



Women's Support Network News

WSN

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The Review Process

In the April edition of our Newsletter we told you about the announcement of the six month emergency fund for the women's sector. Only now, almost three months into this emergency period, is money beginning to make its way to the groups on the ground. While the administration of these emergency monies has been slower than first anticipated, they have provided a lifeline for many groups and concerns are already being expressed about future funding prospects post-September, particularly for those groups who can not apply, or who haven't been successful under the Neighbourhood Renewal programme. This is one of the primary areas of consideration for the review group.

The Review process was announced at the same time as the emergency funding announcement. This review will be led by DSD/VCU, but will also include representatives from other key departments, for



example, DEL (Dept for Employment & Learning) and DHSSPS (Dept of Health, Social Services & Public Safety). Sandara Kelso-Robb from Lloyds TSB NI will also be there as an independent funder.

This review group will also include key representatives from the women's sector. Patricia Haren, Director of the Women's Support Network, will represent the women's centres/groups and organisations in the greater Belfast area, Anne O'Reilly, Director of the WRDA will represent women's centres/groups and organisations in the rural areas and Margaret Logue the Co-ordinator of Derry Women's Centres for groups and organisations in the North/West region, Therefore this review group will include all of the key stakeholders.

continued on page 2

Inside this issue:

Cover Story	1
Review process for Women's sector	
Headlines this Spring	1
Cover story cont'd	2
Term of Reference	
Outreach and Development News	3
WSN Report Launch	
Peace II /Funding update	4
Report from Gender Equality Seminar	5
Policy Issues	6/7
DDDO	
Charities Admin review	
Bmap	
PSNI S75 consultation	
Forthcoming policy work	
Positive Steps	8
Make Poverty History	

Other headlines this Spring

- The term of reference for the review of the women's sector
- Synopsis of Gender Equality Conference
- Peace II + update



Congratulations



Women's Support Network would like to congratulate **Greenway Women's Centre** who are celebrating their 20th Anniversary and **Women's Information Group (WiG)**, who are celebrating their 25th Anniversary . Many happy returns to you both and may you have many more birthdays to come.

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The review process - continued from Page 1

WSN are hopeful that the review group will initiate an inter-departmental approach to begin examining how the relevant government departments could mainstream and core fund the work of women's centres/groups and organisations.

In order to be inclusive each review representative, in Belfast, Derry and Rural, has set up an advisory group on behalf of the women's centres, groups and organisations within each particular region. The aim of this advisory group is to enable individual centres, groups and organisations to feed into the review and administration process and receive update from the review group.

A series of four meetings for the review group have been agreed, they will take place on 16th June, 1st July, 19th July and 28th July. After which a formal report will be made to Minister David Hanson.

If you would like further information on this process, please contact Women's Support Network.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REVIEW GROUP ON RESOURCING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES TO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

On 16th March 2005 Minister Spellar announced a £1.1 million six-month 'rescue' package for women's organisations that provide support and services to disadvantaged communities. The package will fund both the core costs and service delivery costs of those women's organisations that meet this criteria.

In order to deal with both longer-term support and appropriate departmental responsibilities Minister Spellar also announced the establishment of a cross-departmental 'review group'. The review group is to complete its work and report to the new Minister, David Hanson within the six-month time frame of the rescue package.

The services delivered by women's centres are the responsibility of a number of departments. Ministers have agreed in response to "Investing Together, the Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector" that DSD lead co-ordination across departments of support to services for women in disadvantaged communities. DSD will therefore lead this review group and will report to Minister on the following:

- i. A definition of the women's sector and the services it provides to disadvantaged communities including mapping the existing infrastructure and services delivered by the women's organisations.
- ii. The need for current services and the resourcing implications for departments if services are to be continued.
- iii. The views of departments with policy responsibility for these services and their future commitment to resource identified services.

Membership of Review Group

The following Departments all have a direct interest in supporting the women's organisations and therefore will form the membership of the review group:

- Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister – Laurene McAlpine
- Department of Finance and Personnel – Kieran Doran
- Department for Employment and Learning – Catherine Bell
- Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety—Nigel Carson
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development—Pauline McCloy
- Department of Education - Maura McCusker
- Department for Social Development – John McGrath

DSD will chair the review group (Deputy Secretary) and provide secretarial support (VCU). The review group will have four special advisors, three from women's organisations and one independent funder, to support their work.

