

MINUTES

EOC-07-02 (min)

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday 14 November 2002

Time: 9.00 am

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members

David Melding (Chair)	South Wales Central
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
Eleanor Burnham	North Wales
Ann Jones	Vale of Clwyd
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
Huw Lewis	Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central

Officials

Peter Gregory	Personnel & Accommodation Services Group
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Standing Invitees

Kate Bennett	Equal Opportunities Commission
Will Bee	Disability Rights Commission
Cherry Short	Commission for Racial Equality
Derek Walker	LGB Forum Cymru

Invitees

Amelia John	Disability Rights Commission
Naomi Alleyne	Welsh Local Government Association
Steve Thomas	Welsh Local Government Association
Gwilym Morris	Scope
Giles Roddy	Scope
Jessica Gregson	Home Office
Kevin Fitzpatrick	Disability Rights Commission
Beverly Stephens	Monkton Priory Project
William Rees	Monkton Priory Project
Vikki Seddon	Wrexham Traveller Education

Secretariat

Claire Bennett	Committee Clerk
Lara Date	Deputy Committee Clerk

9.00 - 9.10 am

Item 1

Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

- 1.1 Since the last meeting an amendment to Standing Order 14.3 had been passed in plenary that prevented the Minister from chairing the committee. Therefore,

pending a decision by the Business Committee on a new chair, the Clerk invited nominations for a temporary chair. The committee moved to appoint David Melding AM.

- 1.2 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Janet Ryder AM and Val Lloyd AM. It was also noted that Sandra Axinowe, who had been due to speak to the committee concerning education provision to Gypsy Travellers, was unable to attend as she was unwell.

9.10 - 9.20 am

Item 2

Minister's Report

- 2.1 The Minister gave an oral report to the committee and noted that in future he would present a written report. The main points of the report were:
- The First Minister had formally approved the 'Mainstreaming Equality in Public Appointments' action plan. The House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration was taking a close interest in the progress of the Assembly's work in this area as an example of good practice.
 - The Equality Policy Unit had organised a diversity day on 11 November to raise staff awareness of best practice and how to mainstream equality in their work. This had involved the three equality commissions, Disability Wales, AWEMA, LGB Forum and the Wales Women's National Coalition. Further events had been planned.
 - Almost all staff had now completed mandatory equality awareness training and equality training now formed part of the induction programme for new staff. Staff of the Care Standards Inspectorate would have completed their training by the end of March and all senior civil servants had received 1 and a half days training. It was hoped that all Assembly Members would also receive the training before the next election.
 - The second Disability Awards, part-funded by the Assembly and organised by the Black Voluntary Sector Network, had been held on 25 October. Youth awards had been held during the day and the aim was to celebrate best practice in equality. Media interest in the event was welcomed and it was believed that television programmes would appear in the New Year.
 - The Assembly had been awarded a Castle Award for its work in promoting equal pay.
 - The Minister had spoken at a very well-attended Disability Wales conference the previous week and was impressed with the amount of interest shown in the issues under consideration.
 - The Minister was due to attend a Disability Awards event in Cardiff later that day.
- 2.2 The committee discussed the concerns raised by Alun Cairns AM in Plenary regarding the gender and equality balance of Assembly Task and Finish Groups. It was recognised that the participation of external organisations was important in Task and Finish groups, but that Nolan Principles only applied to internal nominations, and not to those from external organisations. Reference was made to how the Assembly's Economic Development department dealt with nominations to Objective 1 partnership groups to ensure balance. It was

hoped that Cabinet would consider what could be done to encourage outside organisations to help improve equality balance in all Task and Finish groups.

Action point

- The Minister would provide a written report in future meetings.
- The Minister would present a paper to the next meeting to outline practice in various departments when making appointments to Task and Finish groups.

