

SJR(2)-01-07(p.7)

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Date: 18 January 2006

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: Update on Social Justice and Regeneration Portfolio Commitments to Equality

Purpose

This paper provides the Committee with an update of progress towards equality of opportunity.

Summary / Recommendations

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

Background

Under sections 48 and 120 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the National Assembly for Wales has a statutory duty to ensure that equality of opportunity is embedded in its work.

My last update on 12 January 2006, provided members with a report of progress on how we were meeting our requirements from the sixth Equality of Opportunity Report 2004-05. Since that update and in addition to ongoing commitments in respect of equal opportunities, we have engaged and contributed to work undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government on the:

- Equality Audit of Key Welsh Assembly Government Policies
- Race Equality Scheme
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Draft Gender Equality Scheme
- Update
- Equality Audit

In March 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an equality audit of all key policies. The audit arose out of a recommendation from the report on Mainstreaming Equalities by the Equality of Opportunity Committee.

The policies submitted for independent review within the Social Justice and Regeneration Portfolio were as follows:

- Better Homes for People in Wales: National Housing Strategy;
- Communities First;
- Voluntary Sector Strategic Action Plan/Scheme;
- National Homeless Strategy;
- BME Housing;
- Child Poverty Strategy ‘A fairer Future For Our Children’;
- Continued role out of the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework;
- All Wales Domestic Abuse Strategy.

As part of the review, individual impact assessments were completed with specific recommendations to be taken forward. Overall, the reviewed polices demonstrated a clear relationship to strategic vision. The key principles of setting direction, initiating, guiding and supporting action to improve the quality of life of the people of Wales were also evident.

Part of the assessment involved a SWOT analysis which identified strong evidence of partnership working and stakeholder participation, promoting equality through frameworks and ensuring that equality is mainstreamed. For instance, it was evident that the Communities First programme promotes equality by providing a framework for access to funding initiatives and projects focusing on poverty and disadvantage. Community empowerment is a key theme in the programme through the development of skills in local communities. Mainstreaming was promoted by the signposting of other sources of funding to follow the initial stages of projects. Barriers to engaging with the Communities First programme have been identified and solutions such as offering reimbursement for community members thus removing any financial barriers to engagement.

The review itself found that the actions to meet legislative requirements in order to support equality and diversity were evident. All of the reviewed policies recognised the importance of partnership approaches and philosophies as being important to good relations.

On consultation and engagement, the review identified varying degrees and depths of reporting. The resulting effect of this is that, as with other policy areas, it was difficult on occasions to determine the degree to which key stakeholders (public, private, voluntary organisations and individuals from the relevant communities) were involved in the decision making processes. There were examples of good practice when referring to consultation and involvement, including the National Housing Strategy. This strategy demonstrated a particularly impressive level of detail about participants in the consultation process and evidence that engagement with consultees was regular and sustained. There was evidence that consultation was ‘cross-strand and inter-departmental’ and that those developing other strategies within the Assembly Government were also consulted.

On the use of demographic quantitative and qualitative data, again the review of policies identified varying degrees of the use of data to support strategic direction. The Better Homes Strategy was an exceptional example demonstrating a range of qualitative and quantitative data sourced from a wide range of stakeholders and partners that illustrated that the data was used to inform policy direction.

The review found there was variation in the degree to which the policies that were reviewed successfully measured equality outcomes. In most documents a commitment to pursuing equality

objectives/outcomes and to measuring progress against identified measures existed, whilst in others there was a lack of evidence. The best example from the policies reviewed contained detailed information on explicit intentions and processes designed to empower people to pursue results. It was indicated that future policies will benefit from clear criteria regarding the measurement of equality and diversity goals.

Overall we regard the audit report as reflecting positively on the equality work in the Department. Naturally there are some areas which have been identified as opportunities for improvement, the recommendations that resulted from the review are being considered and taken forward, such as ensuring best practice on consultation and engagement is applied across the whole group. The recommendations will form part of our work on mainstreaming equality and monitoring of commitments against all schemes on equality. The full audit report will be considered by the Equal Opportunities Committee in due course.

