

Equality and Social Need Steering Group

Wednesday 25 January 2006

10.00am, Room E4.18, Castle Buildings

Minutes

Present:

Gerry Mulligan	OFMDFM – Equality & Social Need (Chair)
Pauline Millar	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit
Stephen Donnelly	OFMDFM – Research Branch/NISRA
Laurene McAlpine	OFMDFM – Equality & Rights
Bernie Duffy	OFMDFM – Equality & Human Rights
Linsey Farrell	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit (Secretary)
Liz McMeekin	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit
Jim Alford	NIO
Carolyn Barr	DFP
Alex Boyle	DOE
Seamus Camplisson	DHSSPS
Rosemary Crawford	DETI
Victor Douglas	DCAL
Lindsay Hodges	DARD
Margaret Langhammer	DRD
Sharon Lawlor	DE
David Malcolm	DSD
Elaine McFeeters	DE
John McGuinness	DEL

Apologies:

Damian Prince
Norman Taylor
Andrew Elliott

1. Apologies & Introductions

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Damian Prince
Norman Taylor
Andrew Elliott

1.2 Gerry Mulligan advised members that Mary Bunting had left the Equality Directorate and moved on to the North-South Ministerial Council. Gerry would chair all ESNSG meetings in the interim until the Director's position was filled on a permanent basis.

1.3 There was a tour de table for the benefit of newcomers to the group.

2. Minutes of 15 June 2005 & Matters Arising

2.1 Gerry recorded apologies that the minutes from the previous meeting had not been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. There had been an oversight due to the cancellation of September's ESNSG meeting.

2.2 The minutes from 15 June 2005 were circulated in draft form for members' consideration. No issues were raised.

Matters Arising

2.3 The meeting postponed from September at which Antoinette McKeown was to give a presentation on Equality Screening would now take place on 21 March. Linsey Farrell would contact members in due course with further details.

Action: Linsey

3. Section 75 Review & Other Equality Issues

Bernie Duffy supplemented the written equality update with details on:

3.1 Joint Declaration Review on the Operation of S.75

The final report from NIO London on the review was pending and would be shared with OFMDFM and the Equality Commission.

3.2 It was possible that the outcomes from this review would feed into the Review of Effectiveness due to be carried out by the Equality Commission.

3.3 Review of Equality Schemes

Bernie advised the group of the successful event held with key stakeholders on 12 January. It had proved to be an example of good practice in terms of joined-up working across Departments. Monica Fitzpatrick was working on collating summaries and the positive feedback received from participants.

3.4 John McGuinness inquired as to whether or not deadlines would be extended for some departments.

Bernie informed the group that ECNI had advised that they were willing to offer a degree of flexibility to departments where required up to 12 April. Aubrey McCrory from ECNI is to confirm this by e-mail and Bernie agreed to circulate this to departments upon receipt.

Action: Bernie

3.4 Review of Effectiveness

The Equality and Human Rights Unit was awaiting further details from the Equality Commission on the focus of this review. The Commission has stated that it would at least include:

- An independent audit of compliance;
- A review of the Commission's enforcement powers; and
- A comparative analysis of equality mainstreaming tools in other jurisdictions.

3.5 However Bernie added that issues around how to define effectiveness and whether there was to be any consideration of amending the existing nine categories had not been discussed, and these were issues that have already been raised informally by the voluntary and community sector on several occasions. The Equality and Human Rights Unit would be meeting with ECNI shortly to tease out these issues.

3.6 Bernie went on to advise that there would be an opportunity for OFMDFM to comment on the Terms of Reference but ultimately; the decision on what the review would focus on would lie with ECNI. There would also be a period of consultation with key stakeholders who would wish to be involved in the process.

3.7 It was probable that the bulk of the work on the review would take place during 2006/07.

3.8 Gerry pointed out that it would be useful if the review were to take account of the parallel duties resulting from the Disability Discrimination Order as this piece of legislation included a statutory duty to produce an action plan in respect of disability. Bernie agreed to keep Gerry in the loop on this and give him an opportunity to comment on the TOR from this perspective.

