

Equality and Social Need Steering Group Meeting

Tuesday 13th February 2007

10.30am, Room E4.02 Castle Buildings

Minutes

Present:

Gerry Mulligan	Equality, Rights & Social Need Division (Chair)
Lindsay Hodges	DARD
Damian Brady	DCAL
John McGuinness	DEL
Rosemary Crawford	DETI
Carolyn Barr	DFP
Nigel Carson	DHSSPS
Margaret Langhammer	DRD
David Malcolm	DSD
Stephen Donnelly	OFMDFM/NISRA
Michael Mulholland	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit
Carol Carser	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit
Liz McMeekin	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty Unit
Linsey Farrell	OFMDFM – Central Anti-Poverty unit (Secretary)

Apologies:

Elaine McFeeters	DE
Alex Boyle	DOE
Susan Nicholson	NIO

1. Apologies & Introductions

- 1.1 Gerry welcomed members to the first Equality and Social Need Steering Group meeting of 2007. After the tour de table, apologies were registered from Elaine McFeeters, Alex Boyle and Susan Nicholson.
- 1.2 Members were referred to the Good Relations research papers that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. It was pointed out that these papers were purely for information purposes but it would be possible to organise a presentation on any of the research at a later meeting if members desired.

2. Minutes of 30 November 2006 & Matters Arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2006 were approved by members. It was agreed that minutes would not be placed on the website until approved by the group.

Action: Linsey Farrell

- 2.2 It was agreed that the issue of Disability Action Plans would be discussed under any other business.

3. Lifetime Opportunities – Monitoring & Reporting Mechanisms

- 3.1 Gerry advised members that the Programme for Government Committee debate had taken oral evidence on the strategy and had responded with a report outlining their views and recommendations for the way forward.
- 3.2 In light of the statutory obligation on an incoming Executive to adopt a strategy on poverty and social inclusion, the Programme for Government committee had given agreement to adopt Lifetime Opportunities as a suitable framework. Although outlining several reservations, the Committee had commended the lifecycle approach adopted within the Strategy. In preparing a response to the report, Central Anti-Poverty Unit staff would look to departments for clearance.

Action: Central Anti-Poverty Unit Officials

- 3.3 In terms of reporting mechanisms, Gerry suggested that it perhaps would be preferable to move away from the focus upon short-term targets, as adopted by New Targeting Social Need, towards an approach more focused on outcomes and longer-term targets.

- 3.4 Three reporting options were outlined for potential consideration:
- OFMDFM would be concerned only with reporting against the high level objectives;
 - OFMDFM would consolidate one single monitoring report with departmental contributions; and
 - A combination of OFMDFM and other departmental contributions would be distilled into one annual report.
- 3.5 There was some discussion around the use of the social need indicators that are focused broadly around the life cycle groups. The indicators give a broad indication of what is happening over a period of time. In contrast, year on year changes in relation to child poverty for example, could not be monitored through the Family Resources Survey because of the small sample size.
- 3.6 Discussion took place around the ministerially led forum that would act as a critical audience for monitoring of Lifetime Opportunities and provide advice on the basis of the content of any monitoring report. It was pointed out that there were already mechanisms in place for reporting through other strategies and so perhaps there was a need for broader reporting on equality and social need generally.
- 3.7 Stephen Donnelly advised members of a research proposal, prepared by Alan McClelland that would look at policy impacts on groups of people and help policymakers identify issues and potential adverse impacts before they arise.
- 3.8 Gerry Mulligan advised that 8th March had been proposed as the date for the first meeting of the forum. ESNSG members would have sight of the submission outlining the membership of the forum. The inaugural meeting would be based around the proposed terms of reference and would be a useful opportunity to decide upon future agenda items.

Action: Central Anti-Poverty Unit Officials

- 3.9 Discussion took place around the frequency of forum meetings. Drawing on the experiences of other departmental fora, it was generally agreed that it would be preferable for meetings to be held on a six-monthly basis.

4. PSI Lone Parents

- 4.1 Gerry updated the group on progress with the work on PSI Lone Parents. Members were advised that focus groups were being held

at various locations across Northern Ireland to identify the issues for lone parents.