9.20 - 9.55am

Item 3

Update on implementation of McKenzie report and paper on recruitment of senior civil servant to head the Equality Policy Unit (EPU)

Papers: EOC-07-02(p1)

EOC-07-02(p2)

- 3.1 Peter Gregory, Director of Personnel Accommodation and Services Group, presented the committee with an interim report on the implementation of the McKenzie report, as a full 6-monthly report was due at the end of the year. He apologised that he had been unable to present a paper on the evaluation of the pilot external recruitment exercise, but the evaluation report had only just been received.
- 3.2 Due to this delay, and significant staff changes, it was regretted that there had not been more progress on developing the recruitment strategy. Staff were now engaged in this work and it was hoped to put an outline strategy to the Permanent Secretary by Christmas and implement it by 1 April, subject to negotiations with the trade union side.
- 3.3 The committee was pleased at overall progress in implementing the report recommendations and would continue to monitor the outcomes.
- 3.4 Some members were disappointed that not all AMs had received equality training yet. Although it might not be possible to make it mandatory, it was suggested that a table could be published to show which members had taken it up. Party groups could also play a role in encouraging take-up. It was noted that AMs based away from South Wales might have difficulty scheduling the time for training and that providing training in 'bite-size chunks' and possibly on a one-to-one rather than group basis, would be helpful.

Action point

- The Minister would take forward the committee's concerns about all AMs having equality training and see whether it was possible to make it compulsory.
- The Minister would provide more information on how equality training could be provided to AMs in smaller segments at the next meeting.

- 3.5 Peter Gregory invited Ms Rashpal Kaur Singh, the consultant who had led the recruitment exercise for the head of EPU, to join him for the discussion on that issue. He had not been on the recruitment panel himself, as he felt it inappropriate because some of the candidates currently reported directly to him.
- 3.6 The committee noted that although Ms Singh could answer detailed questions, accountability for the process and whether it met equality of opportunity criteria lay with the Assembly.

3.7 The committee warmly welcomed the creation of the post of head of EPU and looked forward to working with the postholder, Mrs Jasmin Hussein. It was noted that comments on the recruitment process itself were not intended to reflect on her suitability or qualifications for the post.

3.8 The questions raised and the answers given regarding the recruitment process were:

- Candidates had been asked to provide a CV and covering letter outlining how they met the criteria set out in the advertisement and application package. Applications were measured against the criteria and graded accordingly. Concerns were expressed that asking applicants to provide a CV could result in less consistent assessment, than if applications were submitted on a standard form.
- Psychometric tests had been used in the recruitment exercise and the committee felt that the use of such tests was generally either not appropriate or at least required careful handling.
- The committee queried whether the selection criteria included a requirement to understand the specific Welsh context for equality issues.
- There were queries about the cost of the exercise. The committee asked for information on the proportion of the cost that was for advertisements and for consultation fees.
- Head-hunters were used almost exclusively for senior positions and even then, very sparingly – for 16 senior appointments over two years head-hunters had been used 2-3 times. The added cost was justified in terms of added value in broadening the pool of candidates. In this particular case, headhunters had been used because it was a specialised field where there had already been a lot of recruitment and a simple advertisement would not generate enough, appropriately qualified people. The consultant was chosen because they had proven expertise in recruiting equality posts. The process was an iterative one between the Assembly and the consultant who had advised on technical matters. Approximately thirty per cent of the initial applications were received as a result of headhunting.
- The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was concerned that it had not been contacted about being involved in the process, as it had fought hard for this important post to be created, and could have helped identify a pool of candidates in Wales. The CRE Commissioner said that an independent inquiry into the recruitment would be helpful. It was pointed out that members of the recruitment panel were drawn from a range of backgrounds including people from minority ethnic communities.
- The Disability Rights Commission had been asked to provide a panel member, although this occurred after interview dates were set. It was explained that initially there had been concerns about the size of the panel, but it was concluded that it was more important that the panel should be balanced and an additional member had been sought.
- LGB Forum said that all nine equality strands should be represented in the Assembly's recruitment processes even if this was not possible in every interview panel. The Assembly should give funds to develop expertise in other strands such as age and religion, and to ensure that those areas were considered in recruitment.
- There was concern that the range of media used when advertising posts was restricted, and that for people in North Wales in particular the Daily

Post, Welsh language outlets, certain broadsheets and the internet should be used. The committee was told that Personnel Division monitored the number of applications received through adverts in different media outlets and some newspapers generated significantly more applications than others. The post in question had been advertised in a wider range of newspapers than normal, and on the recruitment consultant's website. The Minister noted that advertising decisions depended on the nature of the post, but advertising was expensive and it was important to balance cost with disseminating vacancy information widely.

- The Minister had been kept informed of the recruitment process and had been impressed with the experience of the chair of the recruitment panel and the extremely high standard of all the shortlisted candidates.

Action Point:

- The committee would be provided with further information about the recruitment practices used, including using CVs rather than standard application forms, the choice and application of selection criteria, and how many on the shortlist for the post in question had been headhunted.
- A breakdown of the costs of the exercise between the advertising and consultant's fees would be provided after taking advice on any implications for commercial confidentiality.

