

Equality of Opportunity Committee

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Impact of the Budget on Equality and Human Rights

Purpose

To provide an update on the impact of the budget agreed by the National Assembly for Wales on the equality and human rights work of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Background

Last year, the Equality of Opportunity Committee (EOC) considered a paper providing the impact of the budget settlement on the equality and human rights work of the Welsh Assembly Government. This year, this paper seeks to report on not only the Promoting Equality Fund, but also on commitments from A Fair and Just Society section of One Wales, and some of the actions which attract spending from our Single Equality Scheme Action Plans.

It is not a comprehensive report of all funding, but highlights some areas of proposed spending. It should be noted that the figures included in this paper are provisional and the paper should be read with this in mind. The new budget plans for Wales will mean efficient delivery of first-class public services and practical help for people - where it matters most.

In order to achieve this, equality and diversity runs throughout the work of the Welsh Assembly Government. We are committed to the principle of mainstreaming; that is, the integration of equality of opportunity principles in strategies, actions and the everyday work of government. It is recognised therefore that Welsh Assembly Government funding beyond that identified in this paper will have an impact upon equality groups.

The Constitutional Affairs, Equality and Communications Department has a co-ordinating role to ensure that all Departments are aware of, and are meeting their statutory equality duties. The Inclusive Policy Making model (equality impact assessment) is assisting joined up working and helping departments to consider how new or revised strategic policies could affect people in different ways, and provide a mechanism to remove or reduce negative impacts, or maximise opportunities to promote equality.

The Promoting Equality Fund

Welsh Ministers have a statutory duty under the Government of Wales Act to ensure that equality of opportunity is embedded in the work of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Act states that the Welsh Assembly Government should "make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people". The purpose of the Promoting Equality Fund is to help deliver the key equality and human rights themes identified in One Wales and in any future Welsh Assembly Government Single Equality Scheme.

Review of the Fund

Following an internal Welsh Assembly Government review of the fund conducted in 2007, officials were asked to consider the recommendations about how the funding could be more effectively distributed to contribute better to the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to mainstreaming and promoting equality, diversity and human rights. These proposals have been the basis for a consultation document on changes to the Promoting Equality Fund, which commenced in September 2008. A further year of transitional funding will be provided before changes are made following the consultation exercise.

Budget

The budget for the Promoting Equality Fund for 2009/2010 is £883,000.

One Wales Commitments - A Fair and Just Society

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to a Wales where everyone can live free from poverty, discrimination, fear or abuse. Many of the actions are identified under Chapter 7: A Fair and Just Society will have spending implications for equality.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In June 2008, I launched the Refugee Inclusion Strategy at the Riverfront Theatre and Arts Centre in Newport. The aim of the Refugee Inclusion Strategy is to support and enable refugees to rebuild their lives in Wales and make a full contribution to society. The Refugee Inclusion Strategy outlines the actions the Welsh Assembly Government will take to achieve refugee inclusion across Wales.

Whilst the strategy is concerned with refugee inclusion, the strategy contains provisions specific to asylum seekers. One of the principles on which the strategy is based is that refugee inclusion begins on day one of arrival in the UK and successful inclusion is closely related to the standard of reception procedures and people's experiences as asylum seekers.

To ensure the Refugee Inclusion Strategy effectively works towards achieving refugee inclusion, the individual strategic objectives set out

in the Refugee Inclusion Strategy are accompanied by action points.

The Inclusion Grant amounts to £800,000 revenue in 2008-09 and will increase to £1million in 2009-2010. Of the £800,000 in 2008-2009, £679,460 is already committed to delivering on refugee and asylum seekers issues and a number of funding commitments in the implementation action plan are already being implemented.

In the 2009-2010 financial year, this degree of funding for the refugee sector is likely to continue at much the same level.

Gypsy Travellers

The 'One Wales' document commits the Welsh Assembly Government to produce a national Gypsy Traveller Strategy. Currently the strategy is in development and research is underway to contribute to the development of the strategy. The Inclusion Grant for 2008-2009 at £800,000 funded a number of projects to highlight issues around Gypsy Travellers. In 2008-2009 the grant has been used to part fund an outreach workers post at the organisation Black Voluntary Sector Network Wales and research to inform the Gypsy Traveller Strategy. In 2009-2010 the grant will increase to £1million and the level of funding on Gypsy Traveller issues is expected to increase.