- 4.2 The main event, planned for 29th March presented a vital opportunity to consider the issues and come up with practical suggestions in response. The importance of departmental representation at this event was emphasised to members.

Action: All Departments

- 4.3 Members were also advised that the social inclusion strand of the British Irish Council was considering issues relating to lone parents and was due to meet on 27th February in Belfast.

5. Research Priorities

- 5.1 Gerry invited Stephen Donnelly to address the group on research priorities. The group was advised that as a result of recommendations contained within the review of the research and information strategy, ESNRIG and ESNSG would jointly agree a statement of priorities.
- 5.2 Members were referred to the discussion paper that had been circulated at the meeting in November. Both groups were also to agree the criteria that research priorities should fulfil. Stephen Donnelly advised that approving the research paper would not prevent departments from commissioning their own research.
- 5.3 The group endorsed the research priorities discussion paper but members were also reminded that ESNSG would rely on members to seek agreement from departmental colleagues with regard to any research proposal.
- 5.4 Gerry suggested that as a programme of research is rolled out, it would be useful to have some kind of tabular summary outlining projects ongoing, issues being addressed, the expected outcomes and relevant priority area. Stephen Donnelly agreed to prepare a tabular summary for the information of the group.

Action: Stephen Donnelly

6. Policy/Legislation Updates

- 6.1 Policy and legislation update papers had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Members had no specific queries in relation to the updates.
- 6.2 In relation to the Single Equality Bill, Gerry invited Patricia Carey to update members.

- 6.3 The group was advised that a policy paper would shortly be going to the Minister, which would narrow options in view of the consultations that had taken place.
- 6.4 Taking account of the Discrimination Law Review in GB, it was probable that the main focus of the Single Equality Bill would be to enhance where appropriate and harmonise existing legislation, filling in any gaps that existed.
- 6.5 Officials from the Single Equality Bill team would be engaging with stakeholders in the next few weeks with a view to having a policy paper ready for an incoming Executive to consider, and subject to the decisions of an Assembly, there would be a full twelve-week consultation.

7. Departmental Updates

- 7.1 Gerry invited members to update the group on any relevant work ongoing within departments.
- 7.2 Rosemary Crawford advised that DETI had decided to undertake a programme of refresher training in terms of Equality screening for Grade 7s and DPs, which would be open to the department and associated agencies.
- 7.3 Some discussion took place around quality assurance of Equality training. Carolyn Barr suggested that EPG might have a role to play in this.
- 7.4 Gerry agreed that EPG would be an appropriate forum at which to share information. Patricia Carey agreed to take this forward through EPG and to consult the Centre for Applied Learning.

Action: Patricia Carey

- 7.5 John McGuinness queried if there had been any follow up to the two-day event at which departments had worked to compile guidance on equality screening. Patricia Carey agreed to find out and advise members through EPG.

Action: Patricia Carey

8. Any Other Business

- 8.1 Members were advised of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee debate which took place in December and were thanked for their valuable contributions to the briefing. The Minister had specifically

asked for his thanks to be passed on to departments for answering the queries that arose on the day.

- 8.2 With regard to Disability Action Plans, Gerry advised that ECNI continued to work on finalising the guidance for OFMDFM approval. As soon as guidance was finalised, further information would be forwarded to departments. Gerry also confirmed that OFMDFM officials would speak to colleagues in the Public Appointments Unit.

Action: OFMDFM

- 8.3 Gerry registered thanks to departments for their contributions to the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference paper on cross-border working.
- 8.4 Members were advised that the centre for cross-border studies was conducting research and would be making recommendations on areas where joint working could be extended.
- 8.5 John McGuinness advised that Equality contacts within departments had received an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to a meeting at the end of March. With this in mind, John inquired as to the level of Human Rights training across departments.
- 8.6 During the general discussion regarding Human Rights training, Carolyn Barr reminded members that the Centre for Applied Learning was the provider of all centralised training and therefore should be contacted regarding the provision of any Human Rights courses.
- 8.7 Patricia Carey suggested that it was a matter that should be taken forward by the Equality Practitioners' Group and that she would discuss the matter with the Centre for Applied Learning and other potential providers.

Action: Patricia Carey

9. Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 Members were advised that the next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 20th June. Linsey Farrell would contact members in due course with further details.

Action: Linsey Farrell