9.55 – 10.30am

Item 4

Access to polling stations

Paper: EOC-07-02(p3) – Letter from Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

EOC-07-02(p4) – Electoral Commission

EOC-07-02(p5) – Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

- 4.1 The committee gave further consideration to the issue of access to polling stations with presentations by the WLGA and representatives of Scope, introduced by Amelia John of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC). The main points covered were:
- The 'Polls Apart' survey presented to the committee in March 2002 had included some Wales specific figures, but the survey was small. There was potential to carry out a Wales-specific survey for the Assembly elections next year. The DRC was keen that this was done, to provide research to build on for future elections, and would welcome a financial contribution from the Assembly. WLGA, Scope and members of the committee supported this. Scope supported an independent, voter-led evaluation of the voting structures that were unique to Wales.
 - The DRC and WLGA had met several times to look at how to make the whole electoral process more accessible. They were offering training to deputy returning officers on physical and attitudinal barriers and were seeking to involve more disability organisations in that work. WLGA was also producing written guidance for polling staff.
 - Steve Thomas and Naomi Alleyne of the WLGA had written to local authorities in August to ask how they were improving access to polling stations and 18 out of 22 had responded. Practice varied across Wales but local authorities were taking the issue seriously. Many were concerned that some

stations were not accessible and were looking at alternatives. Some authorities had established dedicated officers or working groups, were including disability organisations and using checklists to assess access. One authority was providing individual feedback to its polling station returning officers. There was consultation with local elected representatives before identifying alternative venues and temporary measures such as installing ramps were being taken. Risk assessment of buildings was being carried out, and RNIB guidelines had been issued to polling staff alongside other training and guidance. One authority had asked polling staff to monitor issues such as access to parking. Information on access was being issued to voters.

- Problems were also identified. For example in Blaenau Gwent, 36 out of 78 polling stations were not accessible and were mostly privately owned buildings making it difficult to have adaptations made. Topography was an issue – in Merthyr Tydfil temporary ramps did not solve all problems with providing low gradients and access to the polling station area rather than the building itself. In some rural areas it was hard to find suitable buildings and the local community may not always be happy to re-designate buildings for use as polling stations. Postal voting was an option but some people preferred to vote in person.
- There was discussion about the suitability of portacabins and temporary ramps and suggestions on how appropriate facilities could be sourced. A huge capital investment was needed – so far improvements had been on an incremental basis and with demands on capital budgets a 4-yearly requirement would not have the same priority as an ongoing requirement.
- Parking was a big issue UK-wide and was difficult to resolve. The provision of extra temporary parking spaces for the disabled on polling day should be encouraged.
- The WLGA pointed to concerns that the use of proportional representation and the list system was not easily accommodated by tactile templates. Others noted that polling station staff needed more training in the use of tactile templates.
- Gwilym Morris, the co-author of the ‘Polls Apart’ report on access to democracy, said that in the past over 90 per cent of polling stations had been inaccessible. At last year’s election it was 70 per cent and he could not imagine any other group in society accepting that. He advised on access around the UK and had never found a ward where it was impossible to improve access, both physical access and problems related to communication impairments.
- There was discussion of postal voting, which had increased dramatically. WLGA supported improvements to the postal voting system and for local authorities to look at publicising the use of rolling registers more. A lot of councils were taking proactive steps to promote postal voting - large print and tactile templates and in one area monochrome forms were being used for the colour blind. People still needed to be better informed – a lot of ballots were spoiled because of lack of understanding and no large print ballots were available unless requested. People with arthritic hands could have problems with handling ballot papers and the language used on papers should be reviewed. The declaration system was not satisfactory and the whole postal voting system should be looked at.
- The Minister and DRC were concerned that some local authorities might see lack of access as an excuse to close polling stations down. In the Minister’s

constituency in 1999 there had been 3 polling stations for 8,000 voters and long queues, in 2003 there would be 1 in the same area. Postal voting would become essential if this situation was not addressed. WLGA pointed out that it was not always easy to meet the fourteen detailed criteria for a polling station to be deemed suitable.

