

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Venue: National Assembly for Wales Building

Title: Edwina Hart – Report to S J & R Committee – 16 November 2005

1. Operation Tarian

At the meeting of the Committee on 28 September 2005 I agreed to provide details on the views of the Chief Constables on Operation Tarian. I have received the following briefing from the Welsh Association of Chief Police Officers (WACPO).

Since conception Tarian+ has had a dramatic impact on the harm caused by class A drugs within the communities of southern Wales.

To date 17 organised crime groups involved in the trafficking of class 'A' drugs have been dismantled and over 24 Kg of Class 'A' drugs have been seized. Community questionnaires have also found that following enforcement activity 65% of those members of the public questioned believed that a significant impact had been achieved in their community. Wales has also seen a reduction in drug related deaths from 270 in 2000 to 44 in 2004/5. Whilst it is accepted that there are many variables and contributing factors to the fall in drug related deaths it can not be ruled out that the actions of Tarian+ have contributed to this.

Chief Constable Grange (Head of Tarian+) commented:

"The success and impact achieved by Tarian+ is reflected through the significant convictions and disruptions achieved by the unit, which has placed the Welsh region at the forefront of tackling middle market criminality with other areas in the country looking to mirror the welsh model.

The four Welsh forces are committed to continuing the battle against class 'A' drugs and the harm which is caused by serious organised crime within our communities, on a daily basis. Tarian+ welcomes the support of Welsh Assembly Government in tackling this area of criminality."

2. Publication of the Framework for Commissioning Substance Misuse Services

The Committee will wish to note that I am officially launching the Framework for Commissioning Substance Misuse Services at the Commissioning Conference on 22nd November 2005 in Swansea. This document is a key module of the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework.

3. Update on Hidden Harm Report/Children of Drug Addicts

The Hidden Harm Steering group and sub groups have now met and advised on a procurement exercise to obtain indicative costings of the implementation of the Framework for Action on the recommendations in Hidden Harm.

1. Officials have received indicative costings, which have been analysed, and actions identified.
2. An audit of actions is also being undertaken to progress work on Hidden Harm.
3. The steering group considered the costings alongside the audit of actions at its meeting on the 2nd November 2005.
4. The costings paper will be presented at the Cabinet Sub committee for children and young people on the 9th January 2006.

4. Update on Substance Misuse - All-Wales Data Collecting and Reporting System

I mentioned in my Annual Report to committee on 28th September 2005 that the new All-Wales Data Collection and Reporting system became operational on 1st April 2005. I would like to bring to your attention that the first quarter reports have now been circulated to the partnerships and our treatment providers. It is a little early to make much of the first quarter data but it will be interesting to see the first full year report. Members may find it useful to have a presentation from Health Solutions Wales and the consultant of the analysis of the data at that time.

We have also circulated a report of the Welsh data (2001- 31 March 2005) that was submitted to the Department of Health system, the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System. Though this data has been analysed, the low compliance and lack of standardisation associated with this system means the analysis contains a number of caveats and caution must be exercised in the interpretation of the data. This is why we have established our own new system with established standards to ensure consistency of reporting and I am very pleased that we have achieved 100% compliance of reporting in to our new system.

Both reports will shortly be available electronically via the Assembly's Internet site and also with the library.

5. Teachers Spending Time with Police Officers

At present, PSE Coordinators have a good understanding of school liaison officer roles which are cascaded to other teaching staff. These teachers may not have the opportunity to develop their understanding due to teaching commitments. One proposal following the independent evaluation of the

All Wales Schools Programme is to set up a national steering group to take this and other issues raised forward.

6. Announcement made by the Home Office on Domestic Abuse.

I wrote to the Committee on 19th October providing information about the next phase of the UK Government's Specialist Domestic Violence Court Programme.

