

Annex A

Introduction

1. This briefing identifies broad areas for consideration, which Members may wish to consider as suitable for a policy review. There are four broad headings: Youth homelessness, rehabilitation of offenders, youth justice and BME groups and asylum seekers. Under each heading, a selection of current issues is provided and some questions posed. Some information on good practice in carrying out policy reviews can be found at Annex B.

2. Once a potential topic has been decided upon, further work would need to be undertaken to refine the scope of the review.

A. Youth Homelessness

Increase in homeless presentations

3. The *Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001* introduced in 2003 extended the groups considered in priority need for housing in Wales to include Care leavers or those at risk of exploitation over 18 but under 21 years, 16 and 17 year olds. The number of homeless presentations by young people has since increased creating extra demands on homelessness services. The quality and effectiveness of homelessness services is variable¹. The number of rough sleepers is not known although work on developing a methodology is underway.

Local Housing Allowances

4. Local Housing Allowances are currently being piloted in Wales. These set local tariffs for levels of payment and allowances are paid direct to claimants. Where local tariffs are set too low competition for rented accommodation intensifies amongst those relying on Housing Allowances. Giving tenants control of their housing allowance is not always helpful, particularly those with substance misuse problems and the process for having the allowance paid direct to landlords can be lengthy.

Access to health care for homeless young people.

5. Many homeless people are not registered with a GP and may 'self-medicate' to cope with health problems. Access to mental health and drug services is a particular problem for this group. The prevalence of mental health and substance misuse problems amongst young homeless people appears to be increasing – many come from abusive or otherwise problematic backgrounds. Specialist nursing services for homeless people in Cardiff and Swansea have proven successful. Links between housing and health services are poor in some areas.

Outreach services

6. Outreach services for young rough sleepers are important, particularly for those newly arrived on the streets and could be further developed. Rough sleepers are being obstructed in some areas making them more dispersed and harder to reach.

Move-on accommodation

7. Although hostel accommodation for young homeless people is available in many (but not all) areas of Wales move-on accommodation is often scarce. This creates a 'bed blocking' problem in hostels and can have a demoralising effect on young

¹ See Housing Research Report HRR 1/04 January 2004, Welsh Assembly Government
<http://www.housing.wales.gov.uk/pdf.asp?a=c38>

people who can become institutionalised, find it difficult to work (because of the high cost of hostel accommodation) and may acquire bad habits e.g. substance misuse.

B. Rehabilitation of Offenders

National Offender Management Scheme

8. Following the Carter review of correctional services in England and Wales the government established the National Offender Management System (NOMS) in which each offender is supervised by a single offender manager. The Home Secretary recently proposed introducing 'full contestability' into the provision of probation services which would allow the National Offender Manager and Regional Offender Managers to contract with a range of providers for interventions and offender management. New legislation in the form of a Management of Offenders bill would be required to implement the changes. However, these proposals are being reviewed and have been dropped from the forthcoming police and justice bill².

9. In the context of the continuing changes to the probation service the Committee could consider the effects of the changes on the probation service in Wales since the introduction of NOMS in June 2004.

Housing for ex-offenders

10. The *Homeless Persons (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001*³ introduced in 2003 extended the groups considered in priority need for housing in Wales to include former prisoners homeless after being released from custody (and who have a local connection). The Welsh Assembly Government's *Review of the Implementation of the Homelessness Legislation*⁴ highlighted a number of issues relating to the housing of ex-offenders. These included an increase in the number of ex-offenders presenting as homeless to local authorities, the lack of suitable temporary accommodation in some areas and the difficulties ex-offenders face in accessing housing, particularly in the context of a declining social housing stock⁵.

Throughcare and Aftercare Scheme

11. This scheme is funded by the Home Office and managed and run by the Welsh Assembly Government. It aims to provide continuous management of drug misusing offenders to reduce the incidence of offending to fund drug habits. The scheme involves managing the offender from arrest through sentencing and beyond treatment, custody or community sentence. The scheme was established in 2004.

12. The Committee may wish to investigate the effectiveness of the scheme in reducing drug-related offending and the role it plays within the range of treatment and rehabilitation services for drug misusing offenders.

C. Youth Justice

² Guardian 19 January 2006 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianpolitics/story/0,,1689691,00.html>

³ <http://www.housing.wales.gov.uk/pdf.asp?a=i9a>

⁴ Housing Research Report HRR 1/04 January 2004, Welsh Assembly Government
<http://www.housing.wales.gov.uk/pdf.asp?a=c38>

⁵ See p7 Housing Research Report HRR 1/04 January 2004, Welsh Assembly Government
<http://www.housing.wales.gov.uk/pdf.asp?a=c38>

All Wales Youth Offending Strategy

13. Whilst youth justice is a non-devolved matter, the Assembly Government has published an *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* (July 2004). An expert group has subsequently been set up to monitor implementation of the Strategy.