Race Equality Scheme

There has been continued progress of our commitments within the Race Equality Scheme and many of our actions are now complete, for instance:

Race equality issues have been mainstreamed into the All Wales Domestic Abuse Strategy and there is continued Regular review by the All Wales Domestic Abuse Working Group to ascertain the extent to which race equality issues have been mainstreamed

Support to the Black Ethnic Support Team (BEST) and the Black Voluntary Sector Network (BVSN) through the Communities First Support Network to help engage minority ethnic individuals in Communities First areas across Wales is ongoing. The organisations have been working across Wales to help engage minority ethnic individuals in community First areas. BEST brings together the All Wales Ethnic Minority Association, the Black Voluntary Sector Network, MEWN Cymru and the Scarman Trust. Funding of £286,576 has been awarded for 2006-2007 under the All Wales Communities First Support Fund to BEST.

Funding has been given to support the development of the two Communities of Interest (Cardiff and Newport, which have a higher concentration of minority ethnic communities than other areas across Wales). A BME Communities First Partnership has now been established in Cardiff and progress has been made on the BME programme in Newport. NCC, GAVO and SEWREC have now agreed a partnership approach to delivering the programme in Newport. The Communities First Programme in Newport has been awarded £524,674 up to 31 March 2008 to support the BME partnership. This includes funding for five development workers / link workers and associated costs.

A number of our policies have undergone Race Equality Impact Assessments. Screening assessments have taken place for the National Homelessness Strategy and the Affordable Housing Toolkit. And full assessments have been undertaken on the Refugee Inclusion Strategy and the Disadvantaged Communities Development Fund. A screening assessment is currently being undertaken on the Voluntary Sector Strategic Action Plan and the National Homelessness Strategy will undergo a full assessment. We will be carrying out our assessments on all of our future policies.

The Refugee Inclusion Strategy which is currently out for consultation was put through the full Race Equality Impact Assessment. This Strategy provides for the inclusion of Refugee communities in the developing of policies and services provided for them by the Welsh Assembly Government.

This policy is relevant to the Welsh Assembly Government's responsibilities under its race equality duties and a Full Impact Assessment was carried out to confirm that the Strategy does not negatively impact upon racial groups. One of the actions as a result of the full assessment is to commission new research on data of Refugee communities, indigenous populations' perceptions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and a statistical analysis of what research is currently available.

The Disadvantaged Communities Development Fund sets out to empower small disadvantaged community groups and enable them to access mainstream funding, and provide an opportunity for disadvantaged groups to promote a better understanding of their work to the wider community. Through the screening assessment, we identified this policy as having a high impact on race equality because one of the key target groups are the ethnic minority communities. Following this the policy was put through the full Race Equality Impact Assessment. As a result of the screening we are working with the Local Government data unit to improve data collection of funding provided.

Disability Equality Scheme

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, introduced the Disability Equality Duty (DED) which is placed on all public authorities to promote disability equality. The DED came into force for most public authorities on 4 December 2006.

The draft DES went out to public consultation between August and October 2006, an Assembly Government response was produced and where appropriate amendments were made to the draft DES. The Disability Rights Commission also provided advice on the final draft DES before it was presented to the Equality of Opportunity Committee, to Cabinet and Plenary.

The DES was published on the Welsh Assembly Government Internet Site on 4 December 2006 in accordance with the requirements of the DED.

Social Justice and Regeneration Department contributed to the development of the DES. Many of our policies already contribute to disability equality through programmes and grants such as Disabled Facilities Grants and the Disabled Persons Housing Service.

As part of our commitment to the scheme, we will continue to develop policy and support services that assist disabled people to maintain their independence. With involvement from groups that represent people with disabilities, we will maximise the effectiveness of specific programmes and grants by reviewing guidance and identifying barriers to access.

The following objectives have been detailed for publication with the scheme:

We will review our grant scheme conditions to ensure that the grants we administer promote access

for disabled people and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

By reviewing best practice guidance, we will ensure that Care and Repair services assist older disabled people to maintain their independence in their own home by delivering services effectively.

In response to the Russell Commission recommendations, we will ensure that young disabled people are offered opportunities to volunteer, thereby increasing their self-confidence and skills and allowing positive contributions to be made by all.

Through data analysis and the production of a report, we will take steps to ensure that disabled people have equal access to the Assembly Government grant scheme for adaptations in housing association property regardless of their landlord or the local authority area they live in.

To identify barriers preventing disabled people with sensory impairment or mobility problems accessing supported housing services so that guidance can be produced or revisions to grant criteria can be made to remove barriers wherever possible.

Draft Gender Equality Scheme

On 27 September 2006 the Equality of Opportunity Committee unanimously recommended to advise Plenary that the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006 (referred to as 'the Order' throughout this document) should be rejected. This was the first time in the National Assembly's history that any Committee had recommended Plenary to reject an Order.