I am keen to ensure that all parts of Wales have access to these new arrangements. I am aware that although North Wales Partnerships did not express an interest in the last round they are taking steps to be ready to apply to be considered in the future. In North Wales a multi-agency group is being set up reporting to the North Wales Domestic Abuse Forum of the Local Criminal Justice Board to take this forward. In addition training events for Community Safety Partnerships are being held in North and South Wales during November 2005. These events will include a session led by Home Office on the new Specialist Court Programme and the intention is to encourage all parts of Wales to take an interest.

7. Update on the Safer Communities Fund

Since it is now in the final year of its initial three-year period, the Assembly Government is presently conducting a review of the Safer Communities Fund. The All Wales Youth Offending Strategy has been published since the Fund was established three years ago. The Strategy is the result of the Assembly Government, the Youth Justice Board and local agencies working together to develop a Strategy that provides a national framework for preventing offending and re-offending among children and young people in Wales. The long-term aim of the Strategy is to make a real and significant reduction in the rates of youth offending.

In order to assist this process, the Assembly Government is now proposing that the Safer Communities Fund is used exclusively from 2006-07 for providing grant aid, via the 22 Community Safety Partnerships in Wales, towards local schemes for the prevention and reduction of youth crime.

8. Transfer of resources for the financial year 2005-06 between the Economic Development and Transport MEG and the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG

The Committee will wish to note that a transfer of £33,000 from the Cymru Ar-lein Raising the Stakes account within the Cymru Ar-lein: On-Line for a Better Wales BEL in the Economic Development MEG to the Social Justice & Regeneration Dept. Research & Evaluation BEL in the Social Justice and Regeneration MEG.

When the Living in Wales 2006 survey was being drafted, Divisions within the Welsh Assembly Government were invited to commission questions specific to their requirements.

Cymru Ar-lein subsequently commissioned two minutes' worth of questions about computer and

Internet use in the home (for a total of £32,500). The information gathered will provide essential baseline data. Cymru Ar-lein had the same questions in the 2005 Living in Wales survey. Repeating the exercise will allow progress to be measured. E-Wales has succeeded Cymru Ar-lein, and is honouring this prior commitment. The transfer of £33,000 for 2005/2006 is now required. (Annex 1)

9. Transfer Funding from Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation BEL into Revenue Settlement

I would like to inform the Committee that the Finance Minister and I have agreed that £1.0 million can be transferred from the Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) within the Social Justice and Regeneration Main Expenditure Group (MEG), to the Local Government Revenue Settlement for the Financial Year 2006-07. This additional funding is to assist local authorities with the Start-up costs for HMO licensing and related measures in the Housing Act 2004, including the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and Selective Licensing. These measures will come on stream next year when the relevant parts of the Act are implemented in Wales through secondary legislation.

The funding of Supporting People in Wales has, since its introduction in April 2003, been divided into two funding streams: - One, paid as a specific grant to local authorities, to fund support in sheltered projects for the elderly and in projects also providing community care (Supporting People Grant). The other to fund all other types of support project (Supporting People Revenue Grant) and to be administered by the Assembly, building on its track record of administering Supported Housing Revenue Grant (SHRG), a predecessor to the new scheme.

Supporting People amalgamated a range of funding streams and for the first two years funding was received from HM Treasury as Annually Managed Expenditure (AME). HM Treasury has now reclassified this funding as part of the Assembly's Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL).

An examination of the distribution of funding has revealed an inequity that has been previously dealt with at the end of each financial year. With all the funding now being in DEL the opportunity has arisen to regularise the position for this year and for future years.

As a result of this analysis The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (the SJR Minister) has approved and the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services in her capacity as Finance Minister has agreed to:

- The transfer of the sum of £40,020,000 on a permanent basis;

From the Supporting People BEL, to the Supported Housing Revenue Grant BEL

- The Supported Housing Revenue Grant BEL (Apex Ref. 611000) to be renamed "Supporting People Revenue Grant - Accredited Support Providers" BEL.

- The Supporting People BEL (Apex Ref. 524250) to be renamed "Supporting People Grant - Local Authorities" BEL.

10 . Tenancy Deposits.

