

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 4 – Ty Hywel

Meeting date:
9 May 2012

Meeting time:
09:15

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



For further information please contact:

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Agenda

Private Pre-meeting – 09.15 – 09.30

1. Introductions, apologies and substitutions

2. Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League – Evidence Session (Via video conference) (09.30 – 10.10) (Pages 1 – 6)
CELG(4)–12–12 – Paper 1

Mel Thomas, Football Statistician

3. Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League – Evidence Session (10.10 – 11.00) (Pages 7 – 11)

Carmarthen Town A.F.C
CELG(4)–12–12 – Paper 2
Gareth O Jones, Chairman

Bangor Town Football Club
No Paper
Gwynfor Jones, Club Secretary

4. Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League – Evidence session (11.00 – 11.30)

John Loosemore – Independent Chairman of the Licencing Body for Welsh Premier League Clubs
No Paper

5. Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the meeting for the following business:

Item 6

6. Committee to Consider the Report by the task and finish group on the future for the media in Wales (11.30–11.45) (Pages 12 – 94)

7. Committee Forward Work Programme (11.45– 12.00)

8. Papers to Note

CELG(4)–12–12 – Paper 3 – Letter from the Minister for Communities and Local Government following the meeting on 29 March (Pages 95 – 108)

CELG(4)–12–12 – Paper 4 – Letter from the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage (Pages 109 – 110)

Who am I?

I run a results and stats service, Soccerfile Wales, freelance for the Welsh Premier League and have done so since the outset in 1992. I also supply the Press Association with data as well as covering Wales for the German Kicker Sportmagazin. I also do features on request for the prestigious World Soccer magazine and supply UEFA's European Football Yearbook with the copy and stats for Wales. My data is used on websites world wide.

I have produced three books "African Football Handbook" in 1988 – the first to cover the continent - a Welsh Football Almanac in 1991 with Adrian Dumphy and Dave Collins and "History of the Cambrian Coast League" in 2009. I have also compiled various media guides for the WPL and am editor of the League's weekly Welsh Premier Times.

Having been involved with the Welsh Premier League since its inception in 1992 I believe I am in a good position to assess the progress made during the last twenty years.

These can be split into five different categories. Format, Media, Stadia, Playing Standards and Youth Development

League Format

Initially the League adopted a twenty club membership made up of an equal split between North and South. In this respect it should be noted that the North included Mid-Wales except for Aberystwyth Town who were members of the southern Welsh League.

Gradually the League came down to eighteen which was then the norm for most European Leagues. In 2010 a major structural change was implemented by the FAW forcing the League down to twelve clubs. After consideration the current format was adopted whereby the clubs play each other twice in the First Phase – totalling 22 matches each – before splitting into two groups for the Second Phase. These are formed from the top six – the Championship Conference – and the bottom six – forming the Play-off Conference. The playing records are carried forward from the First Phase. This provides a further 10 matches each.

The top club of the Play-off Conference, and possibly second placed club depending on circumstance, qualify with clubs finishing third to sixth in the Championship for the Europa League Play-offs. The winner takes the League's second UEFA League spot.

The two stages during the season have so far created an air of competitiveness throughout the season compared with a straight August to April run through.

This season's title, as with last season, was won on the last round of fixtures; likewise the relegation issues.

Some clubs have complained that they play each other too often but with only 12 clubs in the league it is impossible to get away from this. A straight round-robin would see all clubs playing each other four times giving 44 matches per season – far too heavy a burden for wet Wales' grass pitches.

Matters are compounded by the League Cup where clubs could meet again a couple of times but this could be alleviated by either:

- Inviting the top two from the feeder Leagues to take part
- Seeding the draw so that at least in the early rounds matches are between clubs from separate conferences. The League Cup starts after the First Phase has finished

This is inevitably going to remain a problem unless the League is increased to sixteen which is highly unlikely at present. If it was then a straight forward season of 30 matches could still end with play-offs as occur in Holland and Belgium for example.

Media

This section can be broken into sub categories:

i. Television

a. Match transmission

The current coverage supplied by Rondo Media and S4/C is the best ever achieved by the League and reaches an extremely high standard. Let us hope it continues

b. TV News coverage

The word that springs to mind is abysmal. The BBC's Wales Today will not give a minute to the WPL. On approach they say that sufficient time is given to football which in their mind is coverage of clubs playing in England. This must be the next target for media improvement, even 15seconds on a Friday evening showing a caption of the weekend's fixtures would be quite acceptable.

ii. Newspaper coverage

In the north the Daily Post gives excellent coverage with their website blog by Dave Jones adding to the print contribution.

