

Response by the Welsh Assembly Government to the Report of the European and External Affairs Committee: European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee on what plans it has to take forward the 'poverty audit' model for decision making at the devolved level as proposed by the Anti-Poverty Network Cymru. (Page 17)

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government already has a tool in place, through the Policy Gateway to assess all its major policies. This includes specific references to the need to consider the impacts on the poorest individuals and communities. In addition, and as part of the Policy Gateway Process, a rural proofing checklist includes a specific question on the impact on low income families in those areas.

As well as consulting internally with colleagues, officials are also asked at the 'Threshold Stage' which external stakeholders they will involve in the development of their policy and how they will do this.

Financial Implications

To introduce another, substantially similar process to the Policy Gateway would lead to duplication of effort at a time when the Assembly Government is attempting to reduce costs and manage with less.

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee as soon as possible on how it is ensuring that people experiencing poverty are fully involved in EY2010 activities in Wales from planning to execution and legacy planning. (Page 18)

Response: Accept

The UK National Implementation Body (NIB) has been clear that individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion should be a central part of the activities in connection with the Year. This was therefore one of the criteria against which all bids for funding were assessed.

The UK NIB has also used a reference group, primarily made up of organisations representing individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion, to help develop and guide the awareness raising activities across the UK in connection with the year.

Each of the funded launch events across the UK (this includes the 'Be Heard' event in Wales that was held instead of a launch event) have demonstrated this by seeking a 60:40 split between individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion and policy makers. These events have followed a similar format and in each one, individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion have been able to ask questions to policy makers and hold them to account and express their views and experiences.

The Bevan Foundation event will also include individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the event is specifically aiming to identify 'what works' in terms of tackling these issues and sharing best practice.

In terms of building a legacy, the outputs from the launch events will be distributed to Ministers in the UK and Welsh Assembly Government, and will help to add to the existing evidence base used to develop policy. The need to provide a lasting legacy from the year was also part of the criteria for attracting funds to run activities as part of the year. Therefore a range of legacy products will be created. Examples of these are: conference reports, short films/videos, websites, tool kits etc. In Wales, the Bevan Foundation will be developing a range of products including films and written materials. All of these will be based on the events being run as part of the year, the majority of which will have had input from individuals experiencing poverty and social exclusion. These will be very valuable in informing policy development on poverty in Wales.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee in early 2011 on the main outcomes emerging from EY2010 activities in Wales and its action plan to ensure a legacy from those initial outcomes. (Page 18)

Response: Accept

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is the lead Government Department in the UK (as the Member State) for the Year. The outcomes emerging from the EY2010 activities in Wales will therefore form part of the UK wide report that will be produced for the EU. The Assembly Government, in conjunction with DWP, will ensure that the report, highlighting outcomes emerging from Welsh activities and any legacy from these outcomes, is sent to the Committee when it is available.

Ensuring a lasting legacy to EY2010 is fundamental to its success, and its importance is demonstrated by its inclusion as one of the three UK-level

objectives for the year. Additionally, the extent to which proposed activities contributed to this objective was a key criterion of selection and grant payments, and organisations were asked to specify how their activities would contribute to a lasting legacy. Grants were made to fund those activities which clearly contributed to an enduring legacy, and the monitoring and evaluation of activities will assess the extent to which this objective has been met in practice.

The 'legacy' objective specifically mentions the sharing and dissemination of good practice, and many EY2010 activities will contribute to this by bringing together people experiencing poverty, practitioners and those involved in service delivery, policy-makers and Ministers across the UK to discuss and share experience and evidence of 'what works' in tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion.

It is intended that the Year's legacy will include a heightened awareness of the prevalence, causes and consequences of poverty across the UK. Many activities intend to contribute to this through a variety of awareness-raising activities. It is important that the testimony of people with first hand experience of poverty can contribute directly to this raised awareness, and many EY2010 activities seek to ensure that this happens.. For example, a documentary on the lives of four people with experience of poverty and social exclusion, including a young man living in Wales, will be broadcast on the Community Channel. This offers a powerful insight into the experience of poverty, and challenges some of the myths and stereotypes that all too often feature on this agenda. Similarly, the three UK launch events and the Wales: Get Heard event have put people with experience of poverty at the centre of a discussion about what it means to live in poverty in the UK today and how best Government can respond.

It is recognised that some outcomes are more difficult to measure than others, and the challenges of demonstrating 'attribution' (i.e. how to demonstrate the impact of EY2010 activities on 'softer' outcomes such as raised awareness?). As lead Government Department, DWP are committed to embedding a robust approach to monitoring and evaluation, to enable them to make a good assessment of what EY2010 has achieved.

DWP have been selected by the European Commission as an in-depth case study for evaluation, and are currently in discussion with the Commission's contractors. DWP also have a monthly progress-reporting process, a "non-financial" audit process and a financial audit regime. All providers will be required to submit a final report upon completion of their activities, which will include an assessment of the extent to which the Year's objectives - including that of leaving a lasting legacy - were met.

DWP intend to produce an internal 'end of Year' report, bringing together the findings of the monitoring and evaluation of individual components of the Programme and the Commission's evaluation findings. This will include recommendations and lessons learned.

The Welsh Assembly Government will ensure that the Committee receives the report when it is available and will report on the outcomes emerging from Welsh activities and any legacy from these outcomes.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee on how it plans to engage in the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the future to ensure a legacy from EY2010 activities at the EU level and to share best practice from activities in Wales. (Page 19)

Response: Accept

With regard to the Social Protection and Social Inclusion OMC, Welsh Assembly Government officials work closely with colleagues from the lead government department (Department for Work and Pensions) with a view to ensuring that the UK position reflects our views and that examples of best practice from Wales are highlighted in the OMC process. This is highlighted through the UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion.