- There was a statutory requirement for schools to be made accessible by 2010 and if that was given a higher priority by the WLGA it might have an impact for schools used as polling stations. At the same time it was noted that there was some resistance to schools being used as polling stations.
- It was noted that if a group did not habitually exercise their democratic choice by voting they ran the risk of being habitually ignored by those elected. It was important to be responsive and steer budget strands to address the problems. Often changes took place because of the knowledge and enthusiasm of individual returning officers and training those officers was essential.
- DRC noted that practical solutions were available, and given the number of disabled in Wales, and the increasing number of elderly voters, it was important to find ways to reach them. The committee recognised that accessible, well-lit stations with no trip hazards meant better services for the disabled and better services for everyone.

Action point:

- The Chair would write to the Minister to request that funds be allocated to carry out a survey in 2003. The survey should be user-led and examine best practice and recommend solutions to access problems.

10.30 – 10.45 am

Item 5

Benefits Shopping presentation from the Home Office

5.1 The Committee received a presentation from Jessica Gregson of the Home Office about provisions of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill relating to accommodation. The main points of her presentation and the following discussion were:

- The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill had received royal assent on 8 November 2002 and the Act would be implemented on 8 January 2003. Guidance was being issued to local authorities following consultation.
- Clause 53 of the Act, on ‘withholding and withdrawal of support’, gave effect to Schedule 3, which dealt with people involved in ‘benefit shopping’, and set out the detailed circumstances of provision or withdrawal of accommodation and assistance with travel to return home. The schedule affected four types of people: those with citizenship or refugee status in another EU/EEA Member State, failed asylum seekers who did not comply with removal instructions, and those unlawfully present in the UK.
- The Act gave legal clarity for local authorities to deal consistently with people in those categories that were involved in ‘benefit shopping’. This term referred to increasing numbers of people, in particular people of Somali origin with residential status in another EU country, who were arriving in the UK and seeking benefits for which they were not eligible because they failed the habitual residence tests. It was believed that they

were drawn to the UK by the existing Somali communities and the idea that UK society was more conservative than the other EU countries where they had residency.

- The cost to local authorities of dealing with such people was severe. The areas affected included Leicester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester and London. In Birmingham £2.8 million had been spent on those covered by Schedule 3, applying rules in line with those in the new legislation, had reduced this expenditure to £1.7 million. In April 2002 Sheffield had adopted the measures provided for by the new Act, and its estimated expenditure reduction was from £563,000 in 2001-2002 to £260,000 in 2002-2003. Court cases had also influenced the introduction of the legislation.
- The legislation was similar to that adopted in Scotland and Ireland, and the types of support that were cut off as a result related mostly to accommodation and welfare. Children and vulnerable people, for example those with special needs, would continue to be provided with short-term support until they returned home. The changes also made provision for punishable offences in cases where people did not take up offers of travel to return home.
- Members expressed grave concern at the policy and asked how it might impact on Wales, particularly with regard to the large settled Somali communities in Wales. It was difficult to provide figures as the local authorities reported that people involved tended to register in different places under different names. There was some evidence of it happening to a limited extent in Cardiff, but not elsewhere in Wales. It was pointed out that most local authorities had already started to apply the measures provided for under Schedule 3 of the Act if necessary in their area.
- There was also concern about whether pregnant women would be included in the category of vulnerable people.

Action point:

- Jessica Gregson would inform the committee whether pregnant women would be affected by the new legislation and provide any available figures on the extent of 'benefit shopping' in different parts of Wales.

10.45 – 10.55am

Item 6

National Assembly for Wales Race Equality Scheme

Paper: EOC-07-02(p6)

- 6.1 Peter Gregory updated the committee on the latest developments in relation to the Assembly's Race Equality Scheme. A lot of work was being done on developing the action plans behind the scheme and a project board was working with the CRE to see how to introduce measures of race equality without it becoming too bureaucratic. Colleagues from the Race Equality Councils in Wales had spoken to the Equality Policy Unit about the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and they were now better informed.
- 6.2 The committee looked forward to a second opportunity to consider the scheme and a draft approach to implementing it in the New Year, prior to this going out to consultation in February.

- 6.3 A race equality scheme was being developed first before moving on to apply lessons learnt in developing similar schemes for disability and gender. In the meantime the other Commission standing invitees were welcome to participate in the current process if they wished.

Action point:

- The Committee would consider a final draft paper on implementing the race equality scheme at a meeting in the New Year.

