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EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE

Date: 5 February 2004

Time: 09:30

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

Title: Refugees and Asylum Seekers - Outline of Assembly Government work

Purpose

1. This paper provides an initial summary of the current activities of the Equality Policy Unit to support Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Action

2. The Committee is invited to note the contents of the paper.

Background

3. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to providing support to the most vulnerable members of society, including Refugees and Asylum Seekers. A number of schemes and support mechanisms are in place to achieve this aim.

4. The Minister for Social Justice & Regeneration announced the establishment of The All Wales Refugee Policy Forum and the International Sense of Place Conference in early November 2003.

5. The 'Sense of Place' international event was held on the 24-27 November 2003. It was organised by the British Council with the assistance of a number of partners and sponsors, including the Welsh Assembly Government. The event aimed to highlight the issues of displacement and integration and

provide examples of the work of refugees and asylum seekers themselves. It also aimed to showcase the Council's cultural work around displacement and integration, including two specific projects in Cardiff.

6. The All Wales Refugee Policy Forum was established to consider the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in Wales, to explore how to create more appropriate provision and how to promote better community relations. (A copy of the Forum's Proposed Terms of Reference, a proposal for Research and an Information Background Document are attached at Annex A and Annex B).

7. One of the key issues arising from the first meeting of the Forum was the need to address public and media perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees. The Minister agreed that a national campaign will be undertaken in 2004 to challenge negative stereotypes of a number of minority groups, in particular refugees and asylum seekers.

8. The Assembly's Race Equality Scheme is the key strategic vehicle for addressing refugee and asylum seeker issues. It makes specific reference to the needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers recognising this as a priority area. The draft Scheme, which has been subject to widespread consultation, including with asylum seekers and refugees themselves, includes the following commitments :

"The Race Equality Scheme aims to address the needs of Refugee and Asylum Seekers and Gypsy-Travellers by:

- Ensuring that there is a strategic response to the needs of these communities by mainstream and statutory agencies working in partnership with community based agencies
- Facilitating the settlement and "integration" of these communities into mainstream Welsh society
- Ensuring inclusion and engagement of these communities
- Ensuring that there is a sound evidence base to inform actions based on current needs of these communities and the agencies that are working with them derived through research, service review and evaluation
- Increasing awareness on the needs, experiences and perception of these communities
- Facilitating the development of agencies that are working with these groups
- Providing a high profile to the social justice and human rights issues which concern these communities".

9. The formal consultation on the Race Equality Scheme has now ended and departmental actions, including in relation to asylum seekers and refugees, are being revised and finalised. The finalised Race Equality Scheme will be made available to the Equality of Opportunity Committee following the Easter Recess.

10. In addition to establishing the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum and addressing of needs of refugees and asylum seekers through the Race Equality Scheme, the National Assembly has implemented a

number of other initiatives. For example, funding has been made available to Local Education Authorities to provide educational services to asylum seekers and their children. The Education & Lifelong Learning department also provides grants to minority groups including asylum seekers and refugees.

11. Grants have also been made available to voluntary and community groups for example, to the Welsh Refugee Council and the Central African Association.

12. The Housing Directorate is very much involved in addressing the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Next month they will issue guidance for consultation on the housing and support needs for refugees and asylum seekers. This guidance will cover asylum law, the current system of dispersal and good practice in delivering services as well as looking at measures to facilitate the effective integration of asylum seekers who are granted refugee status.

13. The Housing Directorate has also included refugee integration as a theme

in its Homelessness and BME Housing Grant Programmes and has set up

a Housing Sub Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum.

14. The NHS Directorate has undertaken a number of initiatives. In particular it provides funding and runs the Welsh Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advisory Group. One of the main aims of this group is to draw attention to the issues facing asylum seekers and refugees, in particular tackling the language barriers that they face when accessing health services.

15. Another essential criteria to integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the Welsh community is access to employment. The organisation 'Displaced People in Action' supports refugees through activities such as recruiting doctors and developing volunteering in Cardiff.

16. The Assembly has also agreed to provide training placements to young refugees as part of their work placement requirements.

17. This summary paper highlights some of the current systems and initiatives in place to provide support and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. It is acknowledged that there is a substantial way to go to fully meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, thus enabling effective integration in Wales.

Recommendation

18. That the Committee notes the contents of the paper.

Contact point

Draft Terms of Reference

All Wales Refugee Policy Forum

Asylum Seekers and Refugee Integration in Wales

Immigration and asylum issues are reserved to the Home Office. The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for the provision of services to refugees and asylum seekers once they arrive in Wales. The Assembly works in partnership with the Home Office to take forward successful integration of refugee and asylum seekers into Welsh society.