ON EY2010, the Welsh Assembly Government engaged early in the UK's preparations for the year to ensure Welsh participation in EY2010 activities.

Assembly Government officials from the EU Office in Brussels have also met with the Commission to discuss Welsh activities and possible follow up post 2010.

As part of EY2010 activities, the Welsh Assembly Government will organise a seminar on child poverty in Brussels in partnership with relevant organisations from Wales (WLGA, Children in Wales and Save the Children Wales) and at EU level (the European Commission, MEPs, the Belgian Presidency of the EU and Eurochild a European Non-Governmental organisation working to improve the quality of life of children and young people). We anticipate that this event will be a vehicle that will allow us to share the ideas, views and best practice examples that emerge from best practice in Wales with EU partners.

The Welsh Assembly Government has a good record of working with a range of organisations in the field of social justice and social inclusion. This includes a series of recent consultation events that is being held throughout Wales on the new Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan. The Welsh Assembly Government will continue to share best practice with other countries, within the framework of the Four Nations (with Scotland, Northern Ireland and England), as well as at EU level.

DWP expect to commence work on the next National Action Plan (NAP) on Social Inclusion in early 2011. New stakeholder engagement mechanisms will ensure the involvement of non-government organisations and the Devolved Governments and Local Authorities in developing the NAP. The involvement of the Welsh Assembly Government in this work will ensure that the NAP reflects plans and policies across the UK, including a reflection of the varying national priorities, challenges and approaches to tackling poverty.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government to include in its report to the Committee on legacy activity how it will feed the outcomes from EY2010 activities in Wales into the implementation of EU Structural Funds programmes, including by sharing knowledge and best practice examples with the All-Wales Programme Monitoring Committee. (Page 19)

Response: Accept

The Structural Fund Programmes in Wales are closely aligned to EU policies on combating poverty and social exclusion, and this policy “complementarity” is a requirement throughout the formulation and implementation of the programmes.

The European Social Fund Programmes make a major contribution in this area by helping unemployed and economically inactive people access training and work, and by assisting vulnerable groups to join the labour market. There has been a strong emphasis from the outset on engaging with those furthest from the labour market.

The European Regional Development Fund Programmes support physical regeneration initiatives in some of the most deprived areas of Wales as well as promoting economic development and environmental protection generally.

The Welsh Assembly Government is keen to ensure alignment between short-term initiatives such as these and the seven year EU programmes, which aim to address longer-term structural issues in the Welsh economy. It is important to ensure that relevant best practice and positive outcomes are not lost at the end of the year but used to best effect within the development and implement of Structural Fund projects in Wales where relevant and appropriate. The Welsh Assembly Government will ensure that information on the activities undertaken through the initiative will be made available to the All Wales Programme Monitoring Committee. This will enable a full discussion amongst partners of the outcomes and best practice identified, with a view to them

considering further potential integration and alignment with Structural Funds programmes in Wales.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government to report on how the evidence on child poverty and child well-being gathered by the European and External Affairs Committee's inquiry and from EY2010 activities will be taken into account in the strategies being developed as a requirement of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. (Page 22)

Response: Accept

The evidence on child poverty and child well-being gathered by the European and External Affairs Committee's inquiry and the views gathered from EY2010 activities will be taken into consideration for the final version of the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan which issued for a twelve month consultation period in May 2010. We will also include any substantial findings in the guidance that will be developed to support the Children and Families (Wales) Measure. In addition to this, we will also make this information available on the Child Poverty Solutions Wales website so that other organisations can take this into consideration when developing their child poverty strategies as required under the new Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee what actions it is taking to support establishing a consistent way to measure child well-being at EU-level. (Page 22)

Response: Accept

We have done much through the Assembly Government's Children and Young People's Monitor to establish a measure of well-being. This is a model of good practice that can be shared, through the opportunities provided by the Year, with EU partners to help them develop their own versions. The monitor is currently being updated and will be published in 2011.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee by April 2011 on progress towards developing common indicators for poverty and social exclusion at EU level. (Page 24)

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government already uses UK standard definitions of poverty which enable cross-UK comparisons. Responses to the recent consultation on the Child Poverty Definitions (Wales) Regulations 2010 support the use of existing UK definitions of poverty.

The Welsh Assembly Government will contribute views to the UK Government's position on common EU level indicators but based on current debates we feel that our indicators could align with those proposed at EU level under the Europe 2020 strategy and that meaningful cross-EU comparison is one useful policy tool in combating poverty and social inclusion.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation 9. The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to report to the European & External Affairs Committee on preparatory work and plans for the European Year for Volunteering 2011 and how it will work with and support Welsh stakeholder organisations. (Page 26)

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government's Third Sector Unit has been in discussions with the other devolved administrations and expressed Wales' wish to participate in the European Year for Volunteering 2011. Any Welsh contribution to the costs of the Year will have to come from the 2011/12 budget (as dictated by Brussels). We are currently awaiting a decision on whether funding will be available for the Year. If it is not forthcoming, however, we will still be able to use the branding.

The deadline for submitting the national work programme is 15 September 2010. The intention in Wales is that we dovetail the Year into existing volunteering initiatives.

Financial Implications

Approximately £70k

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government to allocate time for an annual debate on the theme of each European Year and related activities planned in Wales, as part of Government business in plenary. (Page 26)

Response: Accept

The Welsh Assembly Government will continue to support and raise awareness of each European Year through related activities and will seek to hold an annual plenary debate.

Financial Implications

No financial costs are associated with this recommendation

Carwyn Jones, First Minister