- Margaret Logue (Women's Centre, Derry) will advise Derry based groups
- Patricia Haren (Women's Support Network) will advise Belfast based groups
- Anne O'Reilly (Women's Resource and Development Agency) will advise rural based groups
- Sandara Kelso-Robb - Lloyds TSB Foundation for Northern Ireland

Timescale

Report to be complete and presented to the Minister by the end of July 2005.



Outreach & Development News

Supporting member groups

During the past few months much of outreach and support to member groups has been in collating information in three key areas, namely, childcare, education provision and core costs.

WSN have developed Questionnaires in each area and these have been disseminated to groups for completion. As of now (mid-June) the majority of this information has been returned to WSN. We are going to submit the data collected to the individuals who will be developing position papers in key areas.

The reason we are collating this information is so that we can give the various departments an accurate picture of the scope of work and base-line cost of all of the service provision of women's centres, groups and organisations.

This doesn't mean that we will be presenting these costs to any one department for funding, but we are attempting to establish what the real costs are so that we have the information when we begin conversing with the relevant government departments.

Childcare Lobby Working Group

The Childcare Lobby Working Group was formed through the Greater Belfast Community Network (GBCN). It is a consortium of representatives from the childcare, women's and community/voluntary sector in the Greater Belfast area, actively lobbying for strong representation and resourcing for the broad childcare sector.

WSN are involved because all of the women's centres and many of the women's organisations we work with are providing childcare in some of the recognised and documented areas of greatest need, addressing a range of issues such as educational disadvantage and lack of mainstream service provision. This valuable work is being undermined as the childcare sector is currently supported by a piece-meal funding programme that is often under resourced and in crisis.

To raise awareness about this, and to put these issues on the agenda, the Childcare Lobby Group, through GBCN held a conference on the 20th June. A full conference report will be available later in the year. In the meantime a petition has been organised on this issue for the new Secretary of State. A copy of the petition is enclosed with this newsletter, we would ask you to sign, pass on and return.

Newsletter / Information

The Newsletter is a way for WSN to keep our members apprised of the work we are doing on their behalf. It can also be used by member groups for sharing information with other groups or for promoting events within local centres. WSN encourages member groups to use this service.

For further info on visits, events or the newsletter contact Siobh  n on 9023 6923 or alternatively you can email to outreach@womenssupportnetwork.org

WSN Annual General Meeting & Report Launch

Women's Support Network held its AGM on 10th May. At the AGM the Conference Report on Global Feminism was formally launched by Kate McCullough (Chair of the Management Board of NIWEP). This report is a synopsis of the conference we hosted, in partnership with Women into Politics, in December 2004, to mark Human Rights Day.

During Kate's presentation, she said that the launch of the report was timely given that this is the 10th Anniversary of 4th World Conference on Women, otherwise known as the Beijing Conference. Having attended the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March, Kate urged all women's organisations to maintain pressure on politicians and government to ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women.

Copies of the report can be requested from WSN

Peace II/Funding Update

Peace II Extension

Peace II and a half, Peace II +, or some are even calling it Peace III, despite the names we call it, most of us are relieved with the announcement of a two-year extension to the Peace Programme funds. The extension to the Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation was officially launched on the 3rd June 2005. Speaking at the launch Commissioner Danuta Hubner (Commissioner for Regional Policy) said "The European Union understands that economic and social development in support of peace and reconciliation at grassroots level is not a short term process. In face of the current difficulties in the peace process, this decision demonstrates the continued solidarity and support of the European Union towards permanent peace in the region".

The extra funding comes as a result of sustained campaigning from various groups in Europe and Northern Ireland, and in direct response to the consultation carried out by SEUPB in September 2004. The PEACE II programme is targeted at achieving economic renewal and social integration in areas most scarred by the Troubles. It aims to promote reconciliation and to help build a more peaceful and stable society.