Welsh Refugee Integration Forum

- The Forum will report to the Minister for Social Justice, Edwina Hart AM.

It will be chaired by the Head of the Equality Policy Unit, National Assembly for Wales.

- A first meeting has been arranged for 19 November 2003 to discuss and agree with key stakeholders the remit and priorities of the proposed Forum.
- The All Wales Refugee Policy Forum will work in parallel to the National Refugee Integration Forum which was established to take forward "Full and Equal Citizens" published by the Home Office in 2001.
- The Forum will meet at least 4 times a year.
- It will have an initial life span of 12 months and its operation will then be reviewed.

Remit

The Forum will work to ensure a more strategic, co-ordinated and effective approach is taken to supporting the successful integration of refugees and asylum seekers on a national level across Wales.

It will be a practical and outcome driven mechanism.

Specific Aims

The Forum will:

- Assist refugees and asylum seekers to successfully integrate in Wales.
- Promote positive images of refugees and asylum seekers as members of Welsh society.
- Collect and disseminate examples of good practice.

Key Outcomes

1. Produce a comprehensive Review of the position and situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales.

(Its findings and recommendations to form the basis of an Assembly wide Action Plan. This will be incorporated within the Assembly's corporate Race Equality Action Plans. Progress reports will be presented to the Equality of Opportunity Committee.)

2. Implementation of key Actions agreed in the Action Plan, particularly, raising awareness of the needs and circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers and promoting positive images and positive relationships.
3. If possible, develop a specific good practice Pilot project in either Wrexham, Cardiff, Swansea or Newport.
4. Explore the opportunities to support the humanitarian needs of destitute asylum seekers.
5. Identify opportunities to support qualified refugees and asylum seekers to secure appropriate jobs in Wales.
6. Capture and disseminate best practice in terms of refugee integration UK wide and Wales wide.
7. Provide support for capacity building of the refugee and asylum seeker support groups in Wales.
8. Submit at least one major funding application to support above priorities.
9. Evaluate the work of the Forum and the Subgroups.

Membership

Given the strategic policy and delivery remit of this group, membership will consist of senior decision-makers from within the Assembly and key public sector agencies across Wales. Advisory positions will be offered to key organisations representing asylum seekers and refugees. An additional Advisory

subgroup of asylum seekers and refugees will also be set up to feed into the work of the Forum.

Subgroups

Six subgroups are to be established reflecting key policy areas. These groups will include additional membership from a wider range of specialist groups.

- Accommodation and Housing
- Community Development/Safety/Justice
- Health and Social Services
- Employment and Lifelong Learning
- Children and Young People
- Media/Information and Communication

Welsh Refugee and Asylum Seekers - Proposed Research

Introduction

This note provides a brief overview of the aims and objectives of research proposed on Refugee and Asylum Seekers in Wales.

Aims

A research project is proposed to comprehensively identify current issues in relation to Refugee and Asylum Seekers in Wales and develop a reliable and up to date evidence base to inform the development of policy and services across Wales.

The research will investigate the full range of social policy, welfare and humanitarian issues, which concern refugees and asylum seekers and will involve all relevant stakeholders in the process. It will also identify the needs of policy makers and service providers in particular issues related to co-ordination and integration of activities in Wales.

Methodology

The following range of quantitative and qualitative approaches will be utilised:

- Literature and policy review

- Review of secondary data
- Mapping Exercise
- Structured Qualitative Interviews with Refugee and Asylum Seekers
- Semi-Structured Interviews with key informants
- Focus Groups with refugee and asylum seekers and practitioners and policy officers

Outcomes

The following outcomes are expected:

- Identification of broader national and local context-key issues and themes
- Identification of full extent and nature of activity in Wales related to refugee and asylum seekers
- Development of a database of good practice initiatives in Wales and in the UK
- Comprehensive identification of social demographic description and profile of refugee and asylum seekers in Wales
- Identification of the experiences and perception of refugee and asylum seekers in Wales
- Comprehensive identification of needs of refugee and asylum seekers in Wales in relation to social, welfare and humanitarian issues
- Identification of key issues and themes for statutory and voluntary sector agencies and workers in Wales in relation to refugee and asylum seekers
- Presentation of findings and recommendations to the Equal Opportunities Committee