

## Disability Equality Forum

Wednesday 08 December 2016, 9.30 – 11.00am

Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay

### Attendees

Carl Sargeant, AM	Cabinet Secretary for Communities & Children
Paul Dear (Chair)	Welsh Government (Equality team)
Dan Biddle	Access Consultant
Lydia Boydell	BSL Interpreter
Prof Steve Beyer	Cardiff University
Wayne Crocker	Mencap Cymru
Jim Crowe	Learning Disability Wales
Gavin Davies	Sight Cymru
Jackie Davies	Welsh Government (Equality team)
Martin Davies	Welsh Government (Communities First)
Rhian Davies	Disability Wales
Linda Davis	Welsh Government (DWP Liaison)
Joanna Fashan	Whizz Kidz
Michelle Fowler	NHS Centre for Equality & Human Rights
Andrea Gordon	Guide Dogs Cymru
Julie Griffiths	Department for Work and Pensions
Daniel Hurford	Welsh Local Government Association
Catherine Lewis	Children in Wales
Sian Lewis (secretariat)	Welsh Government (Equality team)
Beverley Morgan	Welsh Government (Tackling Poverty Team)
Rhian Stangroom-Teel	Leonard Cheshire Disability
Jenna Trakins	Learning Disability Wales
Owen Williams	Wales Council for Blind People
Richard Williams	Action on Hearing Loss Cymru

### 1. Introduction and apologies

1.1 Paul Dear welcomed everyone and there was a round table introduction.

1.2 Apologies had been received from:

Tracey Good

NHS Centre for Equality & Human Rights

## **2. Minutes and action points from previous meeting**

### ***Paul Dear, Welsh Government***

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 06 July 2016 were agreed as a true record.

There were three action points from the previous meeting:

1. *Fairer Futures to canvass opinions from Forum members on the need for a review of the Framework for Action on Independent Living.*

Forum members supported the proposal from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government that a review and refresh of the Framework should go ahead. This has subsequently been agreed by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, who has taken over responsibility for equality.

2. *Fairer Futures to add the potential review of the Framework for Action on Independent Living to the agenda for the next meeting*

A Steering Group has been formed and will be holding their first meeting on 12 December 2016. A number of Forum members have agreed to be part of the Steering Group. Consequently, the review has not been added to today's agenda but updates will be provided to the Forum. Members were informed that the timescales were yet to be agreed but the aim was to come up with a refreshed action plan by summer 2017.

3. *Fairer Futures to circulate a link to the Welsh Bus Quality Standard to Forum members*

Details were circulated to Forum members on 22 July 2016.

- 2.2 Paul Dear informed the group that the Fairer Futures Division within Welsh Government had now been merged into the Equality and Prosperity Division.

## **3. Resilient Communities**

### ***Martin Davies, Welsh Government, Communities Division***

- 3.1 Martin clarified the position of the Welsh Government regarding the Communities First programme. In a statement to the Assembly on 11 October 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children said he was "minded to phase out the Communities First programme while establishing a new approach to meet the challenges of the future". Martin explained that this comment had led to much inaccurate publicity saying that a decision has already been taken to close the programme.

- 3.2 The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children wanted to determine whether Communities First was still the best way to serve communities. Consequently, a broad programme of engagement would be undertaken before any decision was made.

- 3.3 It was recognised that any changes to the Communities First programme would have an impact on all those individuals who use and work for Communities First; the areas served by the programme; the organisations who deliver services on behalf of Communities First; and on community buildings used for this purpose.
- 3.4 Engagement began in October with an online survey which will remain open until 15 January 2017. Over 1400 responses had already been received. However, it is recognised that an online survey is not sufficient and the Welsh Government is keen to engage with people and networks across Wales, not just those located within Communities First areas. Much correspondence has also been received which will also be fed into the analysis.
- 3.5 As the online survey was considered more appropriate for individuals, a separate questionnaire has been developed specifically for organisations to submit their responses to Welsh Government.
- 3.6 Welsh Government is seeking to determine the impact on protected characteristic groups. The WCVA, on behalf of the Welsh Government, has organised a series of events for representative organisations.
- 3.7 The WCVA has also organised a number of public engagements events. Two further events are being organised for members of the public and it is hoped that they will be attended by people from non-Communities First areas in order to gain the views of people outside the programme. One group will be in North Wales and the other in South/South-West Wales.
- 3.8 Martin explained that the focus of the public engagement was not solely the future of the Communities First programme but on how Welsh Government can best support resilient communities.
- 3.9 Martin informed the group that the engagement was ongoing and encouraged everyone to take part.
- 3.10 Forum members raised the following points:
- The need for the online survey to be available in Easy Read and Young People versions.  
Martin confirmed that Welsh Government was hoping to work with organisations such as Young Wales to engage with Young People.
  - Whether the online survey was collecting statistics regarding disability and, more specifically, on the way people communicate.  
Martin confirmed that the survey asked a number of questions around protected characteristics, including disability. While it would be possible to count the number of people who had identified themselves as disabled, it would not be possible to break that down further e.g. to identify people with sensory loss. However, the information would be incomplete as many respondents had chosen not to complete these questions.