However in the south the so-called national newspaper of Wales must I suppose pander to their main readership in the valley areas which from a football point of view concentrates on Cardiff City – a club rebuked by the FAW last year for making derogatory remarks about the League over the tannoy system.

This brings into focus the true struggle facing the WPL in the future – English football.

The FAW's failure to create a national league much earlier in their history has allowed the influence of the game over the dyke to expand beyond control. This leaves the WPL with an uphill battle to gain support and increase attendances. The only option I can see is to persuade fans of clubs like Liverpool, Manchester United etc to adopt a second club in their own country with incentives to visit their nearest WPL club - reductions for season ticket holders for example.

Engaging these fans will hopefully then lead to some twinning of clubs perhaps; it is done elsewhere.

Imagination and initiative is needed if we are to increase attendances. Clubs that talk of returning to England – as Anne Jones' Rhyl have done - should realise that as far as football is concerned Wales is an independent country and if a League had been formed earlier in the FAW's history the clubs playing in England would not be there at all. To those clubs that want to move to England I would say come into the real world. You are in Wales and that is where your future lies.

As mentioned Wales is independent in the world of football but that is a fragile position within FIFA. FIFA's criteria for membership states that

“Any association which is responsible for organising and supervising football in its country may become a member of FIFA. In this context, the expression ‘country’ shall refer to an independent state recognised by the international community.”

Clearly Wales does not fall into this category and its membership is a privileged one based on the creation of the International Football Association Board

IFAB is made up of representatives from each of the United Kingdom's pioneering football associations - The FA, the Scottish Football Association, Football Association of Wales and Northern Ireland's Irish Football Association – and FIFA, the international governing body for football.

Each UK association has one vote and FIFA has four. IFAB deliberations must be approved by three-quarters of the vote, which translates to at least six votes. Thus, FIFA's approval is necessary for any IFAB decision, but FIFA alone cannot change the Laws of the Game—they need to be agreed by at least two of the UK members. There is also a quorum requirement that at least four of the five member associations, one of which must be FIFA, have to be present for a meeting to proceed.

The Board meets twice a year, once to decide on possible changes to the rules governing the game of Football and once to deliberate on its internal affairs. The first meeting is called the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the second is the Annual Business Meeting (ABM). Four weeks before the AGM, the member associations must send their written proposals to the secretary of the host association. FIFA then prints a list of suggestions that are distributed to all other associations for examination. The AGM is held either in February or March and the ABM is held between September and October.

Wales' membership of this organisation and of FIFA is as a result of the four home nations' historic status as the founders of the organised game.

Politically this is becoming less stable. Moves have been made in the past by Asian and African FIFA members to try and overturn this privilege and was one of the reasons that the late Alun Evans set up the WPL – to publicise our identity to the world.

It is important that we maintain this identity at all costs. This has not been made easy of late with the English FA grabbing headlines – and little support – for a challenge on the FIFA Council. Couple this with Scotland's possible, or even probable, political independence then our position becomes even more precarious.

Challenges to our position will become easier with only three countries in the UK.

It is therefore important that the WAG recognises this and that Welsh football is looking to them to support – without conditions – this independent status and that it does nothing to undermine the status quo.

Stadia

Massive strides have been taken to improve facilities at grounds over the last twenty years and the clubs have worked extremely hard to take their stadiums up to and beyond Domestic Licence requirements.

Raising the required funding has taken great effort and with FAW funding targets have been reached.

However, the stadia improvements have in many cases not been matched at the same pace for playing surface quality. Clubs still suffer from poor drainage and for the standard of football to improve a major hike in surface quality has to be prioritised.

Newtown and Prestatyn Town have recently explored using UEFA standard synthetic pitches as currently used by The New Saints. This of course is also a commercially based move but provides an all-weather surface that copes easily with the oft horrendous Welsh weather.

This is where the Welsh Assembly Government can help with both funding to help the move to synthetics and with grant aid to employ specialist consultants to advise on drainage and turf quality for clubs wishing to remain with the traditional grass.

In the case of synthetic pitches the link clubs will forge with the local community for additional use will surely fall under some funded community aid project at the WAG.

Playing standards and Youth Development

There has in my personal opinion been a vast improvement in playing standards with more WPL players moving to higher levels both in the UK and abroad.

For example Geoff Kellaway of Aberystwyth Town has played for Australian A-League side Melbourne Victory and a number of players have played in Finland during their summer season

To continue this improvement it is important that clubs look to the future by nurturing their own talent. As part of the Domestic and UEFA Licensing criteria all clubs must have a fully operational Academy and these get financial help from UEFA itself.