3.9 **Complaints**

Bernie advised that at a meeting with Nigel Hamilton, it had been agreed to keep ESNSG apprised of the situation with complaints across departments.

3.10 Members were informed that the previously notified DSD complaint raised by Sinn Fein had been investigated by the Commission and resolved with the department being found to have acted correctly and in accordance with their Equality Scheme.

3.11 Carolyn Barr reported that DFP had been made aware of a complaint to ECNI on the Review of Rating Policy. However, there has been some confusion over the validity of the complaint and whether or not ECNI would intervene on the complainant's behalf. Any further developments will be reported in due course.

3.12 **Equality Commission Guidance**

Bernie informed the group of the progress of several guidance documents expected from the Commission:

3.13 **PPPs**

Due to be issued in Spring 2006

3.14 **Good Relations**

To be finalised in consultation with Good Relations and Reconciliation Division

3.15 **Monitoring**

Work not yet commenced

3.16 **Consulting with Children and Young People**

Work not yet commenced

3.17 **Consultation**

Not in this year's ECNI Business Plan. It was hoped that the outcomes from the reviews would inform work on this guide.

3.18 **General Issues**

Gerry Mulligan advised that in a recent press statement, the Equality Authority in the Republic of Ireland described Northern Ireland as an example of good practice in terms of its equality legislation.

3.19 Following on from this, Bernie advised that a representative from ODPM in GB would be paying a visit to Northern Ireland to discuss equality mainstreaming – in the first instance they were meeting with Claire Archbold in OFMDFM, and with the Equality Commission.

4. Policy/Legislation Updates

4.1 Gerry referred members to the update papers that had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

4.2 Disability

In addition, members were informed that work on PSI Disability had been making good progress. It was also intended that an interim report would be produced in Spring 2006.

4.3 Disability Discrimination Order

In relation to the Disability Discrimination Order, Gerry advised that Jeff Rooker would be taking the Order through the House of Lords later that day and he would be supported by OFMDFM and DRD officials. The Order would come into operation after the Privy Council meeting in February. Members would be apprised of all developments in terms of subordinate legislation.

4.4 The branch with responsibility for the Order would be happy to give a presentation to groups or departments, which required further information.

4.5 British Irish Council

Members were advised that a report on Employment and Disability would be presented at a Ministerial Summit to be held in March.

The decision had yet to be taken on the future agenda item for the social inclusion strand.

4.6 Gerry invited questions from members on the update papers.

4.7 Rosemary Crawford raised the issue of the review of the Employers Recognition Awards.

Gerry advised that a review was underway and would look at the added value of the scheme. The outcome would be decided by Ministers.

4.8 Jim Alford queried who had responsibility for the appointment of the Victims' Commissioner. He was referred to John Clarke, Head of the Victims Unit in OFMDFM.

4.9 Departmental Updates

Gerry invited members to provide updates on relevant equality and social need issues within departments.

4.10 DE

Sharon Lawlor advised the group of the prevalent issue of the education of children who have no knowledge of the English language. This situation is particularly pertinent to the families of migrant workers who come to Northern Ireland in groups, seeking employment. In such cases, English is rarely used in the home environment.

4.11 DOE

Alex Boyle also pointed out that DOE was coming under increasing pressure to provide the service of Irish speaking Road Safety Education Officers to schools where the Irish language was used.

4.12 DHSSPS

Seamus Camplisson highlighted that DHSSPS was looking at models for the provision of interpreting services in Health Services.

4.13 NIO

Jim Alford advised that NIO would be meeting Bob Collins in relation to ASBOs in light of the recent Girvan judgment.

4.14 Gerry suggested that the next meeting would be a suitable starting point for departmental updates to be given by representatives. This would become a standing item on the ESNSG agenda and would provide a good forum for information sharing. The primary function of ESNSG was to co-ordinate Equality and Social Need policies across departments and share good practice.

Action: All departments

4.15 Stephen Donnelly pointed out that research was being conducted in GB in and around minority ethnic households. Language would be a key consideration within this study and would therefore be of interest to DE.

