

Equality and Social Need Steering Group Meeting

10.30a.m, Thursday 30 November 2006

Room E4.18, Castle Buildings

Minutes

Present:

Gerry Mulligan	OFMDFM - Chair
Sharon Fitchie	DARD
Kim McCourt	DCAL
John McGuinness	DEL
Irene McAllister	DETI
Margaret Langhammer	DRD
David Malcolm	DSD
Chris Morris	DSD
Susan Nicholson	NIO
Stephen Donnelly	OFMDFM/NISRA
Linsey Farrell	OFMDFM – Secretary

Apologies:

Elaine McFeeters	DE
Carolyn Barr	DFP
Seamus Camplisson	DHSSPS
Alex Boyle	DOE
Pauline Millar	OFMDFM

1. Apologies and Introductions

1.1 Apologies had been received in advance of the meeting from:

Elaine McFeeters	DE
Carolyn Barr	DFP
Seamus Camplisson	DHSSPS
Alex Boyle	DOE
Pauline Millar	OFMDFM

1.2 Gerry advised members that Cynthia Smith had taken over as director of Equality within OFMDFM. Gerry will continue to chair the Equality and Social Need Steering Group meetings.

1.3 Members were also reminded that Arlington Trotman and Mary McMahon would require a short period of their time at the end of the meeting to ask some questions as part of their work on the review of the effectiveness of section 75.

2. Minutes of 27 September 2006 & Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes from 27 September were agreed by members.

2.2 Gerry advised that, with the agreement of the group, the minutes from the ESNSG meetings would be placed on the Central Anti-Poverty Unit website. Members indicated they were content with this approach.

Action: Linsey Farrell

Matters Arising

2.3 At the last meeting in September, Gerry had suggested that OFMDFM should compile a brief synopsis of all the Promoting Social Inclusion priorities. Due to work pressures, this had not yet been completed. However members were advised that the intention was still to produce such a document for reference.

3. Settlements and Services Presentation

3.1 Gerry Mulligan welcomed Chris Morris from the Department for Social Development and invited him to give a presentation on important research that had been carried out on Settlements and Services.

3.2 Chris welcomed comments and questions from members in relation to the research.

3.3 From the research it had become apparent that anomalies existed between population and service provision. With this in mind, discussion took place around the implications of the Review of Public Administration on the provision of services and the location of settlements.

4. Update on Lifetime Opportunities

- 4.1 Gerry advised members that New TSN's successor 'Lifetime Opportunities' had been launched by the Secretary of State on 13 November 2006.
- 4.2 The anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy was characterised by a lifecycle approach. Members were also reminded that poverty would be a key priority within the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review and therefore it would be advisable for departments to highlight links between departmental programmes and the goals and targets of Lifetime Opportunities.
- 4.3 Gerry also emphasised that he was keen for 'Lifetime Opportunities' to become recognisable as New TSN's successor.
- 4.4 In terms of the future roll-out of Lifetime Opportunities, Gerry advised that the Programme for Government committee would be looking at the anti-poverty strategy. Depending on their findings, further work may need to be done or Lifetime Opportunities may be adopted without change, in the event of restoration.
- 4.5 The cross-departmental and cross-sectoral ministerial poverty forum's main function would be to monitor progress against the goals and targets of the strategy and provide advice on the way forward. Gerry advised that the plan was to hold the first meeting of the forum sometime in the New Year. Members were reminded that the Equality and Social Need Steering Group would have an important gatekeeping role in terms of the forum and all papers would be cleared through officials before being presented to the forum.
- 4.6 John McGuinness inquired if a decision had yet been made on the membership of the forum.
- 4.7 Gerry advised that membership had been agreed in principle in terms of the organisations that would be represented on the forum but a decision had not yet been reached on the individuals that would attend.
- 4.8 In terms of reporting progress, Gerry indicated that it would be advisable to seek a view from the Ministerial-led forum with regard to the format and timing of any reporting mechanism. It was generally agreed that a more composite document would be preferable to a

series of departmental reports as this would reduce the burden of reporting progress for departments and present a more coherent picture to a reader.

- 4.9 Stephen Donnelly suggested that the work carried out by Pauline Donnan and her team on Good Relations and Equality Indicators, and the Equalities Review conducted by Trevor Phillips would be useful sources of information in addition to the Family Resources Survey.
- 4.10 In light of the general discussion around reporting progress, Gerry suggested that it should be an agenda item for early consideration by the forum. To this end, it was agreed that in advance of the first meeting of the forum, OFMDFM staff would come up with a series of options in terms of reporting formats.
- 4.11 In response to a query from Margaret Langhammer, Gerry advised departmental representatives that New TSN action plans, linked to New TSN objectives could now lapse. Departments should now think about Lifetime Opportunities and how best to reflect departmental contributions to these objectives, in a transparent way.