The Order would have introduced specific Gender Equality Duties on a wide range of public authorities in England and Wales, including the Welsh Assembly Government. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly, required the consent of the National Assembly before the Order could be made. Powers to make a parallel Order in Scotland were transferred to the Scottish Executive in the Equalities Act.

The Order was subsequently withdrawn by the DCLG, and an England only Order submitted to the First Minister for Consent. No Plenary debate was held with the outcome that there will be no specific statutory duty on public authorities in Wales to prepare formal Gender Equality Schemes. They will, however, be subject to the general duty, and they will need to be able to demonstrate what action they are taking to address inequality and to promote equality for men and women through their work.

The Social Justice and Regeneration Department has contributed to the draft scheme and many of our policies already contribute to gender equality. For instance all Community Safety Partnerships must consider and take account of the full scope of equality issues including gender. The Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre which received ?16,400 capital funding from the Domestic Abuse Fund for the purchase of a three year lease for a male safe house. To promote equality between men and women, an All Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline has been established and is available to all.

The Social Housing Grant Programme (SHG) is allocated in response to bids from local authorities

based on strategic priorities. The programme supports a range of housing schemes to increase the supply of affordable housing for rent and low cost home ownership. The SHG programme also supports the provision of specialised housing for particular client groups. Specifically in relation to women's needs this has included purpose built refuges for women escaping domestic violence, secure move on accommodation from refuges and women only accommodation within purpose built hostels for drugs and substance misusers.

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme aims to enable households to stay warmer and reduce their energy costs through installation of energy efficiency measures. Around half of households in fuel poverty in Wales contain at least one person over 60. Women have a higher life expectancy and a lower average income than men. We therefore believe that women over 60 may be more likely to suffer fuel poverty than their male counterparts. Women are also more likely to seek help from an applicant driven programme such as HEES.

Lone parent families also qualify for the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. Given that there is a higher proportion of female lone parents than men, it is also more likely that applicants from this group are women. Under HEES the Scheme manager, Eaga Partnership is also developing initiatives to specifically target men as they are less likely to apply to the Scheme than their female counterparts.

Child Poverty The Welsh Assembly Government's work to eradicate child poverty will need to address the specific needs of children living in lone parent households. Figures from the 2001 Census show that Wales had a total of 76,934 lone parents with dependent children. The figures show a predominance of female lone parents - 70,356 compared with 6,578 male lone parents. Of these, some 30,618 female and 3,624 male lone parents are in at least part time employment.

The Child Poverty Implementation Plan proposes a range of policies and programmes which aim to improve outcomes for these children and their parents, which include maximising family income, improving access to good quality outdoor play areas and piloting a new holistic intervention and support programme to provide holistic 'wrap around' support for each child in poverty, their family and their community.

As part of our commitment to continue developing policy and support services that assist in tackling gender inequalities, we have developed specific actions that were published with the draft scheme under the following objectives to:

Ensure actions under Chapter 10 of the draft Refugee Inclusion Strategy on 'Understanding Diversity and Supporting the Most Vulnerable' are undertaken':

- Recommendation 31. Promote training, information and awareness raising amongst organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers to increase their understanding of the diversity of needs and the availability of specialist support
- Recommendation 32. Encourage equality and diversity bodies to respond to the diverse needs of refugees and asylum seekers

Reduce personal over-indebtedness amongst single women on benefit and single parent income families (as implicit in the Deputy Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration's Review of Over-Indebtedness).

Evidence: A booster survey of Welsh households undertaken by the Welsh Consumer Council in December 2003 found that higher levels of credit was apparent amongst those vulnerable to financial difficulties which included those with dependent children, especially lone parents of which 92% are women.

Reduce the extent to which the Forced Marriage/honour crime problem impacts on Wales and to develop a joint Forced Marriage Unit/Welsh Assembly Government Action Plan. The Department has recently appointed a secondee to carry forward this work [get wording from CSD]

To ensure a gender balance within the workforce of Cafcass Cymru and ensure policy interests take into account gender inequalities by consulting with stakeholder groups.

Continuing Work

We engage with the Strategic Equality and Diversity Unit on all of our commitments, in particular on the recommendations that fell from the Equality of Opportunities Committee report 'Mainstreaming Equality in the Work of the Assembly'. Our Equality Champion seeks to raise the awareness of mainstreaming equality with staff involved in policy development before official training courses are available.

Action for Subject Committee

The Committee is requested to note the achievements in recent months.

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