**Action: Welsh Government (Equality team) to circulate the questionnaire to Forum members.**

[The Cabinet Secretary joined the meeting at this point, but asked Paul Dear to continue to chair it.]

#### **4. Engage to Change**

##### ***Jim Crowe & Jenna Trakins, Learning Disability Wales***

- 4.1 Learning Disability Wales have been awarded £10 million over 5 years from the Big Lottery Fund's "Getting Ahead 2" grant to boost the employment prospects of young people in Wales with a learning disability and/or learning difficulty, including autism. The grant was developed in partnership with Welsh Government to meet priorities for supporting children and young people.
- 4.2 The Engage to Change project started in April 2016. It will work with 800 employers across Wales to help 1000 young people to develop their employment skills through paid work placements lasting between 6-12 months. The aim is to create and support long-term youth employment opportunities.
- 4.3 The scheme will help young people aged between 16-25 who are NEET, have a learning disability and/or learning difficulty, including ASD, and for whom long-term employment is a realistic option if intensive support is provided.
- 4.4 Learning Disability Wales is leading a consortium of organisations to deliver the project. These include supported employment agencies Elite and Agoriad Cyf, the international internship programme Project Search, self advocacy organisation All Wales People First, and Cardiff University.
- 4.5 The project will engage with 800 employers to receive training and provide supported paid placements and sustainable employment opportunities to young people.
- 4.6 There will be 18 ambassadors who will be sourced from the young people who have engaged in the project. They will become 'project champions' and promote the project across Wales.
- 4.7 A strong focus will be placed on the legacy to be achieved by the programme, including policy and culture change. This will require ongoing data collection from young people, service providers and employers to inform policy makers and commissioners on what works and what does not work.
- 4.8 The emphasis will be on providing real jobs for real pay. The DWP's Access to Work scheme will be utilised, where possible, to provide practical support to the disabled people and their employers. There were limits to the support from Access to Work as it applies differently in Wales e.g in the case of apprenticeships.
- 4.9 Forum members raised the following points:
  - The importance of changing attitudes to the employment of disabled people. This was recognised as a very important step in achieving meaningful and long-term employment opportunities and is envisaged to be a part of the legacy of the programme.
  - The ways in which the Access to Work scheme operates differently between Wales and England and whether these differences could be challenged.

For example, it was identified that the scheme allows those on internships in England to have a job coach but this is not available to those in Wales. The importance of determining what can be accessed through the fund was highlighted.

- The importance of securing individualised packages for children and young people in the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (ALNET) Bill. Forum members were advised to make their views known to Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, and to contribute during committee stages, during the passage of the Bill.

**Action:** *Welsh Government (Equality team) to provide contact details of Julie James AM, Minister for Skills and Science to Jim Crowe in order that they explore work being completed on apprenticeships.*

## **5. Welsh Government's Employability Policy** **Dr Beverley Morgan, Welsh Government**

- 5.1 Beverley informed the group that an Employability Plan is being developed and will be published in the New Year. The Plan will set out how the Welsh Government will reshape employability support for job-ready individuals, and those furthest from the labour market, to acquire the skills and experience they need to gain and maintain sustainable employment.
- 5.2 It was recognised that employability means much more than skills and qualifications. The plan will recognise that a holistic approach is required, which seeks to identify and address the needs and barriers each individual faces in gaining, retaining and progressing in employment.
- 5.3 Levels of employment are nearly at record levels, but economic inactivity remains high. The link between employability and poverty was highlighted, as people who are workless often live in poverty. However, in-work poverty continues to be an issue in Wales.
- 5.4 The Plan will recognise the importance of providing bespoke support for individuals. The need for a simpler and more coherent system was highlighted as the current system is complex, with lots of separate employability programmes in place.
- 5.5 The Plan will set out a framework for action drawing on evidence of what works and learning from current programmes such as Lift and Communities for Work. Welsh Government will be working across departments and with partners to develop this framework.