Running an Academy is a costly business and this is where the WAG can I believe help via its Coaching and Leadership initiative and via Sport Wales

In times of economic strain it is essential that young players are brought into the game at club level both from a social point of view and to enable the clubs to plan ahead.

Conclusion

The Welsh Premier League is our nation's flagship football competition but its growth is stunted by lack of funding.

The FAW have over recent years increased its support but unlike clubs in England very little other financial support is forthcoming. In England the Football Foundation, funded by the Premier League, The FA, Sport England and Government, support football at all levels.

Note that the Premier League is one of the partners involved. Their contribution comes from massive deals for TV coverage. Coverage available to Welsh customers of the pay-per-view channels but none of the revenue is passed on to Welsh football.

The WAG could break new ground here by questioning the fairness of this and approaching the powers involved that a percentage of this revenue should be made available to Welsh football.

Note also that the **UK** government gives money to football in England, but does not financially support the game in Wales. This must be queried

Despite what you may hear from supporters of the rugby code, Association Football is, from a participation and support point of view, the national sport of Wales. Let's treat it as such and I would ask the WAG to do its bit in supporting our Premier League.

CELG(4) WPL 06

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League

Response from Gareth Jones

Dear friends,

I would first like to thank the Committee for showing interest in the Welsh Premier League. During my time as Chair or Secretary of Carmarthen Town Football Club, this is the first time for this situation to arise.

In order to facilitate debate, I will follow the format set out in your original e-mail:

Footballing standards

As someone who has a varied background in the footballing world, I believe that the Premier League has led to an improvement in standards. By now, it is recognised as a league of quality, particularly in respect of those teams in the upper echelons. Clubs are having an opportunity to compete in European competitions, some more successfully than others.

By now, player quality has changed for the better. In the past, a relatively small group of good players was seen moving from club to club, based on the money on offer. These days, players have the opportunity to develop within their clubs and to attain a very high standard. It is a very good shop window for players of excellence.

League format

As a club, Carmarthen had doubts about cutting the league to 12 teams. We abstained from voting at the key meeting, but given that the Football Association of Wales (FAW) had the casting vote, we knew what the outcome would be!

After two seasons, the general feeling among our fans (based on detailed research) was that more teams were needed. They find watching the same clubs four times to be boring. The general view is that 16 is the ideal number of teams, along with a high-quality League Cup.

As a club, we have opposed the notion of summer football. Volunteers run the Carmarthen FA, and it is usually harder to get stewards and so forth in August. As a teacher, I would personally have no hope of securing time for football and a holiday!

Other practical reasons have been identified for not playing in the summer. Traditionally, our crowds are much smaller in August. Traffic is an issue when travelling on summer weekends. The pitches are hard, making it more difficult to play attractive football.

Our feeling is that there is scope for more midweek games, particularly in September and October. What is wrong with launching the league season on the bank holiday weekend at the end of August? There could be games on Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Monday, and these could be local fixtures in order to reduce travel problems.

Having a break in January is a very good idea. We could then have games on the Easter bank holiday. Easter Monday is a traditional football day in west Wales.

I would like to see more support for teams that reach European competitions. The FAW has expertise that could be of great value to these clubs e.g. providing a dietician. They could also secure competitive fixtures for these teams before they play. Maybe the teams could spend a weekend or more in Cardiff or at a special centre in order to prepare in greater detail.

The development and progress of players/coaches

The Premier League has spurred improvement in players and coaches. The work done by our academies is very valuable (two of our youth team members have been in the first team squad since Christmas). By standardising coaching qualifications, domestic and UEFA licences have compelled clubs to hire quality coaches. We now need support to maintain and promote the work done by the academies.

We feel that the impact that licences are having on the standard of team coaches in the Premier League needs to be looked at. Are these standards too high at present? It is very difficult for clubs to shoulder the cost of coaching coaches. The number of coaches that possess the necessary qualification is low, and these coaches are therefore scarce (thereby increasing their cost to a club!). We therefore suggest that officials look at this.

The quality of coaches has improved, but others need greater opportunities to obtain the same qualifications. The cost of pursuing a coaching course (an 'A' course costs more than £3,000, and a 'Pro' course more than £8,000) is out of individuals' reach. We suggest that an agreement is drawn up between the FAW and the coaches. The coaches would receive a grant for completing a course, and they would have to pay it back should they leave the club to which

they are tied before the end of a specific period of time. Until this happens, the quality of coaching will remain static. The league needs continuous new blood if it is to flourish.