The Housing Act 2004 makes provision for Tenancy Deposit Schemes to safeguard the deposits most private sector tenants currently pay to their landlords. The provisions are aimed at removing the risk of misappropriation of tenant's deposits by landlords and letting agents. Given the nature of this issue I considered that there would be no unique Welsh dimension and that with the scale of the exercise, there would be clear advantages in a Wales/England approach. I therefore agreed that the Welsh Assembly Government should join ODPM in commissioning consultants to examine how such schemes could work most effectively in Wales and England, following which, a joint external procurement exercise was undertaken to identify organisations interested in, and having the capacity to run the schemes.

Expressions of interest were sought and resulting applications were evaluated using an agreed evaluation plan. Welsh Assembly Government officials have been closely involved in the process. The exercise is on going and is anticipated to continue into next year, with a view to Tenancy Deposit Schemes being up and running by 1 October 2006.

Running concurrently with the procurement exercise, it is proposed to issue a consultation paper to interested parties on the proposals to be contained in legislation. Given the nature of this subject I have agreed that it is appropriate to issue a joint consultation document and also for the ultimate preparation of joint statutory instruments.

11. Report on work being undertaken by the Housing Corporation on factory built housing.

At the Fourth meeting, the Committee discussed a report on the "Use of factory built housing in Wales", which gave an outline of factory built housing, what it is, what it does, and how it might be applied in Wales.

The report advised that factory built housing should be seen as part of a wider approach to providing high-quality, affordable housing but. It also made the point that, in order to fully realise the full benefits of these new methods, it needs to be supported in the way housing is funded, planned, procured and designed.

In this context, I agreed to report back to the Committee on "the work being undertaken by the Housing Corporation on factory built housing" (Annex 2).

12. Lettings

In response to Catherine Thomas question on 12 October regarding sensitivity of lettings by many local authorities (0AQ404 SJR)

I wrote to social landlords in March 2005 reminding them of the need to take care and support into consideration when allocating their homes. I emphasised that landlords' allocation schemes should be sensitive to the range of needs which are often conflicting. Landlords are required to maximise access to a publicly funded resource which can be in short supply. Allocation schemes therefore often have to focus on housing those in greatest housing need such as homeless households. It is generally accepted that such households often have a range of complex needs which require interventions to help sustain their tenancies. So, whilst there may be lettings which are insensitive or inappropriate, this is often due to the vulnerability of the households concerned. Therefore, reliance on changes to allocation schemes alone will not address problems of this kind. Landlords have at their disposal a range of mechanisms to address management problems arising from lettings – particularly in regard to anti social behaviour where swift action can be taken to stop anti-social behaviour in the immediate and long term.

I have written to Catherine Thomas to this effect.

In response to Peter Black's statement on 12 October that 'many local authorities are finding it difficult to get housing associations to tie in with their agendas in relation to the allocation of housing'. (0AQ404 SJR)

My officials have advised that there is no hard evidence to support this claim. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there are issues falling within the housing association and local authority sectors in terms of housing allocations. It is claimed that some housing associations 'cherry pick' potential tenants and exclude those with the most challenging behaviour. Conversely it is claimed that local authorities, rather than apply exclusion policies they instead nominate the most challenging applicants to housing associations. There is probably an element of truth in both arguments. Steps are being taken to address this issue involving the creation of exclusion policies for housing associations which mirror those of local authorities and the promotion of common suspension policies. We are also considering the potential for joint statistical returns on nomination performance by both local authorities and housing associations to enable us to get a more accurate picture about performance and to promote partnership working in this area.

I have written to Peter Black to this effect.

13. Community Fire Safety Committee

The CFSC held its inaugural meeting on 28 September when it considered its remit, composition and forward work programme. The Committee felt that it should take a strategic, rather than operational view of CFS activity, when advising the Minister on future priorities and targets arising out of the CFS agenda.

The Committee is considering, via e-mail correspondence and sub-group meetings, a range of workstreams arising out of the original two fire safety reports into domestic fires and arson in Wales. Pending this work, it is anticipated that these will be agreed as the formal work programme for the Committee and form part of its terms of reference to be agreed at the Group's next meeting in March 2006.