10.55 – 11.10 am

The Committee agreed to break for 15 minutes

11.10 – 11.40am

Item 7

Consideration of Disability Rights Commission annual report

Paper: EOC-07-02(p7)

- 7.1 Will Bee and Kevin Fitzpatrick of the Disability Rights Commission informed the committee of the Commission's work over the last year. It had been a year of progress, moving out of the set-up phase to delivering change for disabled people in Wales. Kevin Fitzpatrick pointed to three trends in DRC's work: working with individuals, partnership-working and profile raising. The main points raised in his presentation and the following discussion were:

- There had been concern about the initial take-up of DRC services but the trend had been reversed and for the year in question 7 per cent of UK-wide calls to DRC were from people in Wales, and 6.1 per cent of referred casework (84 cases) was from Wales. This was a significant improvement as the level of benefit claims indicated a higher proportion of disabled people in Wales.
- A study of casework showed that in many cases people were able to achieve a satisfactory solution by settling out of court. The committee noted that court cases involved considerable costs and emotional strain but having test cases was important, especially given some of the discrimination incidents highlighted in its annual review. DRC said that many people preferred anonymity and with employment case law it was cheaper for employers to settle out of court without adverse publicity, but it would like to follow through a high profile case.
- Partnership working helped to maximise impact in areas including the arrival of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act that had plugged a critical weakness in the Disability Discrimination Act by extending to cover discrimination in education. Codes of practice had helped clarify the issue for education establishments but there was more work to be done and DRC hoped to see a telling impact on schools in Wales. Sixteen per cent of all consultation responses on the draft code of practice for schools came from Wales and for the post-19 code it was 10 per cent, which was a significant increase. Meetings had been held with the Assembly, 11 training sessions had been held with Estyn and new curriculum materials developed with ACCAC. Colleagues elsewhere in the UK had seen that recognition of the Act was higher in Wales. DRC confirmed to the committee that it was targeting school governors as a key audience and had employed a former teacher to work on this. The officer was focusing primarily on face to face contact with LEA representatives but guidance for governors had also been published.
- With regard to planning guidance under the new legislation, DRC recognised good work had been done on special needs but the Assembly should publish planning guidance as soon as possible so as not to hinder schools in implementing the Act.
- By 2004 the Disability Discrimination Act would place a duty on providers of facilities, goods and services to make reasonable physical adaptations to ensure accessibility. The DRC wanted to see changes to the environment, not just more money to lawyers for resulting legal cases. Solutions were not necessarily expensive, and imagination and can do approach could make a huge difference. DRC was working with interested partners to inform businesses of their duties. Examples included a meeting of the TUC/CBI Forum, involvement with the Welsh Development Agency's small and medium-sized enterprises equality project, and working with CADW on guidelines for access to listed buildings. It was important to recognise that disabled people were concerned about aesthetics too, and that most access issues did not relate to ramps but other physical features of buildings.
- The Assembly's 'Barriers Coming Down' events had also informed people of their duties. DRC needed to keep promoting the business aspect - that businesses would lose the custom of people with disabilities if they did not comply.
- Focused pieces of work had been carried out with partners including work on polling stations, and with Disability Wales, the Welsh Language Board and

West Bangor University on a terminology guide for Welsh translators and interpreters. DRC had also been working with the WLGA's new equality unit on their work plan.

- Profile raising work had included nearly 100 engagements and media coverage of the launch of the new code of practice.
- Attitudinal change was still vital, and DRC wanted people to look at disability issues afresh and adopt a 'can do' approach to what was a simple issue of social justice.
- The committee noted the importance of equality training and awareness in the public and private sectors. It was hoped that training would become more standardised and less piecemeal. DRC only had limited capacity to offer training across the board so it was focusing on encouraging decision-makers to change, and offering access audits and training. For example by reaching groups like hoteliers, to encourage the view that adaptations for people with disabilities did not have to be made in a way that would exclude the non-disabled. DRC tried to use audiences assembled for them to get their messages across, for example by speaking at events organised by the Assembly or other bodies. DRC was also accessing Communities First funding to start up projects that would benefit people with disabilities.
- There was a query about providing support to people with autism, which highlighted a weakness in the Disability Discrimination Act regarding provision of dedicated services for a particular disability. Where there was no comparable service provided for the non-disabled, a problem with service provision would not constitute a breach of the law. The Human Rights Act would be relevant here, for example when judging quality of lifestyle, but at present the issues of human rights had been mixed up with discussion of a single equality body.
- It was noted that the DRC had given presentations to the Assembly's regional committees during the year and these had been very helpful.
- The committee congratulated the DRC on coming a long way and wished it future success.