Groups applying for Peace II grants must demonstrate how their proposals will address the legacy of the Troubles and show how they will promote reconciliation and mutual understanding, particularly within the framework of the broad aims of Peace II, namely:

FIVE AIMS OF PEACE II+

- Economic renewal
- Social integration
- Inclusion and reconciliation
- Local re-generation & strategic development
- Cross-border cooperation

The Measures, IFBs and budgets for this extension are detailed in the table enclosed with this newsletter.

At the time of going to press only four measures had been fully agreed and are open for application, the rest are to be operational over the next 2 - 3 weeks. SEUPB have advised us to

keeping checking the EU grants website (www.eugrants.org), or even the website of the IFB, for example Training for Women Network (www.twnonline.org).

SEUPB are hosting a series of Public information Events on the Peace II Extension throughout June. These events will enable you to find out more about the extension and also provide information on how to apply for funding. The last event is on the 30th June, from 11am - 1pm at NICVA.

WSN attended a *Positive Steps* seminar to find out more about what is contained within the document (for further info on Positive Steps see page 8 of this Newsletter). At that seminar Dave Wall (Head of VCU) was a speaker on the Modernisation and Community Investment Funds referred to in the PS document. He outlined the two funds as follows;

Modernisation Fund

A £3 million fund will be available to enhance the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to deliver public services, this fund will be—

- For well established groups
- Not for new groups, or groups at an early stage of development
- To aid longer term strategic development

The criteria have been agreed for this package and an announcement will be made soon. Groups will then be invited to register their interest. Only groups who fully meet the criteria will be invited to make a full application. This should speed up the application process, all criteria and the selection process will be accountable and transparent.

Community Investment Fund

This fund is in the early stages of development and VCU are taking guidance on it's development, an announcement on the fund will be made later in the year. This will be a three year, £5m fund with £1 million being paid out in the first year and £2 million in the consecutive two years. This fund will support local community development activity, particularly that which would fall outside Peace, or Neighbourhood Renewal funding.



Women's Equality Seminar Update

The seminar 'Women's Equality: International Standards – Local Strategies' took place on 28 April 2005. It was attended by almost 80 participants from the north and south of Ireland, representing a wide range of organisations, including older women, women with disabilities, and ethnic minority women, whose multi-identities are currently excluded from the gender strategy.

Brenda Campbell as the keynote speaker provided an informative overview of the importance of CEDAW* and the Beijing Platform for Action as international benchmarks for the elimination of gender inequality. She was followed by Kate McCullough for NIWEP and Therese Murphy for NWCI. The difficulties in maintaining the agreements reached in Beijing were graphically illustrated by examples of American determination to turn Beijing + 10 into an anti-abortion event. While they were outnumbered and outmanoeuvred by the rest of the world, the outcome was that no new advances could be agreed in an atmosphere where it was important to defend the gains of Beijing.

The afternoon discussion saw Dermot Killgallon of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform outline the approach being taken in developing an Irish strategy that would be 'Beijing in an Irish context', high level and strategic and relevant to all women. It was clear that the Irish government has no difficulty with the concept of a specific women's strategy.

Mary Bunting, on behalf of OFMDFM, provided a robust defence of the work of the Gender Unit, expressing her 'disappointment' at the negative feedback they had received in the consultation response. However, she stated that responses would be 'taken on board' and she suggested a future meeting with those in the 'gender equality sector' to discuss the way forward.

Margaret Ward, speaking on behalf of the Ad Hoc Policy Group, replied that the strength of the

response was a measure of women's determination to have a policy that was radical and inclusive and which acknowledged the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland in ensuring that women had an equal role in the task of conflict resolution and reconstruction. Joanna McMinn for NWCI concluded by outlining what a strategy for women should contain, emphasising the importance of political will in ensuring that a strategy would be developed, resourced and implemented.

The final discussion of the seminar provided the opportunity for an open and honest exchange of views regarding the limitations of the gender strategy and the misuse of Section 75 in ignoring women's multi-identities because of an assumption that a gender strategy could only be about ensuring that women received equal treatment to men. Participants voiced their frustration at the gender neutral approach of policy makers and the failure to accept that equality of outcomes, rather than equal treatment, defined the spirit and reality of S75.