We also feel that better use needs to be made of experienced coaches with the top qualifications. At present, they work for one club only. How about using their knowledge and skills by dispatching them to lower-placed teams in the league so that they can share their experiences? This could form a part of their continuous professional development.

There are many more opportunities for young players. There are representative teams at all levels, and they hold their own against representative teams from other countries. The academy system works, but there are clubs in the system that do not contribute fully to its activities, which has consequences.

External contributions

Although the clubs in the Premier League focus on their first teams, their contribution to local football is also very important.

One regret is the fact that players can no longer sign up to play for two clubs. It is not possible for a club like Carmarthen to maintain a large squad of players. In the past, we collaborated with other clubs to keep players fit and to develop young players who were too old for youth teams.

As a club, we are organising a football festival for primary schools during the summer term. Out of necessity in a rural setting, the teams will be mixed. We will collaborate with primary schools and participate in the Show Racism the Red Card initiative in order to raise awareness of contemporary problems in our society. We will also ensure that we comply with equal opportunities legislation. We are grateful for the licences in this regard.

The position of the Premier League in Welsh sport and within the media

This is dependent on personal attitudes. Personally, I feel that there is insufficient support for the Premier League within the corridors of the FAW. Positive support is provided by some members, but not by all. Until there is a positive relationship, the league will suffer.

We feel frustrated on occasions when decisions are made without consultation e.g. the decision regarding who is allowed to play in the Welsh Cup.

The league is criticised in the press. The lack of a team in south-east Wales is primarily responsible for this, as well as a lack of enterprise by the press in the west. How important are newspapers to young people these days?

Maybe the BBC is sulking because it lost the contract to broadcast Wales games! The clubs are not informed of what is going on. Is it the same state of affairs with the *Western Mail*?

We have to praise Rondo Media to the skies. Its coverage of live games on Saturday afternoons is superb. The programme *Sgorio* has been a part of football supporters' culture in Wales since before the establishment of the Welsh Premier League. Seeing Carmarthen's fixtures on the same programme as the likes of Barcelona lifts the heart. It is a shame that there is no financial value for the Premier League clubs in relation to the use of their resources for broadcasting live games.

An opportunity was missed when the Principality's sponsorship period came to an end. It is a Welsh company with Welsh products. One wonders whether enough work was done to ensure that the contract was extended. This is the time to ask what role is played by the FAW's marketing officer. No one has ever seen him Carmarthen, for him to share his skills!

We must also ask why an expert had to be recruited, using grant funds, for the 'Grow Your Club' project. Our last meeting was very similar to a GCSE or AS business class! Would it have been possible to obtain a grant for improving broadcasting facilities?

The clubs

I am not in a position to comment on other clubs.

In Carmarthen, the club is run by volunteers. The club runs the following teams: under 12s, under 14s, under 16s, under 19s, the second team (in the Carmarthenshire league) and the team that plays in the Welsh Premier League. In addition, we run development sessions for pupils of primary school age.

The club is a key part of the community. To date, we have built partnerships with Bro Myrddin Welsh Comprehensive School, Carmarthen Quins Rugby Club and Carmarthenshire County Council in order to search for funds to improve leisure facilities in the town. It is a very ambitious project.

Our club is used as a community centre, with more than 20 different organisations using it at different times. It hosts arts groups, a computer group, weight-loss classes, and social events organised by parents' groups to raise money for local schools and charities. The club adopts one local charity annually (the local hospice is receiving our contributions this year).

Our relationship with the businesses of the town is very positive. Without their support, Carmarthen would not be a member of the Welsh Premier League. It is tough to maintain this through the work of volunteers.

We are very fortunate in respect of resources. We have a stand that holds more than 1,000, car parks on both sides of the field and changing rooms hopefully on the way, thanks to the generosity of the FAW. The club has a lease for over 90 years at Richmond Park. Regrettably, the Romans had once settled there, and any development these days ensures a visit by CADW.

Work is needed to improve the quality of the pitch. Again, volunteers are busy, but without the relevant human and mechanical resources, the pitch is not going to improve in the near future unless the relevant authorities invest.

Improvements in the quality of pitches are primarily going to raise the standard of games and raise the league's profile. Games are broadcast live at present, and some of our pitches are not good enough (I include Richmond Park in Carmarthen in this observation). Investment is needed in our pitches.

An annual budget is set for our teams, and detailed inspection and monitoring activities are conducted. We must ensure that there is no overspend.

At present, we are looking into the possibility of establishing a charity section at the club that will be able to attract more grants or gain access to additional sources of capital. We are grateful to Carmarthenshire Council for its support in this respect and also to Llandovery Rugby Club.

