

# Equality of Opportunity Committee

## EOC(2)-01-07(p5)

**Date: Wednesday 24 January 2006-12-07**

**Time: 09:30 – 12:30**

**Venue: Committee Room 3 The Senedd**

**Title: Issues relating to Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

### **1. Purpose**

1.1 To provide Committee Members with an update on issues and work undertaken regarding Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Wales.

### **2. Summary / Recommendation**

2.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the paper.

### **3. Background**

3.1 The Chair of the Equality of Opportunity Committee has requested an update for Committee on Asylum and Refugee issues in Wales.

3.2 The Minister for Social Justice & Regeneration last provided an update on these issues for Committee Members on 23 September 2004.

### **4. Refugee Inclusion Strategy**

4.1 The Refugee Inclusion Strategy for Wales sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's vision and 3 year strategy for achieving Refugee inclusion in Wales. It also sets out the core principles which will underpin this work.

4.2 The evidence base for the Strategy was developed through focus group research; a comprehensive literature review; questionnaire feedback; workshops and interviews with key stakeholders. The Strategy is placed within a policy and legislative context, taking into account the profile of Refugee and Asylum Seeking and receiving communities in Wales and work already undertaken to date.

4.3 The Welsh Assembly Government will work with partners to deliver the Strategy and will continue to seek ongoing advice from those with expertise in this area. The document sets out its overall arrangements for doing this.

4.4 Cabinet agreed the Refugee Inclusion Strategy on 19 June 2006 and agreed to go out to consultation. This consultation began on 3 November and will target consultation through 3 mechanisms:

- An invitation to all interested parties to provide written feedback on the draft strategy. This will be done via the Assembly Government website, email and hard copy letters and distributed widely through relevant networks across civil society, the statutory and private sectors. Responses will be sent directly to Assembly officials.
- Two consultation events targeted at all partners, stakeholders and interested parties. One will be held in South Wales (to capture dispersal areas Swansea, Newport and Cardiff) and a smaller event in North Wales to enable input from Wrexham in January 2007.
- The executive summary and the recommendations will be translated into five languages (Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Somali) and targeted consultation sessions with asylum seekers, refugees and Refugee Community Organisations which will be facilitated by Refugee Voice Wales and The Welsh Refugee Council have been arranged.

4.5 In addition, a group of senior officials and external stakeholders to oversee the consultation process, the costing and continued development of the strategy and action plan has been established. This group will report to the Minister for Social Justice & Regeneration. The first meeting of this official group was held on 10 October.

## **5. All Wales Refugee Policy Forum**

5.1 In November 2003, the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum was established by the Minister for Social Justice & Regeneration. It is chaired by the Minister and ensures that a more strategic, co-ordinated and effective approach is taken to support the successful integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers on a national level across Wales. The Forum initiated the work which has led to the publication of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy.

5.2 The Forum is a multi-agency group which brings together representatives from across Wales and officials from across Assembly Departments. The Forum is an important means for dialogue between the Welsh Assembly Government and its various stakeholders and partners.

## **6. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)**

6.1 In the summer the Home Office was due to consult with Local Authorities on the new reforms for UASC. The process was delayed to allow for further discussions with Assembly officials on key elements. Assembly officials have fostered good working relationships with Home Office and have jointly agreed to look at how to develop a model that is suitable for Wales but still meets with Home Office aims.

6.2 The consultation paper has now been recast in a more positive light and gives clear proposals for future plans. It no longer invites expression of interest from local authorities to become specialist centres, but allows for comment on the vision for delivery of services to UASC. Key areas to note:

- Specialist Services - The document proposes setting up 50 - 60 specialist authorities across the UK, each caring for around 100 UASC. A specialist centre can include a group of authorities working in collaboration and would accommodate up to 300 children.
- The document makes clear that the care/pathway plan for UASC must prepare the child for return to their country of origin (less than 2% are granted leave to remain in the UK).
- After Care Services - The document clarifies the position of post 18 services - if asylum is not granted then the young person can not claim after care support (i.e. Care Leaver support under Children Act 1989).
- Component of the UASC Model - The document lists clear criteria on which authorities will be granted specialist services status.

### 6.3 Implications for Wales:

- In September 2006 there were 154 UASC in Wales, around 100 more in the last 18 months and that figure is expected to increase. Officials and key stakeholders have held discussions with the Home Office to clarify position in Wales and have a better understanding of each others expectations.
- The Home Office would like to work with the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh agencies to look at developing a Welsh model that could accommodate (probably via a phased approach) up to 300 UASC, and delivered through 2 or 3 specialist services centres. A stakeholder group has been established to work with Assembly officials and Home Office to develop a Welsh model. Its aim is to develop a model that meets the requirements of both the Welsh Assembly Government and the Home Office.

## 7. 'Uncertain Futures: Children Seeking Asylum in Wales' Report

7.1 Save the Children commissioned a team from the Universities of Glamorgan and Cardiff to undertake qualitative research with children and young people and with professionals working in the field. The report published in February 2005 is the first detailed study of its kind in Wales. It provides an analysis of the number of Asylum Seeking children in Wales and highlights the major issues affecting their lives. The study is based on interviews and group sessions with children and young people, and professionals working with young Asylum Seekers in Wales

7.2 The report identifies key messages for policy and practice in Wales and concludes with a number of recommendations. Fifteen of the recommendations are directed towards the Welsh Assembly Government and cut across Ministerial portfolios.

7.3 The All Wales Refugee Policy Forum considered the recommendations and how they should be taken forward and the Minister for Social Justice & Regeneration wrote to Keith Towler, Director of Save the Children Wales on 14 June 2006 to outline that the Assembly welcomes the Report.

7.4 The cross-cutting recommendations will be taken forward and monitored by the Children and Young People's Network, with progress being reported back to the Children and Young People's Sub-Committee periodically.

## **8. New Asylum Model (NAM)**

8.1 Details of the proposed New Asylum Model (NAM) were first published in the Government's Five Year Immigration Strategy in February 2005. The NAM is fundamentally a new tighter, faster procedure for processing claims with three key elements:

- Segmentation; new screening process changes the standardised processing principle and instead allocates claims to a processing route tailored to their characteristics, known as "segmentation".
- Fast Track Processing; non-detained cases will be dealt with more quickly and be closely
- Case Ownership. Asylum cases will be managed by a case owner through regular visits and reporting.

8.2 The Home Office began NAM implementation in May 2005 (with a pilot in Liverpool), and began processing all new claims in Wales under the NAM in September 2006. There will be two NAM team based in South Wales, each with about 25 staff. The Home Office expects the service to start in January 2007. Office space has been located in Newport Road, Cardiff, and negotiations are continuing with the landlord.

## **9. Refugee Housing Action Plan**

9.1 The Refugee Housing Action Plan was published in July 2006. The aim of the Action Plan is to help address the main barriers to integration from the housing perspective.

9.2 It was produced by the Housing Sub Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum. The Housing Sub Group found that the housing and related support needs of Refugees are similar to those of the host population and will vary within and between individuals and groups such as children and the elderly. The need for support however may apply more generally due to the trauma and isolation often experienced by Refugee groups. Therefore, whilst providers should be aware of the diversity and specialist nature of support that Refugees might need, it is likely that most will have relatively straightforward support requirements. These will often be linked to their higher need for social support, advocacy and advice.

9.3 The Housing Sub Group then identified the following as being the main barriers to integration from the housing perspective:

- Lack of awareness about the housing and support needs of Refugees in Wales;
- Lack of strategic planning afforded local authorities by the current Asylum dispersal system;
- Lack of promotion of good practice in preparing communities to receive Asylum Seekers/ Refugees;
- Absence of strategy for dealing with failed Asylum Seekers;
- Insufficient affordable housing;
- Inconsistent treatment of Refugees by local authorities in terms of allocations and homelessness;
- Inadequate or inappropriate support services, particularly in the period immediately following

a positive decision;

- Housing and support services are not responsive to Refugee needs
- Language/communication barriers;
- Lack of skilled or appropriately trained staff;
- Systems issues;
- Lack of dedicated funding for Refugee groups.

9.4 The Housing Sub Group developed this Action Plan to help address the main barriers to integration from the housing perspective. The plan was informed by the knowledge and experience of Sub Group members and by a survey of housing associations undertaken by the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations in November 2004.

9.5 The Action Plan is intended as a stand alone document to inform the development of responsive housing and related support services and to inform the All Wales Refugee Inclusion Strategy. A number of the actions contained within the Plan have been completed, some are being progressed and others are under consideration.

9.6 The consultation on the draft action plan took place between November 2005 and March 2006, to elicit responses that would inform consideration, receive views and provide suggestions for refinement of the final version. The consultation responses were then considered by the Housing Sub Group.

9.7 Since the publication of the Refugee Housing Action Plan in July 2006, the Housing Sub Group of the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum met in Cardiff. The Sub Group agreed that they would assume the monitoring role and work to ensure that progress is made against the actions contained within the action plan. The Sub Group also agreed that the refugee community itself should be directly represented at the meetings and officials from the Housing Directorate have been liaising with Refugee Voice Wales to ensure that this is actioned. The first review meeting of the Housing Sub Group was held in November and progress will be reported to the All Wales Refugee Policy Forum when it next meets on 29 January 2007.

## **10. Refugee & Asylum Seeker Research**

10.1 At present reliable data on numbers and distribution of Refugees in Wales, or on the barriers to integration that they may face is not held. This information is needed both to fulfil the general social inclusion objectives of the Welsh Assembly Government, but also, more specifically, to monitor the impact of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy for Wales.

10.2 The main reason for the lack of data on Refugees is that "Refugee" is not a category in the Census, in national surveys, and in data collected routinely by Local Authorities and other agencies. It is not possible to do a projection from the numbers of Asylum Seekers dispersed to Wales, since they may have decided to move out of Wales, after being granted Refugee status. Conversely, other Refugees may have moved into Wales.

10.3 The situation with regard to data on Asylum Seekers is somewhat better, in that we have data on

numbers and distribution from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), but there is an urgent need to monitor the racism and social exclusion suffered by this group, identified in Focus Groups with Refugees: Report to the Welsh Refugee Council.

10.4 Proposals are currently being drafted to compliment the planned research as listed below:

### **The Home Office Longitudinal Study on Refugees**

The survey will be a census of new refugees over a 2 year period, from December 2007 to November 2009. All refugees given leave to remain within this time period and aged 16 and over will be eligible for the survey. Wave 1 of the survey will be conducted within one month of a refugee receiving leave to remain in the country. Wave 2 will be carried out 6 months later, and Wave 3 a year after that (18 months after receiving leave to remain).

The questionnaire is based around the Home Office Indicators of Integration (Ager and Strang) and the measures, particularly the 'core' indicators, included where possible. Headline findings from the pilot are due in Autumn 2007.

### **Public Perceptions of Asylum Seekers and Refugees**

This research, part of the Social Justice and Regeneration Research Programme, is currently at an early planning stage. It would provide evidence on "Reported public attitudes to Refugees", one of the Home Office Indicators of Integration, and would also be relevant to "Perceived friendliness of local people (by Refugees and non-Refugees)". Research on attitudes to Asylum Seekers, carried out in Cardiff (2004/2005) by the Institute for Public Policy Research, found that people there were less likely than in other parts of England and Wales to express fears about an erosion of British identity. The authors of the research thought this was due to a positive sense of Welsh identity and to pride in the city following recent regeneration. This research is intended to find out if the same attitudes exist outside the capital city, and also if attitudes have changed, following the recent influx of economic migrants from Eastern Europe.

### **The Impact of Migration: A Review of the Social Evidence**

The proposed methodology includes focus groups and depth interviews with both migrant workers and members of host communities to ascertain attitudes to migrant workers. The relevance in this context is that there appear to be blurred boundaries in popular consciousness between migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees.

## **11. Financial Implications**

11.1 There are no financial implications arising from this paper.

## **12. Compliance**

12.1 There are no issues of compliance arising from this paper.

### **13. Cross-cutting Themes**

13.1 The issues around Refugees and Asylum Seekers cross over many different areas within the Assembly and outside, such as health, education, employment, housing and children and young peoples' issues.

### **14. Action for Committee**

14.1 To note this paper

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