**Action:** *Welsh Government to send a link to the Oral Statement on Employability which the Minister for Skills and Science made in Plenary on 15 November 2016.*

## **6. 'Improving Lives': Work, Health & Disability Green Paper** **Linda Davis, Welsh Government**

- 6.1 Linda informed the group that the UK Government's Green paper had been published on 31 October 2016. There is wide consultation on the Green Paper which

will close on 17 February 2017. A series of engagement events with stakeholders is currently being planned across Wales.

- 6.2 Welsh Government, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales are currently working closely through the Cymru Well Wales network to formulate a collective response to the consultation, in respect of the health related areas. The Green Paper provides an opportunity to highlight case studies and good practice across Wales. It was agreed that it was important as part of the consultation to hear directly from claimants on areas of the Green Paper which affect them.
- 6.3 Linda informed the group that the all-party parliamentary group on disability (APPGD) has published a report entitled 'Ahead of the Arc' that examines how the UK Government can meet its pledge to halve the disability employment gap and offers a number of recommendations.

**Action:** *Welsh Government to circulate a link to the Green Paper, the engagement events and the 'Ahead of the Arc' report to Forum members*

## **7. DWP's Access to Work Programme** **Julie Griffiths, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

- 7.1 Access to Work is a UK-wide DWP programme which provides support to disabled people to help them get into work and remain in work. The support provided helps to overcome the barriers to work faced by disabled people and includes provision of specialist equipment, access to buildings, travel costs and support workers.
- 7.2 Many employers still do not know about the scheme and the support it can provide when employing a disabled person.
- 7.3 Work is being undertaken in Jobcentres to increase knowledge of the programme amongst staff, including job coaches. It is envisaged that awareness raising sessions will also be held with other groups, including employers.
- 7.4 Julie informed the group that training was also being delivered to Job Centre work coaches around hidden impairments. A toolkit is being developed to assist staff and this will be widely promoted across the Job Centre network

**Action:** *Welsh Government to circulate DWP contact details to the group along with a link to the DWP leaflet on Access to Work and the Disability Rights UK leaflet.*

## **8. Discussion**

- 8.1 An individual's personal experience of the Access to Work scheme was shared with the group. The individual requires a travel and support worker who enables them to remain in work. During the Access to Work renewal process, the individual, who had a visual impairment, was informed that the criteria for confirming details of their impairment had changed and a medical note from their GP was now required as a part of the renewal process. The medical note was required to state how the individual could cope in work, but the GP did not feel able to judge this. The individual was also required to pay for the medical note. The individual informed the

group that if they were to lose their support worker, they could no longer remain in employment.

- 8.2 Members of the Forum welcomed the support that Access to Work could provide but were concerned that the application and assessment process itself put up barriers that disabled people have to overcome. They requested that Access to Work staff are trained to better understand the issues faced by disabled people, forms be available in a range of formats and that it become a more person-centred programme.
- 8.3 Forum members requested that the Employability Plan include robust and comprehensive data collection in order that the needs of specific groups be identified and targeted.
- 8.4 Forum members recognised the Engage to Change scheme as a huge step forward for people with learning disabilities. They highlighted the need for similar schemes across all areas of disability.
- 8.5 Forum members were concerned that disabled people are often overlooked in discussions around the employment gap. The 'Improving Lives' Green Paper was based on a medical model of disability which in itself is a barrier.
- 8.6 It was highlighted that the statistics available at a UK level are often good but that more needs to be done to develop Welsh datasets.
- 8.7 The apparent differences between how the Access to Work scheme operates in England and in Wales were again raised and Forum members expressed concern that Wales was negatively affected by some of the differences.

**Action:** *Welsh Government to provide briefing to the Cabinet Secretary on the Access to Work scheme, with specific reference to the differences of application between the scheme in England and Wales, such as internships.*

**Action:** *Welsh Government and DWP to provide the Cabinet Secretary with further information about the specific case raised during the Forum of an individual encountering difficulties following changes to the renewal process.*

## **9. Any other business / date of next meeting**

- 9.1 The Cabinet Secretary thanked everyone for their attendance and contributors. He reiterated the need to join up the various schemes across Wales and highlighted the Employability Plan as a tool through which this can be achieved. He also recognised that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 will facilitate new ways of working across Wales which can be utilised in order to achieve this.
- 9.2 Forum members suggested transport as a possible agenda item for the next meeting.
- 9.3 The next meeting will be held in June/July 2017. Date to be confirmed.