14. There may be issues about the ways in which the *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* dovetails with other Welsh Assembly Government policies that impact on young offenders e.g. housing, education and training, health.

15. There are a number of partnership arrangements which exist in Wales and it is not always clear how they link in relation to youth justice issues e.g. Communities First Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships, Youth Offending Teams in Wales, Children and Young People's Partnerships.

16. The overwhelming majority of the 180–190 Welsh children and young people currently in custody are housed in establishments in England.⁶

“This is of concern to both the Welsh Assembly Government and the YJB. The YJB has established a working group with the Welsh Assembly, to consider how the needs of Welsh children and young people in custody may best be met. Depending on the outcomes of these deliberations, the YJB proposes (subject to necessary funding) to develop a mixed range of appropriate accommodation in Wales. In the meantime, the YJB will seek, as far as possible, to ensure that those establishments that care for Welsh children and young people in England are sensitive and responsive to their specific cultural needs.”

17. In December 2005, the Minister expressed concern about the lack of provision of juvenile secure accommodation in Wales⁷ and as early as June 2003, wrote to Lord Warner to express this same concern.⁸ The British Association of Social Workers has stated that it is “extremely concerned about the experience of Welsh young people being incarcerated in English institutions. This is not acceptable given their cultural and linguistic needs as well as the geographical challenges presented to their families in terms of maintaining contact.”⁹

18. How are the needs of Welsh young people placed in the secure estate in England are being met?

19. What assessment has been made of the impact on young people and their families of being placed outside Wales?

20. What are the issues around the provision for young girls within the secure estate.

D. Issues affecting asylum seekers and people from black and minority ethnic communities

⁶ Youth Justice Board, *Strategy for the Secure Estate for Children and Young People*, Plans for 2005/06 to 2007/08, available at: http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/Publications/Downloads/YJB_Strategy_Secure_Estate.pdf

⁷ RoP p16, 8 December 2005, Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

⁸ National Assembly for Wales, Ministers' Report to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee (SJR 01-03 (p.1), 11 June 2003

⁹ BASW response to Youth Justice Board Consultation on Strategy for the Secure Estate for Juveniles, March 2005, available on the BASW website at: <http://www.basw.co.uk/articles.php?articleId=289>

21. An alternative approach to a review may be to examine the effects of Assembly Government social justice policies on particular groups such as people from black and minority ethnic communities e.g. community safety issues, housing issues.

Children seeking asylum in Wales¹⁰

22. A qualitative study recently published by Save the Children calls for a thorough review of current funding, policy and practice as they affect asylum-seeking children in Wales.¹¹ The study, which provides an analysis of the current situation in Wales, could be used as a basis for policy review and development in particular areas.

23. Areas of concern within the social justice and regeneration portfolio include:

- A lack of consistency between public and private housing; the placing of some separated (unaccompanied) children in hotel accommodation and the quality of shared accommodation.
- Racism and harassment routinely experienced by asylum seekers which is aggravated by negative media portrayal. Over one third of children and young people interviewed had experienced racial abuse and harassment.
- Lack of expertise and specialist services or support staff.

¹⁰ Although immigration and asylum are non-devolved, the Assembly Government is responsible for the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees once they arrive in Wales.

¹¹ Save the Children (2005) *Uncertain Futures: Children seeking asylum in Wales*, Save the Children Wales Programme, p.1

Annex B

Good practice in carrying out policy reviews

Purpose of the review

- ◆ In choosing a topic for review, good practice shows that there should be clarity from the outset about what the purpose of the review is. For example, reviewing the effectiveness of existing Welsh Assembly Government policy; collating evidence about service provision to feed into developing policy; collecting evidence on a topic which is not devolved but which the Committee is concerned about and may wish to raise the profile of.

Scope of review

- ◆ Policy reviews should be as focused as possible and capable of delivery within the time and resources available. This needs to be borne in mind in determining the scope of the review, the work programme for the review, and the other activities (if any) to be pursued by the Committee alongside the review.
- ◆ Selecting a more narrowly focused topic should make it easier to identify the key issues which need to be addressed, the outcomes to be aimed for, the information which needs to be explored and the key players who need to be interviewed.

Outcomes

- ◆ There should be clarity about what will be delivered as a result of implementing the Committee's recommendation and the monitoring and evaluation arrangements that will be required.