5. Disability Action Plans

- 5.1 By way of background information, Gerry informed members that the Disability Discrimination Order had gone through in February 2006. As a result of this, OFMDFM's role was to formally approve guidance for public authorities, prepared by ECNI.
- 5.2 The Disability Discrimination Order mirrored closely the GB legislation, which placed a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity, positive attitudes and participation. The duty to promote equality of opportunity had already been captured within the spirit of section 75 but there was no asymmetrical duty to focus on people with disabilities in terms of promoting positive attitudes and participation. To this end, a duty would be placed on public authorities to develop an action plan. The Equality Commission's role would be to keep action plans under review and provide guidance.
- 5.3 The appointed day for the legislation to go into operation was set for 1 January 2007.
- 5.4 Gerry invited Arlene McCreight to update the group on progress with the guidance from ECNI and thanked Liz Elliott for taking the time to attend the meeting to represent personnel.
- 5.5 Arlene advised members that a public authority could revise an action plan at any time. All public authorities had to produce an action plan with the exception of those organisations which had been exempted by the Equality Commission.

ECNI had produced a first draft of the guidance for assessment by OFMDFM staff.

- 5.6 Arlene went on to advise that all comments from the Equality Practitioners Group had been taken onboard and in passing on these concerns to ECNI, it had been agreed that Disability Action Plans should not be regarded as policy. Although the guidance would still commend consultation as good practice, there would not be an obligation placed on public authorities to do so. As a result of discussions with ECNI, revised guidance would soon be circulated for further comment.
- 5.7 General discussion took place around the best approach to producing disability actions plans. The overall view was that there was room for cross-departmental engagement on certain common elements of the action plan while also allowing for distinctive departmental approaches.
- 5.8 With this in mind, Gerry agreed to circulate any information that would be common to all departments. It was also suggested that some kind of cross-departmental consultation event, perhaps some time in March/April would be useful in terms of sounding out ideas from key stakeholders as to the content of the action plans. The possibility of inviting a number of key stakeholders to an Equality Practitioners' Meeting was also discussed as a forum to gauge general opinion from the outset.
- 5.9 It was also agreed that departments would value some form of template to use in developing action plans.
- 5.10 Liz Elliott reiterated the importance of liaising and consulting with Central Personnel Group as so many services would be centralised through E-HR.

6. Research and Information Strategy

- 6.1 Gerry invited Stephen Donnelly to address the group.
- 6.2 Stephen referred members to the papers that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Firstly, Stephen referred the group to the proposal regarding the use of the ESNSG budget to fund major annual surveys. ESNRIG had already endorsed the principles of using approximately half of the research budget for part-funding major annual surveys while ensuring that information is utilised and disseminated effectively, thus ensuring greater value for money.
- 6.3 In light of endorsement already received from ESNRIG, ESNSG members expressed agreement to the 50-50 principle.
- 6.4 In terms of the budgetary requirements for the Northern Ireland

Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) and the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS), representatives from DEL and DETI supported the LFS bid. However, the second option of allocating funds proportionately to each bid (30K to the LFS and 50K to the EFS) was agreed by the Group on the basis of the papers previously circulated outlining the importance of each survey and on the grounds that both were important in terms of monitoring social trends which were relevant to equality and poverty.

- 6.5 Agreement was also given to devolve responsibility to OFMDFM Research Branch to independently commission research (in line with the ESNSG published research strategy) in order to deal with any potential underspend in the budget. Members would of course be kept informed of all such decisions and research projects commissioned.
- 6.6 Stephen Donnelly referred members to the discussion paper that had been circulated in advance of the meeting in response to an action point from the previous meeting in September. The purpose of the paper was to highlight, clarify and agree the strategic principles under which the Group commissioned research and to identify future research themes and areas. This was in response to the recommendations made in the review of the 2003-2006 research strategy. In preparing this paper, Stephen had consulted with Grade 6s in NISRA. Members were asked to consider the 6 strategic issues identified within the paper and the potential research themes before submitting their views at the next ESNSG meeting, when formal comments would be taken.

7. Any Other Business

- 7.1 Update papers on policy and legislation had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Members were content and did not have any queries or additional comments.

8. Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 Members were advised that the next meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday 13 February. Linsey Farrell would confirm arrangements with members in due course.

Action: Linsey Farrell