Action point:

- The committee would write to the Education Minister to raise its concerns that the planning guidance to implement the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act had not yet been published.

11.40 - 12.05pm

Item 8

Gypsy-Traveller review - Education - Vikki Seddon, Wrexham

- 8.1 Vikki Seddon gave evidence to the review about her 8 years work in the Traveller Education Service in North East Wales. She had worked in Wrexham and Flintshire and an advisory service was offered to Denbighshire and Conwy. The main points of her presentation were:
- The Wrexham Traveller Education service team consisted of a teacher/coordinator, teacher, nursery nurse, educational social worker and youth worker, mostly working part-time. The number of children supported ranged between 40 and 90 and was currently 54. Of the 24 families supported in Wrexham, 11 were living on an official site, 3 were in trailers on their own

land and the rest lived in houses. The service worked with 5 primary schools, 3 secondary schools and one special school.

- The key issues they faced were enrolment, prejudice, the tradition of gypsy traveller children leaving school at an early age and addressing the educational needs of gypsy traveller children in school.
- Enrolment was difficult for mobile families. There were many families who visited and stayed six weeks before moving on. Delays in enrolment were the problem, which could mean children left an area without having access to schooling, so the LEA had failed in its duty to provide education.
- There was often reluctance of head teachers and staff to enrol children. In one case 5 out of 6 schools had been reluctant to enrol gypsy traveller children, often saying it was too much trouble to take on children who would not stay for long.
- There could be prejudice from staff, existing school pupils and the local community. It was important that teachers were briefed on the previous educational history of children, and on their rights and the duty of the school to educate them. Teachers also needed to know that the children usually didn't require special needs teaching but they did have specific needs. A general ethos of welcoming newcomers was also necessary in schools. In one case a family had met the headmaster and bought new uniforms on the Friday, and then local parents signed a petition, lobbied councillors and police and by the Monday the gypsy traveller family had been evicted.
- Leaving school at an early age was traditional, usually by age 11 or 12 or even earlier, particularly if children had been attending regularly and had enough basic skills to help with the family business. This was an obstacle to academic achievement. In Wrexham none of the gypsy Traveller children had achieved a GCSE or completed year 11. Boys were expected to leave school to learn trades like tarmac, block paving etc from their father. Some might enjoy school and want to stay on but there was pressure from older relatives and visitors to leave. Girls tended to be groomed for motherhood from a very early age. The family unit was very strong and family events always took precedence over school. Regular contact with families was important to gain trust and encourage understanding of the possibilities open to children through formal education.
- Schools needed to compensate for gaps in education caused by mobility and the different experiences of children must be taken into account. Often schooling depended on the determination of the mothers. The women might occasionally appear forceful but this was necessary to ensure that their children's needs met.
- The level attendance at school varied significantly, some children entered school late, aged 9 or 10, and needed extra support. Sometimes the parent's lack of formal education made it difficult for them to help with reading or homework and schools needed to provide support.
- Gypsy traveller children could also feel a lack of association and relevance to their lifestyle in the mainstream curriculum and as with any culture this should be recognised in relation to teaching resources, subject content and displays.
- Examples were given of Gypsy Traveller children whose educational experiences had all been very different, shaped by their lifestyle and culture. Including a girl with special needs whose family did not wish her to attend a special school because it was seen as a school for sick people and would

damage her prospects of marriage. In this case the LEA had tried to keep her in mainstream school and a contract was drawn up with the family to keep her in school for 3 days a week. In another case, a boy whose schooling was interrupted to travel with his uncle was re-enrolled to follow an alternative curriculum agreed with him that included construction, cookery and football in the community.

- Best practice in delivering education to Gypsy Traveller children included a welcoming inclusive school, maintaining regular attendance, encouraging nursery age attendance, INSET training for staff and providing a flexible curriculum that reflected cultural diversity.
- Special strategies were needed for secondary age Gypsy Traveller children, including preparation for the transfer from Year 6, use of classroom assistants, help with homework, home school liaison and use of flexible timetables and alternative curriculum.
- The LEA in Wrexham does provide transport for gypsy traveller children to and from school.

