

# **Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee**

## **EPC(2) 13-06(p4)**

**Date: 11 October 2006**

**Venue: Committee room 2, Senedd**

**Title: EPC Department's promotion of Equality of Opportunity as outlined in the Welsh Assembly Government's Seventh Annual report on Equality of Opportunity.**

### **Purpose**

The Committee is asked to note the paper.

### **Summary / Recommendations**

The paper contains an update on progress made by EPC Department in promoting equal opportunities.

### **Background**

On 25 October 2006 the Equality of Opportunity Committee will consider the Welsh Assembly Government's Seventh Annual report on Equality of Opportunity. Subject Committees have been asked by the Chair of the Equality of Opportunity Committee to scrutinise Departmental performance prior to that meeting.

The first report on progress in relation to cross cutting issues (including equality) was considered by this Committee in April 2006. The attached paper at Annex 1 specifically focuses on activity with regard to equality of opportunity during 2005-06.

### **Action for Subject Committee**

The Committee is invited to note the paper.

Carwyn Jones AM

Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

# **Annex 1**

## **Update on Progress Made By EPC Department in Promoting Equal Opportunities**

### **Introduction**

1. The National Assembly for Wales has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity. The Welsh Assembly Government's Seventh Annual report on Equality of Opportunity details achievements. The purpose of this paper is to highlight work by Environment Planning and Countryside Department during 2005-2006 in this regard.

### **Mainstreaming**

2. EPC Department is strengthening its evidence base on equalities. The Department participated in an Assembly-wide project to equality audit key policies in a cross cutting way which addressed race, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, religion and belief. It was a retrospective review looking at the extent to which existing key policies promote equality and diversity and avoid under discriminatory practices. Three policies in EPC were randomly selected. These were the Environment Strategy, Farming for the Future, and Rural Community Action.

3. The audit should indicate how equality is being embedded in the work of the Department. The results will provide evidence on the effectiveness of mainstreaming of work and identify gaps that need to be address. The information obtained will provide a baseline against which progress can be monitored on a year by year basis.

4. Three members of staff have participated in a programme of equality awareness sessions. These ranged from the new duties of gender and disability, to understanding Race Equality Impact Assessment, to broad equality awareness and understanding.

5. An EPC Equality Champion has been appointed and is a member senior management team. The Champion acts as a catalyst for change, supports the embedding of equality, EPS's policies and programmes, and advises staff on the issues.

## **EPCs Work and promoting Equality during 2005-06**

### **Sustainable environment**

6. During 2005-06 work was undertaken on developing this Environment Strategy for Wales. The consultation document was sent to the statutory equality commissions and groups representing minority and disadvantaged groups. The Black Environment Network is represented on the Environment Strategy Reference Group, which steered the development of the Strategy and will now assess progress on implementation. Organisations representing disabled people and minority ethnic communities provided written responses to the consultation on the strategy or attended the

consultation workshops. These included Disability Wales and the Black Environment Network. Specific workshop events were held regarding health for children and young people. Particular reference should be made to workshop held at St Christopher's Special School Wrexham where a diverse group of children and young people participated in the event.

7. Race Equality Impact Assessments were also undertaken as part of the development of the Environment Strategy and the Action Plan. The Strategy specifically identifies the environmental issues which have a significant equality impact. Although it is too early to identify outcomes at this stage, the recent equality audit identified that:

- Social cohesion is demonstrated as a fundamental value on which this strategy is built.
- Resource plans related to this strategy take due account of equality and diversity needs.
- The strategy demonstrates how it intends to improve health/social/economic status for all groups.
- Robust consultation and involvement processes were influential in setting policy direction.
- Equality is being built into Wales's contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and Assembly policy action on adapting to climate change impacts. This includes an inclusive consultation process, a REIA screening of the Adaptation Action Plan and an assessment of its relevance to other equality strands.

## **Access Statements**

8. The timetables for taking forward secondary legislation, will require that disability access statements accompany planning applications in Wales.

