

**Sue Essex AM***Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services**Y Gweinidog dros Gyllid, Llywodraeth Leol a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus*DEBATE ON THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

3 NOVEMBER 2004

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Your ref:

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
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Dear William

I promised that I would respond to you in writing concerning the points you raised in the recent debate on the Local Government Partnership Scheme Annual Report 2003-2004.

I turn firstly to the point you made about police funding. Responsibility for the police is not devolved. Nevertheless, I understand that Edwina Hart AM has tabled a paper about police funding for discussion at the next meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. The paper will explain that police authorities receive their non-hypothecated funding from government in two streams. Firstly, there is the police grant which is paid by the Home Office. In addition there is a revenue support grant (RSG) and non-domesticated rates (NDR) which are paid via the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in England and the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales. In addition to these two streams, there is a series of specific grants, which the Home Office is responsible for allocating but which Welsh police authorities may bid for. In terms of the element of funding provided by the Welsh Assembly Government, the RSG provision for Welsh Police authorities in 2005-2006 gives a 4% increase over provision for 2004-2005. This is however subject to adjustment to take into account transfers to the Home Office for central initiatives.

The Assembly Government produced an early local government settlement last year and this was the first time the final settlement had been produced before Christmas and was some 6-8 weeks earlier than in previous years.

I have written to Sir Michael Lyons requesting an early meeting so as to set out the Assembly Government's view of the balance of funding local government in the context of the Terms of Reference of Sir Michael's review.

The Welsh Assembly Government is pursuing a number of initiatives in relation to Gypsy Travellers, following last year's "Review of Service Provision for Gypsies and Travellers" undertaken by the Assembly's Equality of Opportunity Committee. On accommodation aspects, the Assembly Government has consulted on revised guidance on managing unauthorised camping and will be issuing the finalised guidance very shortly. We are seeking tenders for



research to examine the demand for, and supply of, Gypsy-Traveller accommodation in Wales. We will be resuming the twice-yearly count of Gypsy-Traveller caravans and there will be consultation on revision of the Welsh Office Circular 2/94: "Gypsy Sites and Planning". The Housing Bill received Royal Assent on 18 November and this new legislation will ensure that local authorities take a strategic approach in determining and meeting the needs of Gypsy-Travellers. It will place a duty on each county/county borough council to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in its area, and to produce a strategy as part of its overall housing strategy detailing how these needs will be met. It may be opportune to discuss these matters at the Partnership Council. In terms of timing however it may be better to await the results of the research project on accommodation which is expected next Summer.

The recently announced local government settlement reflects increased pressures faced by fire and rescue authorities in Wales. In addition, we are in discussions with the ODPM over the transfer of resources following devolution, this will be in addition to our existing £5m Community Fire Safety budget which supports the development of fire safety initiatives, such as arson reduction teams, in Wales. Taken together the Assembly Government is ensuring that the service in Wales is adequately placed to meet the new demands placed upon it. The National Framework for the Service emphasizes the importance of training as part of the Integrated Personal Development System. In addition to the first class facilities and training provided nationally by the Fire Service College, the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority received agreement from the Assembly Government and the ODPM to proceed with a new dedicated training center, a PFI project, to which the Assembly Government will provide over £15m of revenue support. The project will meet the training requirements of both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel of South Wales FRS; disseminate best practice and improve fire safety and fire awareness within the region through the provision of education and training services.

Although housing benefit is not devolved, the Assembly is monitoring the effects of the pathfinder project to establish whether the proposed reforms produce anything which may impact on devolved housing policy. Officials are liaising closely with officers from Conwy and adjoining authorities in North Wales. In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has commissioned independent research to evaluate the outcome of the project and is producing a series of interim reports. It may be appropriate to discuss this issue with the Partnership Council but much will depend on the outcome of ministerial discussions between Edwina Hart AM and DWP ministers.

I am unsure if you are requesting discussion of Project Dragon at the Partnership Council or the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. I have sought advice from officials and I believe it would be more appropriate for this to be discussed at the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, of which I understand you are a member.

Best wishes,

Sue FSSG