2012 Strategic Plan

The strategic plan is welcomed in general terms. The Premier League does not occupy a prominent position, but there is time to flesh this out in the future. The clubs must have a voice in doing this. This could foster the appearance of a much more professional league, in which everyone co-operates.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to respond to the Committee. This is only the opinion of one club, but it is an entirely honest one. We are very proud to be members of the Welsh Premier League and want it to flourish in the future. A successful national league is key to the development of football in Wales.

GARETH JONES

Document is Restricted

Carl Sargeant AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Minister for Local Government and Communities



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref CS/1448/12
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29th April 2012

Communities Equality and Local Government Committee meeting 29 March – Update on action points and unasked questions

Thank you for inviting me to the recent Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee meeting held on 29 March. As you are aware, I agreed to provide the Committee with a note on the following action points:

- The structure of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG)
- Write to those local authorities who have not completed the Equal Pay Settlement process and update the Committee with the predicted timescales
- Provide a progress update on the new role of the Partnership Council for Wales
- Provide an update, as appropriate, on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters
- Update on the progression with the Tier 4 planned proposals and the dual diagnostics issues.

Please find this enclosed at Annex 1.

Also enclosed, at Annex 2, are responses to the nine questions that were not reached during the meeting.

I will write to you again shortly when I have received further advice and information from my officials in relation to the timescale for completion of the Equal Pay Settlement process across local authorities.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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Correspondence: Carl.Sargeant@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Printed on 100% recycled paper

I will send you an update on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters in October.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Carl'.

Carl Sargeant AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Minister for Local Government and Communities

Update from the Minister for Local Government and Communities on action points from the Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee held on 29 March 2012

Action Point	Update
The Structure of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG)	The membership of the Public Service Leadership Group (PSLG) is based primarily on senior public service leaders either leading national programmes of work (Asset Management and Procurement; Organisational Development and Simpson Implementation and Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups), or acting as a regional leader of collaboration in one of six specific areas: North Wales; Mid & West Wales; Gwent; Cardiff & Vale; Cwm Taf; and Western Bay. Key partners in the public service reform agenda – trade unions, the third sector, Wales Audit Office (WAO), Welsh Local Government Association, and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives also contribute through membership of the PSLG. The Terms of Reference of the PSLG, which includes the full membership, together with information on the National Work Programmes and meetings of the PSLG are available on the Welsh Government website via the following link: www.wales.gov.uk/improvingpublicservices The PSLG also provides oversight of the implementation of the Compact for Change agreed between Welsh Government and Local Government. In addition to political endorsement through the Partnership Council for Wales, individual local authorities have been ensuring formal local agreement. At the

	time of producing the evidence paper for the Committee Paper, indications received were that all authorities had completed this process ;m y latest information is that in fact one authority has not yet done so and now expect s this to take place after the local authority elections In May I thought it might also be worth noting that progress on implementing this Compact is well underway and I expect to report on this to the Assembly in the Autumn.
The Minister agreed to write to the local authorities who hadn't completed the Equal Pay Settlement process and update the Committee with their predicted timescales	Advice to the Minister for Local Government and Communities is in hand and will be submitted shortly. Letters to these authorities will issue shortly.
Progress update on the new role of the Partnership Council for Wales	The Welsh Government secured the agreement of the PCfW that its operation and membership should be reviewed, and an approach to the review was agreed at the PCfW meeting on 21 July 2011. The results of the review were reported back to the PCfW on 5 December 2011, with the proposals endorsed by the PCfW. The key proposals for the Partnership Council for Wales include: ○ creation of an expanded Partnership Council which represents the public service as a whole – membership will include health representation and observers from Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA); WAO and Trade Unions ○ formalised Ministerial bilateral arrangements with representative organisations of the local government

	family ○ the inclusion of Deputy Ministers as formal members ○ streamlining of the finance structures whilst recognising the need for expert technical input ○ creation of a Reform Delivery Group which will be responsible in particular for scrutinising and ensuring progress on the Compact. The Partnership Council for Wales (Local Health Boards and National Health Service Trusts) Order 2012 was laid on 9 March 2012, and came into force on 3 April 2012. The Order will enable the membership of the PCfW to be amended, specifying Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales as local authorities for the purpose of membership of the PCfW. Following the local government elections, new members for the PCfW will need to be appointed and refreshed terms of reference agreed.
When appropriate an update on the monitoring and outcomes of the Communities First clusters	The first applications are now being received for proposals to form Communities First Clusters. These will be assessed internally over the next few months, including taking them to meetings of an internal Assessment Panel with representatives from many Welsh Government Divisions. As well as commenting on individual applications, the panel will be asked to advise on appropriate Performance Measures relating to their various areas of expertise. This process should therefore help substantially with the development of the overall monitoring framework.

