

EQUALITY WORKING GROUP MEETING

15th SEPTEMBER 2008

AGREED MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Bob Collins, Equality Commission (Chair)

Lisa McElherron, NICVA

Jim Deery, Ashton Centre

Patricia Bray, Disability Action

Dale Heaney, OFMDFM

Andrew Minnis, SEUPB

Damian Fitzpatrick, DETI

Carly Gordon, NISRA

Peter Millen, DFP

Lynsey Moore, DFP

Anne Baker, Secretariat

APOLOGIES: Pamela Dooley, UNISON

Mealla Bratton, Local Govt

Kevin Doherty, Disability Action

Michael Hughes, RCN

Jim Jewhurst, DEL

1. Introduction

Apologies were noted. Thanks to Dale Heaney for the hospitality.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

No comments were received on the draft minutes therefore they were taken as agreed.

3. Action Points

- Template forwarded to DETI. Paper now presented for WG consideration and covered under Agenda item 4.
- DETI considered having Invest NI attend at this point would have no added value

- Equality Guidance Note.
 - Amended and circulated to the WG before issue for inter-Departmental consultation. No comments received to date from Departments.
 - NISRA advised that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) was testing 2 Sexual orientation questions; however these would not be included in questionnaires until April 2009. It was agreed that the current question continue to be used and NISRA will inform the group in due course if the question is changed.

Action: NISRA

- NISRA also suggested that the question relating to Religious Belief - (7b) be amended to take reflect Scottish related religions. It was agreed that choice 2 be amended to 'Presbyterian / Church of Scotland' for the Interreg IVa Programme and a 5th option 'Other Christian' be added across all Programmes.

Action: DFP

- NISRA also suggested that question 5 (Dependants) be amended to include 'Please specify' at the 'A dependant not included above' option.

Action: DFP

It was agreed that the amended version of the Guidance Note will be issued to the Managing Authorities for implementation.

Action: DFP

- DEL Equality Unit letter was received by the secretariat. DFP and OFMDFM had discussed this and concluded that the 2 questions should be included in the questionnaire as there was no policy stating that they should be excluded. DFP explained that the questionnaire was completed at the discretion of the individual and returned in a freepost envelope to NISRA and was therefore totally anonymous. The Working Group discussed the issue and agreed that the questions should be included for comparability and consistency across all the Programmes. It was agreed that DFP would discuss the issue with DEL and ask them to comply with the Member State guidance.

Action: DFP

- Review of the Equality Guidance Note has been added to the Work Plan
- DEL provided the information for the sub-group.
- The sub-groups met. Reports under agenda item 3.

4. Work Programme 2008 – reports from sub-groups.

DFP advised that the sub-group examining the equality responses and scoring had met and a note of the meeting was tabled. He advised that DEL had provided the text and scores relating to the Equality question. However the sub-group found that the exercise had a limited capability in producing anything useful.

The SEUPB rep reiterated that the information had a limited use. He advised that under the Peace III and Interreg IVa selection process, the extent of Equality of the project was taken on the whole application and not just one question. He noted that an issue which arose at the sub-group meeting was that the answers tended to be focused on the organisation rather than the project with regards to policies etc.

He suggested that the sub-group should take a different approach and examine the full applications of a sample of projects across all the Programmes, which will give a more in-depth view as to how the equality guidance is being used. This in turn will allow the sub-group to make recommendations across all the programmes by providing guidance to MAs on the implementation of the Equality Guide, (currently being produced by the other sub-group), suggest training for MAs, selection panels, etc and giving advice to projects.

DFP will convene a meeting of the sub-group to discuss the way forward.

Action: DFP

The Chair requested that work should be completed in time for any recommendations to be presented to the April Monitoring Committee meeting.

The OFMDFM rep advised that the sub-group reviewing the Equality Guide had made good progress to date. He noted that there were still areas to be reviewed which included the 'Case studies' section, where examples were required.

DFP advised that they would ask the MAs to select some good examples.

Action: DFP

He advised that they hope to have the Guide reviewed by the end of December to enable it to be used by the other sub-group.

DFP advised that they would prepare a WG paper for the MC meeting and asked if a statement could be added noting that the EqWG endorse the revised Equality Guidance Note and recommend that the MAs put it into practice. The WG agreed.

Action: DFP

Item 5 on the Work Plan was discussed. To gather the required information it was suggested that the Equality questionnaire should be issued to MC, WG and selection panel members. Members agreed the information would be useful for refreshment exercises and guidance could be produced to ensure nominating organisations were more aware of S75 issues when nominating people for membership of MCs, etc. DFP will discuss the methodology with NISRA.

Action: DFP/NISRA

5. Competitiveness Programme – screening out of EQIA

DFP advised that DETI had produced this paper to explain the rationale for screening out an EQIA for EqWG consideration.

DFP advised that they were involved in the preparation of the Programme and completed the screening out exercise. She explained that an EQIA, if recommended, should be completed at the development stage of the policy therefore it was difficult to see any added value in carrying one out at this stage of the Programme. She stated it would be more beneficial if the EqWG focused on influencing the delivery of Equality across the Programmes. Managing Authorities were preparing for programme evaluation and there was the opportunity to make practical recommendations.

The OFMDFM rep agreed that to carry out a full EQIA at this stage would be of little value. He highlighted that the DETI paper set out all the steps taken and gave assurances that all policies included in the Programme have had EQIAs carried out.

The Voluntary & Community Sector rep commented that strategic documents should be considered for an EQIA. She could see how the expenditure within the programme is subject to EQIAs through the Department therefore at this stage there is no need for an EQIA. She stated that the EqWG has a positive duty to promote equality which it can do under the remit of its work plan.

The Chair stated that an EQIA to assist in the development of the policy would have been worthwhile. While it may have identified how projects can more actively promote equality of opportunity, it was not practical at this time. However he stated that it should be acknowledged that: Equality is a cross cutting theme of the Programme: the Monitoring Committee have been tasked with monitoring equality: and the EqWG exists to actively promote equality of opportunity.

It was therefore agreed that the decision of the WG was not to carry out a full EQIA on the Competitiveness Programme. This recommendation will be reflected in the WG report to the MC.

The DFP rep suggested adding that the group would more positively promote equality of opportunity using the equality cross-cutting theme, the Monitoring

Committee and the EqWG. This would also be noted in the WG paper for the MC meeting.

Action: DFP

DFP asked DETI if they had copies of the EQIAs on schemes to share with the group.

DETI confirmed they have a number of EQIAs which they will forward to DFP for circulation to the WG.

Action: DETI/DFP

6. AOB

The DFP rep advised that Jim Deery would be attending the Open Days in Brussels. DFP asked that he give a short presentation to the WG at their next meeting.

Action: J Deery

7. Date and venue of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the EqWG would be held January/February. The Secretariat will circulate members for availability. The Voluntary & Community rep kindly offered to host at NICVA.