Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2)-17-06(p.1)

Date: 6 December 2006

Time: 9.30 - 12.30

Venue: Senedd, National Assembly for Wales
Title: EU policy and legislative priorities for 2006

Purpose of Paper

1. This paper updates Members on the priorities Committee selected for 2006 from the European Commission's Forward Work Programme.

Background

2. Committee selected the following priorities for the coming year from the European Commission's Forward Work Programme at the meeting held on 25 January 2006:

Rights of the Child

Communication on the Rights of the Child: this is intended to set a framework for actions to implement children's rights in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Drugs Policy

Green Paper on drugs and civil society: this would provide a framework for working with civil society to implement actions in the EU Drugs Action Plan 2005-08. The Drugs Action Plan was one of the suggested priority items for consideration by the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee in 2005.

Alcohol-related Harm

Commission Communication on an alcohol policy: the aim is to reduce the health and social effects of alcohol consumption

Postal services

Proposal for a Directive on an internal market for postal services. This would further progress the creation of a postal internal market (i.e. the opening of remaining postal monopolies to competition) towards the target date of 2009 which could affect rural areas in particular.

Action for Committee

3. Since the last update tabled for Committee on 21 September 2006, there have been no updates on the priorities Committee selected for 2006 from the European Commission's Forward Work Programme.

Janice Gregory AM - Chair of the SJR Committee SJR Committee EU Priorities (2006) – latest developments

Priorities identified	
Rights of the Child	4 July 06
The European Commission adopted its Communication "Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child" on 4 July 2006. The Communication proposes to establish a comprehensive EU strategy "to effectively promote and safeguard the rights of the child in the EU's internal and external policies and to support Member States' efforts in this field."	Published
Following scrutiny of the Communication, the UK Parliament Select Committee on European Scrutiny concluded that because of the importance of children's rights, the contentious nature of the Commission's proposals and the UK Government's opposition to them that the document is recommended for debate by the European Standing Committee.	
The Draft Opinion produced by the Committee of the Regions for discussion on 29 November 2006 broadly welcomes the Commission's proposals, but stresses the need for local and regional authorities to be regarded as essential partners in the development of the Strategy.	6 October 2006
The Strategy is structured around seven specific objectives which include:	
Capitalising on existing activities (e.g. tackling human trafficking) and addressing urgent needs. The Commission will therefore undertake the following urgent measures:	
To attribute one single six digit telephone number (beginning with 116: 116 xyz) within the EU for child help-lines and one for child hotlines dedicated to missing and sexually exploited children (end 2006).	29 November
To support the banking sector and credit card companies to combat the use of credit cards when purchasing sexual images of children on the Internet (2006).	2006

To promote 'a clustering of actions' on child poverty in the EU (2007).

Identifying priorities for future EU action e.g. to collect comparable data on children's rights (2007)

Mainstreaming children's rights in EU actions (2007).

Establishing efficient coordination and consultation mechanisms e.g. increasing children's involvement in decision making and the setting up of a coordinator for the rights of the child (2006).

Enhancing capacity and expertise on children's rights and communicating more effectively to publicise children's rights (2007 onwards).

It is hoped the Strategy will be launched by late 2008 or early 2009

Green Paper on the role of civil society in EU Drugs Policy

The European Commission consultation on dialogue with civil society organisations active in the drugs field on the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2005-2008 has now closed. The Drugs Action Plan was one of the suggested priority items for SJR in 2005.

The Commission will now report on the contributions received and suggest ways forward.

EU Alcohol Strategy

The Commission has published its "EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm" - the aim is to reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe until the end of

2012. It explains what has already been done at national and Community level, where further action is needed and taking this forward, in particular through the proposed Alcohol and Health Forum which is to be set up by June 2007.

The priorities identified in the Communication are to:

- 1. protect young people and children and the unborn child;
- 2. reduce injuries and deaths from alcohol-related road accidents;
- 3. prevent harm among adults and reduce the negative impact on the workplace;

Consultation closed 30 Sept

Published October 24

- 4. raise awareness of the impact on health of harmful alcohol consumption; and on appropriate consumption patterns;
- 5. develop a common evidence base at EU level.

The strategy identifies areas where the EU can support the actions of Member States to reduce alcohol related harm, such as financing projects through the Public Health and Research Programmes, exchanging good practice on issues such as curbing under-age drinking, exploring cooperation on information campaigns or tackling drink-driving and other Community initiatives. It also interested parties and sets out areas where industry can make a contribution, notably in the area of responsible advertising and marketing.

Postal services directive

Published on

The European Commission has published its proposed draft legislation to open EU postal markets fully to competition by 2009, in line with the target date set out in the current Postal Directive.

18 Oct 06

National operators will no longer have a monopoly on mail below a certain weight (currently a maximum of 50 grams). Member States will be allowed a flexible choice of means to finance universal service provision or the possibility to share out the universal service obligation between operators.

The proposal maintains the current provisions such as:

- 1. the obligation on Member States to ensure a high-quality universal service comprising at least one delivery and collection five days a week for every EU citizen;
- 2. the obligation to ensure affordability of postal services;
- 3. the possibility for Member States to impose a uniform tariff for single piece tariff items such as consumer mail.

The provisions of the directive now have to be agreed jointly by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers (Member States' Ministers).