	The assessment process is likely to take about six months, by which time the framework should also be substantially further advanced. I will provide a further update in October 2012.
Update on the progression with the Tier 4 planned proposals and the dual diagnostics issues	The Minister for Local Government and Communities wrote to Commissioners and Providers of Residential Rehabilitation and Detoxification Services (Tier 4) in March 2012, reminding them of the significant capital funding on Welsh Tier 4 services provided by the Welsh Government over the last 5 years and the importance of maximising these services wherever possible. The Minister also commissioned the Substance Misuse Strategy Implementation Branch to undertake a thorough evaluation of current assessment and referrals procedures by both Commissioners and Providers in order to:- ○ develop an overview of area pathways into Tier 4 ○ develop an understanding of why clients are being referred outside of Wales ○ establish whether value for money is being achieved. Following the transfer of responsibilities to Health in April 2012, progress on this work will be reported to the Minister for Health and Social Services in September 2012. In terms of the issue of dual diagnosis when individual have co morbid problems with both substance misuse and mental health problems, a Service Framework to meet the needs of this group of people was re issued in 2010. This matter is of significant

	importance and is also being addressed in the Draft Mental Health Strategy Together for Mental Health, which has identified this as a key area that requires further work. Cross agency working is particularly important and it is anticipated that services will work closely to improve outcomes in this area.
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**Communities Equality and Local Government Committee Meeting -
29 March 2012**

**Responses to unasked questions from the Minister for Local
Government and Communities**

1. What he believes the introduction of Single Integrated Plans will achieve and how will they improve public services at local level.

- Single integrated plans will mean a significant reduction in bureaucracy that makes it easier for partners to focus on outcomes not processes, and ensure that they are making a real difference for local people and communities.
- The single integrated plan will replace four existing plans and strategies, an overall reduction from 88 to 22 by April 2013.
- There will also be a reduction in unnecessary partnerships by at least a half. This means real and substantial resource savings for our partners.
- There is widespread welcome for this approach and partners are already reporting significant progress
- This policy has been developed with our partners. It builds on good practice in Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, Powys, Denbighshire and elsewhere.
- This approach will enable local service boards to focus on strategic issues. They need to make sure the public is getting effective services and value for money in difficult financial circumstances.

2. How the Single Integrated Plans will tie in with the work local authorities and others are undertaking as part of the Welsh Government's collaboration agenda.

- The strategic needs assessment which underpins all integrated plans will provide a robust evidence base for informing the commissioning of services on the collaborative footprint, as well as the benchmark for scrutinising those services for effective local delivery.

3. What is his preferred delivery method for crisis loans and Community Care Grants when they are devolved

- I am currently considering a range of delivery options.
- The delivery method will be informed by the responses we have received to our consultation on the successor arrangements. The closing date for consultations was 30 March 2012.

4. Progress made by the Welsh Government implementing the *Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales* and the contribution of the Expert Group on the needs of the Armed Forces community in Wales.

- One of my key actions to raise awareness of priorities given to veterans was the publication of the Package of Support for the Armed Forces Community in Wales which I launched in a meeting with the Royal British Legion last November.
- It is also an issue that I have discussed with the armed forces community through my Expert Group. Actions have included:-
 - Articles in the Family Federations magazines.
 - Further promotion of the Package of Support during the Armed Forces Community Conference held in February 2012.
 - A planned meeting of interested parties in North Wales, to be hosted by my officials.
 - A dedicated section on the Welsh Government website which not only promotes the Package of Support but also has contact details for the Families Federations and dedicated charities in Wales.
- I am now considering, advised by my Expert Group on the needs of the Armed Forces Community in Wales, ways of monitoring the impact of Package of Support on the Armed Forces Community.
- We have already delivered on many of the commitments in the Package of Support including:
 - £485,000 each year to fund the All-Wales Mental Health and Well-being Service for Veterans.
 - Since 1 October 2011, seriously injured service personnel and seriously injured veterans resident in Wales have been eligible to apply to their local authority for a bus pass entitling them to free travel on local bus services throughout Wales.
 - Regulations to extend eligibility in Wales for the Blue Badge Scheme came into force on 1 August 2011. The regulations extended eligibility criteria to include injured war veterans and injured armed forces personnel.

- Introduced changes to Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) exempting both War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Payments from the means test for DFGs.