The Gypsy Traveller Team in Social Justice and Local Government also manages two capital grants for Gypsy Traveller sites. In the 2007-2008 financial year, the Gypsy Traveller £1million refurbishment grant was launched. Additional funds were secured and in the first year of the grant, £1.7million was awarded to local authorities in Wales to refurbish existing Gypsy Traveller sites.

The 2008-2009 refurbishment grant was launched earlier in the year and the deadline for bids is the 1st September. In addition a new grant for new site provision was launched during summer 2008. The Gypsy Traveller new sites grant is £1.5million. These grants amount to £2.5million made available to local authorities, this level of capital funding will continue in the 2009-2010 financial year.

Child Poverty

The Welsh Assembly Government's child poverty strategy, A Fair Future for our Children, was launched in February 2005. The Strategy reaffirms the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to do what it can to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and to halve child poverty by 2010, compared with 1997 figures. The approach adopted by the Strategy is informed by the findings of, and consultation on, the report of the 2004 independent Child Poverty Task Group.

To take forward the Strategy and in order to provide a strategic framework for the cross cutting work required to tackle child poverty, the Child Poverty Implementation Plan and associated milestones and targets paper - Eradicating Child Poverty in Wales - Measuring Success was published in 2006. This set out specific solutions and actions to integrate policies and programmes to eradicate child poverty in Wales by 2020, building on existing anti-poverty programmes such as Flying Start, Cymorth and Communities First.

One Wales and 'Three Strand' Approach

The 'One Wales' agreement re-commits the Welsh Assembly Government doing what it can to halve Child Poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020 through developing more Wales-specific solutions and through integrating strategies with programmes which remain within the competence of the UK Government. 'One Wales' includes a number of new commitments specifically aimed at tackling child poverty aimed at adding impetus to the effort to reach the challenging child poverty targets.

I confirmed - in a Written Statement published in February 2008 - that future Welsh Assembly Government action will focus on three strands:

Strand 1 Improving life opportunities for disadvantaged children;

Strand 2 financial inclusion initiatives; and

Strand 3 Encouraging greater uptake of the UK Government tax and benefits support.

A further Written Statement was issued on the 16th July providing an update on recent key developments as they relate to the Welsh Assembly Government's child poverty agenda.

Budget

An assessment of Welsh Assembly Government spend on tackling child poverty is currently being undertaken. Significant funding is being made available through a wide range of our policies and initiatives that contribute towards tackling child poverty. For example:

Childcare facilities will get 50% reduction if the premises they are housed in has a rateable value below £12,000. This means that the maximum amount of rate relief available for child care is approximately £2,800;

£160million is being invested in the Cymorth programme over the next three years;

£89 million is being made available through Flying Start over the next three years;

£32 million is being invested in the Want2Work project to help people into employment with a further £12 million being available in East Wales;

£5 million a year is being provided for free swimming in Wales;

£5 million will be invested in a Welsh premium to the Child Trust Fund between 2009 and 2011;

£3 million is being made available to increase the take-up of council tax benefit and housing benefit.

£70 million for Genesis Cymru Wales 2 to tackle many of the major barriers unemployed people face, including childcare.

Community Cohesion Strategy / Hate Crime

Welsh Ministers have agreed to tackle hate crime and community cohesion through an over-arching community cohesion strategy. This will provide the strategic direction for the future development of the community cohesion agenda within Wales; to promote and build more cohesive communities, with shared values and equal opportunities in all areas of society

One of the key themes of a community cohesion strategy is that it is based on identified needs within an area, and tailored specifically to meet the specific needs of that area. Community cohesion should be viewed as a long term pro-active approach to improving and strengthening the communities within Wales and not as a short term reactive measure.

Community cohesion issues will be different in each community. In some areas this may initially be focussed on immediate short term issues around racial groups and new community groups, but community cohesion is not just about short term tensions surrounding faith and ethnicity. Even in geographical areas where there have not been significant changes in terms of ethnic diversity there is still an important role for a community cohesion strategy. The draft Strategy will go to public consultation in November 2008.