5. Research & Information

5.1 Stephen Donnelly referred members to the research paper that had been circulated prior to the meeting. Members were advised that a research budget of £300k, referring to the 2005/06 financial year had already been allocated, leaving a yet unallocated amount of £130k (from the 300k) covering 2006/07. Consequently, members were invited to advise respective research branches of research priorities and needs.

5.2 ESNRIG was said to respond to the needs and priorities of ESNSG. However it was important that any priorities identified should have relevance across a number of departments and not merely be pertinent to one area of work.

5.3 Census

Members were invited to respond to NISRA in respect of the information departments would need to find out from the Census. Stephen advised that he was responsible for coordinating the census consultation response to NISRA from DSD, DE and OFMDFM.

5.4 Progress Reports

Stephen updated members on the progress of the Survey of Disability and the Equality and Diversity Indicators project. The group was also advised of preparations underway for a research project into evidencing good practice in relation to mainstreaming sexual orientation issues into policy development and practice.

5.5 Lindsay Hodges raised the subject of ongoing research in respect of urban/rural definitions.

Gerry Mulligan suggested that perhaps ESNSG would be a suitable forum for a presentation on this research.

5.6 It was agreed that Stephen would give a presentation on Equality Indicators to the next meeting and the urban/rural research would be considered at the following meeting.

Action: Stephen Donnelly

5.7 It was also agreed that the Family Resources Survey and its funding base would be a future agenda item for consideration at ESNSG.

Action: Linsey to note

6. Lifetime Opportunities and Subsequent Outworkings

Pauline Millar advised members that the Lifetime Opportunities document had been approved by Departments and Ministers.

6.1 Regional Action Plan

In terms of the Regional Action Plan, Pauline advised that representatives from the Central Anti-Poverty Unit (CAPU) would shortly be going out to departments for informal discussions.

- 6.2 It was emphasised that ESNSG would have a key role in the co-ordination of the Regional Action Plan and it would provide a good opportunity to identify areas for joined-up working across departments.
- 6.3 Members were advised that CAPU was currently working alongside DFP ISU in developing an IT system to support the Action Plan. It was hoped that this would be a useful information resource for all departments. The first Regional Action Plan would cover the period 2006-08 in order to link to the UK National Action Plan.
- 6.4 Members were also informed that the Regional Action Plan would take a life-cycle approach in terms of measuring and reporting progress. Pauline advised members that CAPU was taking advice from Research Branch in relation to targets for the Action Plan.
- 6.5 Gerry reminded members that ESNSG would carry out an important gate keeping role in the entire process and the draft Regional Action Plan would be cleared by ESNSG before going before the Forum.
- 6.6 Discussion took place around departmental initiatives, schemes etc. Members were advised that the Action Plan should take account of existing programmes but that did not exclude the possibility of developing new areas. Departments were encouraged to bear in mind the Strategic Spending Review, which would present opportunities for departments to identify areas for further development.
- 6.7 Ministerial Forum
In respect of the Ministerial Forum, it was hoped that a submission and list of suggested members would be put to the Minister shortly for approval.
- 6.8 Poverty-Proofing
Pauline advised members that work was ongoing in the development of a poverty-proofing tool. Consideration was being given regarding its relationship with the Integrated Impact Assessment process.
- 6.9 It was agreed that a presentation on Lifetime Opportunities and its outworking would be given at the meeting in March.
Action: CAPU
7. **PSI Lone Parents**
Pauline advised the group that a meeting would be taking place with nominated representatives on 3 February.

It had been agreed that PSI Lone Parents would take a different approach due to the feeling that in general, the process was taking too long to reach recommendations stage.

- 7.1 It was planned that a conference report would be compiled at the end of the event planned for March and the aim was to have the process completed by the end of this calendar year.
- 7.2 Final recommendations would become actions for departments and where appropriate, these would be included in the Regional Action Plan.
- 7.3 Members were invited to send all comments on the Lone Parents paper that had been circulated and the Terms of Reference to Pauline by 31 January.

8. Any Other Business

No items were identified under any other business

9. Date of Next Meeting

Next meeting would take place on 21 March.