What work has been undertaken to raise awareness of the priority given to veterans and of the specialist services available to them, both amongst service providers and veterans themselves.

- An Armed Forces Community Conference was held on the 8 February following a commitment made by the Expert Group to promote the community covenants across Local Authorities and to discuss wider issues across the Armed Forces community.
- My Armed Forces Community Expert Group consists of representatives of the three Services, along with representatives of the Army, Naval and RAF Families Federations, and of third-sector organisations who are active in supporting the Armed Forces community in Wales.
- Activity through the Group has also resulted in a review by Health Inspectorate Wales of the adequacy, availability and accessibility of healthcare for our Armed Forces community in Wales. It is due to report to Ministers in April, will draw primarily on the experiences of the community itself and contribute to an assessment of whether existing services are meeting their needs effectively.
- I am extending membership on the Group to include representation from local government to encourage and support developments locally throughout Wales.

5. What further information can he provide on the *Prevention of Youth Offending Bill* and the proposed timetable for its introduction, and whether the Minister is confident that Community Safety partnerships will be sufficiently well resourced to contribute to its implementation.

The youth justice system in Wales has achieved a great deal in recent years, with reductions in the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system and in the number of young people in custody.

However we believe the best way to reduce re-offending and keep children and young people out of the youth justice system is to stop them offending in the first place; this can only be achieved by devolved and non-devolved services working together.

The youth justice system is one of the few key areas of policy relating to children and young people which is not devolved in Wales. Responsibility

for policies in relation to education, housing, substance misuse, health, and social services and the needs of looked after children are all devolved to Welsh Ministers. Strengthening these arrangements would ensure greater accountability of all partners for children and young people in the youth justice system so they can access a range of welfare, educational and other services.

We will be consulting on a Prevention of Youth Offending (Wales) Bill which aims to:

- Reduce the number of children and young people entering the youth justice system.
- Provide better support for children and young people in the youth justice system.
- Strengthen the accountability and co-operation of local and regional partnerships in their support for young people while they are in the youth justice system.
- Provide better support, aftercare and re-integration services for children and young people after a community or custodial sentence.

These policy options will be consulted upon in the summer of 2012 and the response will determine our final approach to increase influence over the youth justice system in Wales which may be through the introduction of a 'Prevention of Youth Offending (Wales) Bill'. The Bill, if required, is expected to be introduced in 2014.

Any potential changes will be fully assessed for their impact as any proposals are developed. The current Safer Communities Fund, which provides funding to Community Safety Partnerships to support projects that are aimed at preventing young people from offending, will be directed to support any potential changes.

6. The key priorities of the Welsh Government's *Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012* and how these will be achieved in the context of budget constraints on Fire and Rescue Services.

- I published the Fire and Rescue National Framework on 27 March. It sets out my vision and priorities for FRAs in Wales and describes what the Welsh Government expects of the FRAs and their role in the context of the wider public sector. The focus continues to be on improving outcomes for citizens.
- Budgets are constrained and FRAs are of course funded through the council tax precept. FRAs will have to therefore collaborate and focus on measuring results (and prioritising on those activities which are shown to have results).

- FRAs will need to ensure that services are targeted and that they become better at identifying those most at risk in our society. To do this priorities for the FRAs will be:
 - to actively implement opportunities to work together, and with other emergency services, wider public sector and third sector;
 - to identify and implement opportunities for shared services;
 - to review their existing and new collaborations and partnerships to ensure that they are achieving the required outcomes, improved service delivery and/or increased value for money;
 - to ensure service levels meet local needs, striving for greater improvements at a time when budgets will come under even greater pressure;
 - to clearly identify outcomes and actively manage performance;
 - to seek innovation and new ways of working to make the most of the talents, expertise and resources that the FRAs possess.
- Ultimately however we might at some point moving forward need to consider the shape and structure of our FRAs in Wales.

7. Whether he can provide further details on the development of the anti-poverty action plan, including details of consultations with external stakeholders.

- A Written Statement on tackling poverty was issued on 7 March, in the name of all Welsh Ministers and Deputy Ministers, which reinforces the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling poverty.
- The content of the Tackling Poverty Action Plan is being developed with input and dialogue from key stakeholders as the Welsh Government recognises we can only tackle poverty in a collaborative approach.
- The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services regularly holds meetings with the End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) to discuss Welsh Government priorities to tackling child poverty.
- Officials are also in the process of establishing an independent External Advisory Group that reports to the Minister for Local Government and Communities and will comprise a panel of experts in the field of poverty. The Public Appointments process is currently underway and a formal announcement, confirming appointed members, will be made following the completion of the appointments exercise.
- It is anticipated that the External Advisory Group will provide expert, evidence based advice on the implementation and further

policy requirements necessary to deliver the Tackling Poverty Action Plan in Wales.