Budget

The financial implications of the Strategy have not been examined in terms of what it would cost partners to deliver on all the recommended actions. As part of the draft budget, it is proposed that £200,000 revenue per annum from 2009-10 onwards be transferred from the Social Justice and Local Government Research and Evaluation budget expenditure line to the Inclusion budget expenditure line to cover the work on community cohesion.

The Single Equality Scheme

The following examples are taken from our Single Equality Scheme Action Plans.

Constitutional Affairs, Equality and Communications

To increase the number of applications and appointments from underrepresented groups in public appointments, the awareness raising campaign will be continued, and training provided on the public appointment process to increase understanding of and confidence in public appointments by under represented groups. Funding of £80,000 is available in 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Department for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

The Social Housing Management Grant (SHMG) seeks to achieve high standards in housing management. There is a specific budget of £410,000 to address the needs of black and minority ethnic people as part of the overall SHMG budget of £2.17million. Projects specifically relating to equality from this include:

Tai Pawb receive £225,000 to promote a strategic approach to race equality, develop increased equity in housing, promote good practice and implement strategies to engage with minority ethnic organisations and tenants to influence services.

The bidding round for 2009/10 has not yet been completed so a full list of projects is not available.

The Homelessness Grant programme funds 155 projects for a total of £6.4million. Comprehensive client data is not collected, however, titles of projects show that some of this money is targeted at specific groups especially, young people, refugees, people with mental illness and victims of domestic violence. A more robust monitoring mechanism, is being developed to more accurately measure the equality impact of this programme.

The Supporting People Grant programme funds projects for specific client groups. These include people with learning difficulties, people with physical disabilities, people with chronic illness and women seeking refuge. Local Authorities received £73million for 2008/2009. This funding will continue for the year 2009/2010.

The Social Housing Grant funds registered social landlords to meet people's needs which are identified by Local Authorities. It can be used to support different schemes including those for older people and those who need support for independent living. The Grant will undergo a fundamental review for 2009 which will include the consideration of equality issues. The draft budget for 2009/2010 is £82.3 million.

The Coastal Access Improvement Programme will make specific provision for those with mobility problems, including disabled people.

For 2008/9 a target of 15 kilometres of coastal path is to be made suitable for those with mobility problems. There is no specific budget for disabled provision, but the overall programme budget is £2m for 2008/9 and is expected to be at least that for the next two financial years also.

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

As part of work to encourage under represented groups to consider careers in sectors which remain segregated, a three year funding programme is in place with Chwarae Teg to improve the position of women in the labour market.

Chwarae Teg is a pan Wales organisation which works to maximise women's contribution to the Welsh economy. The Welsh Assembly Government provides Chwarae Teg with core funding to support its strategic and operational work: influencing policy development; promoting good practice; demonstrating and creating best practice; and active involvement in research and development. Core funding of £402,000 will be provided 2008-09, rising to £411,698 for 2009-10.

Department for the Economy and Transport

To increase the rate of economic participation amongst minority ethnic communities, disabled people, and women and lone parents, support is provided to WISE and Female Inventors to encourage women into science and engineering. £15,000 is provided for Women Inventors and £20,000 for

Women in Science and Engineering.

Human Resources Department

In order to improve representation of the Welsh Assembly Government workforce, an outreach programme is being developed. There is provision of paid placement schemes for minority ethnic, disabled and traveller groups. Graduate schemes are targeted at disabled and minority ethnic people. A number of non graduate schemes are also run aimed at minority ethnic, women, disabled people with learning difficulties, special needs and mental health issues. £210,000 is allocated to undertake this work.

To develop the capability of it under represented staff, management and leadership programmes are undertaken for these members of staff to increase opportunities for advancement. £40,000 is allocated to undertake this work.

Department for Health and Social Services / Public Health and Health Professions

There is a commitment to enable and influence improvements in equity of access in the provision of health and social care in Wales through mainstreaming equality, diversity and human rights. 'Our Healthy Future': A Public Health Strategic Framework will be put in place and has the two over-arching goals of improving the quality and length of life and improving equity in health. In line with the One Wales commitment, the Inequalities in Health Fund will be extended to help address inequalities. The Fund will support the development of 'Our Healthy Future' together with a package of other public health related commitments / proposals which are currently being considered by the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The Inequalities in Health Fund has a budget of £6.528m for 2009-10.

Dr Brian Gibbons AM

Minister for Social Justice and Local Government