OFMDFM appeared reluctant to move beyond an equal opportunities model, but did support the use of positive action and promised that UN Resolution 1325 would be considered in the next stage of the strategy. Their defence of the approach taken was that they had been mandated by politicians to produce a gender strategy, not a strategy for women. Given the fact that the UK government has endorsed the Beijing Platform and is a signatory to CEDAW, this argument needs to be explored further. Overall, it was an important and timely seminar which highlighted the need for engagement with policy makers, and which illustrated the strength of including an all-island dimension within the discussion. A full report of the event will be published.

*Dr Margaret Ward
Women's Support Network
Reprinted from 'Just News' the newsletter of the CAJ*

WSN Policy work in April—June

Draft Disability Discrimination Order

The Draft Disability Discrimination Order (April 2005) is mainly concerned with how public transport and public bodies can further the inclusion of all individuals in society and achieve a more diverse workforce.

While we welcomed the extension of a number of conditions (HIV, cancer, MS and mental illness) that will come under anti-discrimination legislation, the WSN agreed with the view of Disability Action that the approach is negative rather than positive because its emphasis is on assessing the cost to society of making adjustments to ensure the greater inclusion of disabled citizens, rather than estimating the potential benefits to society of increased protections for disabled citizens.

We also support Disability Action in their effort to have the promotion of good relations between persons with a disability and persons without to be included within the S75 Good Relations Duty.

Review of Charities Administration

The WSN welcomes the proposal to establish a register of charities for Northern Ireland and to set up a Charity Commission to support and regulate charities. We hope that women will be equally represented in the proposed new Commission.

We welcomed the review of charity legislation and the expansion of definitions of charity to include the promotion of peace and the promotion of good community relations, both objectives being central to the work of the women's sector in Northern Ireland.

We urged that there should be a pro-active approach to defining charity, to reflect the special circumstances of a society coming out of conflict. Therefore we suggested that the aim of the advancement of education should not be

considered a charitable aim in itself, but needs to be accompanied by another purpose, such as the promotion of good community relations. As religion has been a divisive force in our society we made the suggestion that a public benefit test should be used before qualifying for charitable status. The purpose of the advancement of religion should be accompanied by a commitment to promote religious tolerance.

North West and North East Quarter Masterplan Consultations (May 2005)

The WSN responded to the consultations aimed at revitalising the area around the north of the city. As our offices are right in the middle of this area, we had a particular interest in making a response. Potentially, we could see the further development of small, independent shops and businesses, with the promotion of living areas in the upper floors of buildings, more movement of people and less traffic moving through the area. We made many recommendations, including:

- greater attention to safety for women on the streets
- free leisure provision for young people
- dedicated cycling lanes
- recreational open spaces and green space
- a commitment to the development of ecological 'green' buildings
- support for alternative cultures and low-cost cafes and meeting places
- more support for cultural rather than retail projects.

We need to make sure that pressure is maintained on the DSD throughout the consultation process so that this does not become yet another development where commercial considerations ride roughshod over community wishes.



WSN Policy work in April–June

PSNI Consultation Paper on S75 Screening (May 2005)

The WSN made a number of suggestions in relation to key equality issues around policing. Many organisations have commented on the adverse impact of the 'gender neutral' policy in relation to domestic violence, which is being viewed as 'family' violence. This reluctance to name women as the principle victims is also influencing policies on sexual violence. We argued that this obscures the extent to which women are affected and could have the consequence of reducing the resources for women's organisations working on such issues.

In terms of recruitment and promotion of women within the PSNI we urged the introduction of positive action measures, a review of the internal culture within the PSNI and gender sensitisation programmes for those involved in promotion processes.

We also called for meetings between the PSNI and key stakeholders so that we could have a more direct exchange of views. The PSNI have been in touch with us to arrange a future meeting for the women's sector.

Gender Equality Strategy follow up

We are still awaiting a response to the consultation process by the Gender Equality Unit. A meeting is scheduled for 30 June, at which representatives from the women's sector will be meeting with Mary Bunting, Director of Equality in OFMDFM.