8. What discussions the Minister and his officials have had with the UK Government on welfare reform and legal aid reform.

Welfare Reform

- The Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews is lead Minister for Welfare Reform and there is a Ministerial Task and Finish Group in place to ensure cross-portfolio issues can be taken considered.
- Ministers and officials are now working through a number of DWP fora to identify the impact of the changes for Wales and to represent Welsh Government views and concerns. I understand that the Minister for Education and Skills met with Lord Freud, the UK Government Minister for Welfare Reform, as recent as recently as 21 March 2012.
- The Welsh Government has repeatedly raised concerns about the impact of the Welfare Reform Act on Wales both directly with the Department of Work and Pensions and publically within the Assembly.
- My officials are having ongoing discussions with the UK Government at official level as we determine a successor scheme for the Social Fund and new arrangements for a replacement Council Tax benefit scheme. Both schemes have recently been the subject of consultation exercised seeking views on a range of delivery options here in Wales.

Legal Aid Reform

- In the early stages of the proposals on legal aid reform I wrote to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice expressing concerns about the changes.
- The Welsh Government issued a formal response, at official level, in February 2012 on the detail set out in the consultation document on the proposals for change and specifically highlighted the impact on advice services in relation to debt and welfare benefits; domestic abuse; housing and children and families.

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Tai, Adfywio a Threftadaeth
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref SF-HL-1332-12

Ann Jones AM
Chair
Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel

30 April 2012

Dear Ann.

I was pleased to attend the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee for its general scrutiny session on Thursday 29 March. As agreed, I am now providing further information on Empty Homes policy, Co-operative Housing and grants available for sports clubs.

I am aware that some Members have suggested that a Wales-wide empty property strategy is needed. However, I am not convinced that this is necessary. We now have a nationally coordinated programme of action, *Houses into Homes*, to tackle empty properties. This will effectively serve the same purpose as an empty home strategy without having a new, separate strategy that runs parallel to our national housing strategy.

Most local authorities across Wales have their own empty homes strategies and these are supported by the revised guidance the Welsh Government introduced in September 2010. I do not wish to burden local authorities with a plethora of strategies, particularly when our National Housing Strategy *Improving Lives and Communities: Homes in Wales* covers the issue of empty homes and it has also been discussed extensively at the Housing Strategy Implementation Programme Board.

I also see an important role for the *Houses into Homes* national steering group in this respect. The group's membership will include the six chairs of each collaborative working area along with Welsh Government officials and representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association. The group will monitor the initiative's progress and also advise on target setting.

As you know, I am also very interested in developing co-operative housing in Wales as an additional method of delivering affordable and accessible housing. In fact we have made firm commitments in our Programme for Government to look at how we can support co-operative housing, including a new form of co-operative home ownership and also whether there is an opportunity in the Housing Bill to break down any legislative barriers to this approach to housing.

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There is a rich history of co-operative housing in Wales, going back to the Garden Village movement at the turn of the century and more recently the formation of community mutual's resulting from a number of large scale voluntary stock transfers.

We have brought together key stakeholders from both the housing and co-operative sectors to agree how we will approach this work and we have set out criteria that we think co-operative housing should meet in Wales. This includes how it will provide democratic and community based involvement, choice and flexibility, as well as demonstrating the quality of place through social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The group has also been the conduit for a number of key pioneer co-operative housing schemes that range in size, location and type and we are working in conjunction with the Wales Co-operative Centre and a number of other key stakeholders to explore how we can support these pioneer schemes, to bring forward delivery as soon as possible.

Some of these pioneers could make efficient use of public land, including our own Welsh Government land and alongside work we are doing to try and secure new sources of longer term funding for equity based co-operative housing, I am hopeful we can be innovative in our approach and provide a new affordable and sustainable way for people to live.

Finally, with regards to grants available to sports clubs in Wales, Sports Wales provides information on its website about its grant schemes, for example, Community Chest. Other sources of funding which may help fund sport related projects include the Communities Facilities & Activities Programme (CFAP), Regeneration Funding, Communities First and Big Lottery Funding. Elsewhere, local authorities offer separate grants schemes to assist in sport related projects. I intend to give consideration to the feasibility of how all these funding sources might be publicised further.

I trust that I have addressed the Committee's queries in full.



Huw Lewis AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Tai, Adfywio a Threftadaeth
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage