

SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME - Assembly Government Evidence Paper by the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Purpose

To inform the Committee of progress on the Welsh Assembly Government's Single Equality Scheme.

Background

Equality is a cross-cutting issue and *One Wales* includes the vision of a fair and just Wales, in which all citizens are empowered to determine their own lives and to shape the communities in which they live. Our ambition is a Wales where everyone achieves their full human potential and everyone can live free from poverty, discrimination, fear or abuse.

The Welsh Assembly Government is required to publish Equality Schemes for gender, race and disability. The Schemes have been important drivers in our path towards mainstreaming equality into the policies, strategies and services developed and implemented by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The decision was taken by the Welsh Ministers to further develop the equality agenda beyond the individual Schemes by developing and publishing a single Scheme for gender, race and disability, together with religion and belief or non-belief, age, transgender and sexual orientation.

The Scheme ensures that equality and diversity are embedded within our policies and actions. By creating a Single Equality Scheme, the Welsh Assembly Government aims to tackle multiple inequalities. The Scheme will help us demonstrate how we fulfil our obligations under current equality law. It sets out how we will promote equality of opportunity for all, and how we recognise and value diversity. We want to go further than meeting our legal responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination in respect of disability, gender and race.

In developing this Scheme we have focused on integrating the principles of equality, fairness, respect and dignity into the Welsh Assembly Government's day to day work. The scheme assesses the impact of our policies on different groups within the population of Wales and the actions that will be taken to address that impact.

Developing the Scheme

The initial intention was not to include all the work of the Welsh Assembly Government, but to focus on a smaller number of priorities using high level statements supported by more detailed actions. The outcomes from these activities need to be measurable.

A framework for principles and priorities for the Scheme was published to consultation in March 2008 and concluded in June 2008. A variety of

methods were used to engage with groups to further inform development of the Scheme, including workshops, stakeholder events and conferences. Events were tailored to meet the needs of the individual audiences and the learning from these events has been published on the Assembly Government website.

As the scheme developed, it became apparent that external stakeholders wanted the opportunity to give their views on the Scheme and action plans together. We published the Scheme and the departmental action plans for consultation on 30 October 2008. The feedback received was given to departments to further refine the action plans.

The Single Equality Scheme and action plans were launched and published in March 2009. The scheme will run for three years and we have made a commitment to monitor progress on a six monthly basis and review the Scheme annually. Two progress reports have been published to date – April 2009 - September 2009 and October 2009 – March 2010.

A Delivery Group has been established with external and internal representatives to inform development of the Scheme and to review progress. The Delivery Group has met twice - in November 2009 and in June 2010.

Through the progress reports we have been able to identify and evidence areas of good practice. Some examples are provided below:

Case Study 1- Consulting with Stakeholders Gypsy and Traveller Strategy

The draft Gypsy and Traveller Strategy 'A Road Less Travelled' is the first national strategy on Gypsy and Traveller issues, focussing on accommodation, health, education and planning as well as other barriers which face the Gypsy and Traveller community. The draft Gypsy Traveller strategy aims to address the inequalities experienced by the Gypsy Traveller community, to ensure equality of opportunity for the Gypsy Traveller community and to enable the community to access resources and mainstream services. The strategy also aims to map out a new relationship between the Gypsy Traveller community and the settled community by improving community cohesion and dispelling myths often associated with Gypsy Travellers.

An ambitious consultation programme on the strategy was launched on the 14 September 2009 to enable as wide an engagement with voluntary sector organisations, the statutory sector and most importantly the Gypsy Traveller community. The consultation programme was delivered in partnership with Save the Children, Tai Pawb, the Black Voluntary Sector Network and the Cardiff Gypsy Traveller Project. The consultation programme was developed to underline how the voluntary sector can work in partnership with us to improve access to services for the Gypsy and Traveller community. The strategy seeks to encourage partnership working with all relevant agencies to address the inequalities experienced by the community.

Case Study 2 – Welsh Public Sector Partnership Working

The Department for Public Services Improvement have built a partnership with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Wales Local Government Association (WLGA), the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the NHS Centre for Equalities which will support Local Service Boards to develop and share best practice and maximise equalities expertise and capacity across and between the public services.

Using research evidence and data to inform policymaking

Case Study 3 – Student Ethnicity Data

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills has been able to gather ethnicity data on student enrolments, retention, employability and take up of learning opportunities in later life to help identify areas where additional provision is required. Using this data, they have been able to establish an information database and strengthen evidence-based practice so that their policy making, programme design and communication can be better informed.

Training on equality issues

Case Study 4 – Health-Specific Equality Training

The DG Group for Health and Social Services has developed an Equality Training Framework which utilises experts in a variety of equality issues and their relevance to health. Sessions have included Forced Marriage, Female Genital Mutilation, Honour Based Violence, and Sexual Orientation.

Producing information in a variety of formats and making it more accessible

Case Study 5 – Swine Flu Leaflet

The Swine Flu factsheet was translated into Easy Read formats to ensure that people with learning disabilities, those whose first language is not English or Welsh, the Gypsy Traveller community and others who prefer an easy read format can understand the approach to Swine Flu for residents in Wales. It was also available in thirteen languages apart from Welsh and English (Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Eritrean, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Kurdish, Polish, Punjabi, Somali and Urdu). Audio, Braille and British Sign Language versions were also produced.

Cross-Assembly Working

Case Study 6 – Children and Families (Wales) Measure

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure was passed by the National Assembly for Wales on the 19 November 2009 and received Privy Council approval on 20 February 2010. The Measure is a key deliverable of the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for children and young people set out in 'One Wales'. Officials in Social Justice and Local Government; Children, Education, Life Long Learning and Skills; and Health and Social Services

worked together with legal services across Departmental boundaries on the first cross-cutting Measure.

Next Steps

Strong leadership at a senior level is essential to shape WAG's commitment to equality and diversity and to push the equality agenda at every level of the organisation. Commitment from senior staff is a crucial factor in enabling equality issues to be addressed and demonstrates the importance that is given to equality throughout the organisation.

Currently Departments are working on re-focussing individual Action Plans to concentrate more on outcomes rather than output and on evidencing the link between the outcomes and the processes.

We are looking to work more closely with the Third Sector. Third Sector partners and stakeholders have stated a willingness to use the experience they have on monitoring their own schemes to make a contribution and work closely with WAG officials on monitoring the scheme. This additional mechanism will increase transparency in our monitoring and governance procedures.

An independent evaluation of the Scheme is due to be undertaken over the coming months and this review will inform any new or revised scheme.

The Equality Act

A public consultation will commence on 21 September on the Specific Public Sector Equality Duties proposed for relevant Welsh public authorities in Wales. It remains our intention that these new duties will come into force in April 2011.

The Government of Wales Act 2006

The Government of Wales Act 2006 (s77(1)) requires the Welsh Ministers to make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that their functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.