## **British Sign Language Futures Scheme**

9. '*BSL Futures*' is a scheme to ensure that we move significantly towards the goal of increasing the number of BSL/Spoken Language interpreters in Wales. EPC is playing its part in supporting the project and has made a £40k commitment to support the British Sign Language Interpreter Services

## **Local Development Plan**

10. Local Development Plan (LDP) Regulations are in place which require consultation with "bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups". The draft LDP Manual gives advice about the LDP Community Involvement Scheme and refers to the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) best practice on Diversity and Planning. The draft LDP Manual was issued for targeted consultation to a list of 400 groups based on the Wales Planning Forum (which included representatives from minority ethnic groups) in September 2005.

## **Wales Waste Strategy**

11. The Wales Waste Strategy strongly supports the role of the community sector in delivering local services. Organisations like Newport Wastesavers, Frame in Pembrokeshire and Cae Post in Powys provide training and employment opportunities for people from disadvantaged groups, people on

probation, people with mental health difficulties and people with learning difficulties.

## **CROW Act 2000**

12. In terms of opening up public access to the countryside and coast, the CROW Act 2000 places a duty on local highway authorities to have regard to the needs of those with mobility problems in making improvements to rights of way. A consultation was held with CCW in January 2006 on grant funding for projects that encourage people from minority ethnic groups into the countryside. The Countryside Code has been translated into 20 languages and placed on the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) website.

## **Race Equality Scheme**

13. The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in partnership with three other UK National Parks, the Youth Hostel Association (YHA), the Council for National Parks and minority ethnic community group leaders across England and Wales are taking part in the Mosaic Partnership 2 Project. One key element of this project is to develop a network of Community Champions to promote the National Parks to ethnic minority communities, including offering work-shadowing opportunities to individuals from minority ethnic groups. To take this forward the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority has identified 10 officers, across a range of departments, and 3 Park Authority Members who have volunteered to be 'shadowed' by those interested in learning more about the work of the Park Authority. The first shadowing opportunity began in August 2006, with individuals shadowing the Chair of the Park Authority. As the Community Champions Network develops, it is expected that the number of individuals from minority ethnic groups engaged in the scheme will increase.

## **Next Steps**

14. EPC department has identified our major priorities for equality for the forthcoming year. In 2006-07 we are committed to:

- producing a Disability Equality Scheme;
- producing a Gender Equality Scheme; and
- making progress on our existing equality action plans.

## **The New Gender and Disability duties**

15. From 6 April 2007, a general gender duty will require the Welsh Assembly Government to

- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women; and
- Eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment.

16. The Welsh Assembly Government will also be subject to a specific duty to develop a Gender Equality Scheme (GES), setting out how it is intended to meet the general duty and various specific

duties imposed by the order. The GES is required to be published by the end of April 2007.

17. Similarly the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA 2005) is intended to drive forward a culture of positive change across the public sector and in doing so remove many of the barriers disabled people encounter in their daily lives. The Welsh Assembly Government is required to have due regard to the need to:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons.
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- Eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities.
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons.
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons.

18. The Welsh Assembly Government, will also be subject to a specific duty to produce a Disability Equality Scheme (DES), by December 2006.

19. To meet the requirements of the duties, each Department is required to compile its contribution to the Gender Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme. Work has already begun on producing plans for EPC for both schemes. Officials have participated in engagement events aimed at involving a cross section of the general public to assist in identifying priorities. More engagement events are planned for the future.

20. The Welsh Assembly Government's Disability Equality Scheme which includes a section from Environment Planning and Countryside was launched on 8th August 2006. For statutory consultation, which ends on the 13 October 2006. The Gender Equality Scheme will be published in draft form, (again with a contribution from Environment Planning and Countryside) for statutory consultation in the autumn - commencing early November.

## **Conclusion**

EPC has made progress during 2005-06 on a range of equality strands and is continuing to focus on these issues during 2006-07.