This is an outcome of the north-south seminar held in April, where Mary Bunting heard many participants voice their dissatisfaction with the content of 'Gender Matters'.

Notice of future consultations

Below is a list of some of the consultations WSN will be responding to over the next couple of months. WSN actively seek your input into any of the issues, and if you would like to feed in your views, please call Margaret at the WSN office on 028 9023 6923, or alternatively you can email her on policy@womenssupportnetwork.org

Updating the Sex Discrimination Order – 22 July

The purpose of this consultation, being carried out by OFMDFM, has the ambition of defining more clearly what indirect discrimination is within employment, and will include;

- defining harassment on the grounds of sex, gender reassignment and sexual harassment;
- removing the small employer exemption from maternity leave regulations

Review of Public Administration 30 September

This consultation will consider restructuring and changes to how public services in Northern Ireland are organised and delivered. This will include:

- cutting the number of councils from 26 to 7, 11 or 15 councils with enhanced powers;
- the development of new Health and Personal Social Services agencies;
- replacing the existing Boards and Trusts; replacing all the education bodies with one education services support body; reviewing public bodies to see if their functions should be transferred to local or central government.

If you want copies of any of the responses detailed here, or any past WSN consultation response(s), call the office and Margaret can email you an electronic version or post out a hard copy.



Positive Steps

In April 2005, Minister Spellar published 'Positive Steps'; the Government's response to Investing Together, which was the Taskforce report on resourcing the voluntary and community sector.

Positive Steps examines the Taskforce recommendations and sets out its own plans in line with those recommendations which have been deemed feasible. The task of putting Positive Steps into action will be the responsibility of Partners for Change (Partners for Change is the strategy to implement the Joint Voluntary/Community Sector Compact), which is currently under review and due to be published later in the year.

There are many encouraging statements contained within the document, for example Minister Spellar sets out the government's ambition within 'Positive Steps', where it is noted that 'The voluntary and community sector makes a significant contribution to life in Northern Ireland and is a key social partner working with the Government to deliver social, economic, cultural and environmental change' (Positive Steps 1.1). This report also notes the need for government '...to help ensure the sector is better placed to cope with social and economic change and imminent changes to the funding environment' (Positive Steps 1.3).

However, despite this welcome recognition of the vital role of the voluntary and community sector, WSN fear that these are not accompanied by concrete aims and in some cases the commitment falls far short of the recommendations within

Investing Together. For example, one of the recommendations of the Taskforce report was that 'a Community Investment Fund of £25 million per year to be established for the support of local community development activity', and while Positive Steps does establish a Community Investment Fund, it falls wide of the target suggested by the taskforce when it commits only £5 million over **three** years.

Again, where Investing Together recommends a Modernisation Fund of £5 million over the next three years —'to enhance the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to deliver public services', Positive Steps establishes a Modernisation Fund of £3 million to 'promote modernisation and change within the sector...'. Not only do we again have the difference in amounts of money, but there is also a fundamental linguistic difference between 'enhancing' and 'promoting'.

Positive Steps concludes with the sentiment that Government accept the 'challenge to help ensure that the voluntary & community sector is best placed to demonstrate and deliver its full added value. Similarly the voluntary and community sector need to respond to that challenge'. The community & voluntary sector are ready to respond to this challenge, we are able to demonstrate our ability to deliver both frontline services and service provision that statutory agencies can't, won't or don't deliver—this is, after all, **WHY** government recognises the voluntary & community sector as a 'key partner'.

Make Poverty History

2005 has been dedicated to the anti-poverty campaign known as 'Make Poverty History'. This campaign focuses on trade justice, debt cancellation and more and better aid. This campaign is also part of the Millennium Development Goals, a key part of which is the elimination of world poverty by 2015. In Northern Ireland we have a strong history of 'giving' and this is vital, however political change is also necessary to make the fundamental changes required if we are really serious about ending poverty. To this end we have enclosed a Make Poverty History postcard to Tony Blair, asking him to ensure this issue is on the political agenda. All you have to do is sign it, stamp it and post it!

Newsletter

If you require any further information about anything featured in the Newsletter, or if you would like to join our mailing list, or submit information for the Newsletter, please contact:

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