12.05 – 12.25pm

Gypsy-Traveller review – Education - Monkton School, Priory Learning Centre project

8.2 William Rees, Headteacher of Monkton School, and Beverley Stephens, a teacher at the school, gave evidence to the review. The main points of their presentation were:

- Monkton School and its staff was dedicated to the education of Gypsy children, and used the term Gypsy because that was the term children in his area were proud to be described as.
- On the Assembly's Welsh index of multiple deprivation the council ward of Monkton was identified as the 10th most deprived in terms of income, 9th most deprived in terms of employment and 5th most deprived in terms of child poverty (69 per cent of children had free school meals). Overall it was 14th out of 865 in Wales, and had the highest levels of special educational needs in the county.
- Between 20 and 25 per cent of pupils at Monkton were members of the gypsy community and their culture and close family ties within the extended family were very important. The families were very weary of authority and unsurprisingly were unwilling to share confidences. It was important to earn their trust.
- Education beyond basic literacy and numeracy was not valued and any moves to change this must be tacked on to the gypsy families' existing culture and values.
- In the Monkton area gypsies tended to marry within their community and there was some movement from trailers into houses but also back again.
- Before 1996 when the project started, 95 per cent of 7-11 year olds were attending school but attendance was low during May to October (the traditional time for seasonal work such as hop-picking) and secondary school attendance was only 5 per cent. Attempts by attendance officers to change this were unsuccessful.
- The school applied for funding under section 488 of the 1996 Education Act to set up the Priory Project and taught, on site at the primary school, children of secondary age who were not attending secondary school
- A parallel curriculum was developed with emphasis on literacy, numeracy and IT. Enrolment at secondary school was promoted and family literacy sessions were set up. Classroom support was given to infant pupils and visits to secondary schools were arranged for parents and pupils. It was noted that many gypsy parents were concerned about sex education, access to drugs and the risk of teenage pregnancy if their children attended secondary school.
- NVQ placements were provided within the school for gypsy family members to work as learning support assistants and in administrative support.
- The school also runs tuition to pass the driving theory test as this was very important to young adult gypsies.
- The school was inspected by Estyn in 1999 and the quality of learning was judged 75 per cent good or very good, standards of achievement 66 per cent good or very good (national average 44 per cent) and quality of teaching 80 per cent good or very good (national average 47 per cent).
- The Priory Project was staffed by 2.6 teachers, 14 learning support assistants and a playgroup leader. Three of the learning support assistants were gypsies. 205 gypsy children were currently supported aged 3-19, in 5 secondary schools and 8 primary schools. 6 students were undertaking post 16 education. This included a gypsy who had returned to full-time education after leaving aged 9 and now lived on a gypsy traveller site and

studied engineering at University. A member of the gypsy community had been elected onto the board of governors of Monkton Priory School.

- Average attendance figures for gypsy children in county schools that were being supported were 85.5 per cent in primary schools and 75 per cent in secondary school. The results could be seen partly in the school-leavers who were maintaining their cultural identity and still living on gypsy sites but gaining employment in the Ministry of Defence, oil refineries, hairdressing, small businesses etc. This set an example for younger siblings.
- Achieving the continuum of education required trust, flexibility and responding to local need. The school provided total representation for the local gypsy community with local councillors, AMs, MPs, doctors, benefit agencies, police and potential employers.
- The Priory Learning Centre had applied for Objective One funding and had acquired 15 laptop computers for IT training. Grants had also been obtained for work with the Pembrokeshire Museum Service to develop a travelling gypsy exhibition including a romany wagon to take to schools and gypsy sites in the county.

8.3 The committee thanked the speakers for their presentations and for the examples of best practice they had outlined. As part of the review, visits to projects by members of the committee could be arranged through the committee secretariat.

12.25 – 12.30 pm

Item 9: Minutes of the previous meeting

Paper: EOC-06-02(min)

- 9.1 Diabetes UK had written to the previous chair querying the way their presentation, and discussion about it, had been recorded in the minutes. In particular they were concerned that comments by some members of the committee in support of their bid for additional funding were not reflected in the minutes. The video recording of the item had been reviewed and although the committee as a whole was very supportive of the Diabetes UK work, only one member specifically referred to supporting additional funding, and the chair did not include it in summing up the discussion. The committee noted what the member had said and decided to accept the minutes as a true record of this item.
- 9.2 Derek Walker of LGB Forum pointed out that in the last bullet point of 2.2, instead of 'A bid to extend the initial 3-year funding', the LGB Forum had actually put in a bid 'to extend its initial 1-year funding for 3 years'.
- 9.3 With this amendment the minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.
- 9.4 The meeting closed at 12.30 pm.