Anglesey, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Conwy, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath/Port Talbot, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda-Cynon-Taff, Swansea, Torfaen and Wrexham) These councils are in varying stages of determining the appropriate course of action, but only one (Swansea) has made a decision to ballot its tenants on the transfer of its housing stock to a community housing mutual.

The remaining 9 local authorities have provided Business Plans that indicate that WHQS can be achieved from their own resources. However, all of these plans require further clarification, as some of the assumptions used may not be appropriate or sustainable.

I am now considering the detailed report on each of these plans, together with the appropriate action in each case. I will also be meeting with the Leader of the WLGA later in the month to advise him of the current situation.

I will keep the Committee informed of progress on this matter during recess.