

Disability Equality Forum
Wednesday 06 July, 10.00 – 11.30am
Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay

Attendees

Mark Drakeford, AM (Chair)	Cabinet Secretary for Finance & Local Government
Jackie Davies	Fairer Futures, Welsh Government
Linda Davies	DWP Liaison, Welsh Government
John Dixon	RNIB
Miranda French	Disability Wales
Tracey Good	NHS Centre for Equality & Human Rights (CEHR)
Andrea Gordon	Guide Dogs Cymru
Helen Gumett-Preece	RNIB
Maggie Hampton	Disability Arts Cymru
Ella Jones	Diverse Cymru (job shadowing)
Martyn Jones	Diverse Cymru
Catherine Lewis	Children in Wales
Sian Lewis	Fairer Futures Division, Welsh Government
Tara Lewis	NHS CEHR (job shadowing)
Cathryn McShane	BSL Interpreter
Alan Meudell	Mental Health Service User
Glenn Page	Mencap Cymru
Rhian Stangroom-Teel	Leonard Cheshire Disability
Sharon West	Fairer Futures, Welsh Government
Alyn Williams	Housing, Welsh Government
Owen Williams	Wales Council for Blind People
Richard Williams	Action on Hearing Loss Cymru
Victoria Wass	Cardiff University – Business School

1. Introduction and apologies

1.1 The Minister welcomed everyone and there was a round table introduction.

1.2 Apologies had been received from:

Wayne Crocker	Mencap Cymru
Jim Crowe	Learning Disability Wales
Rhian Davies	Disability Wales
Cerris Dearsley-Hopkins	Entrepreneurship, Welsh Government
Daniel Hurford	Welsh Local Government Association

2. Minister's Update

Mark Drakeford AM, Cabinet Secretary for Finance & Local Government

- 2.1 The Cabinet Secretary has taken over the responsibility for Chairing the Forum. He provided an update to the group on developments since the previous meeting.
- 2.2 The cross cutting strategic responsibility for equality was within his portfolio although each of the Cabinet Secretaries were responsible for equality within their specific policy areas.
- 2.3 The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that, in his previous role as Minister for Health, he had met with many of the Forum members and he was looking forward to working with the group.
- 2.4 The referendum result was dominating Welsh Government's concerns and efforts were being directed at ensuring that the promises made during the referendum by the Leave campaign will be delivered. The First Minister will be involved in negotiations at all levels to protect the interests of Wales. The very real possibility of a reduction in funding as a result of the referendum would have a direct impact on organisations across Wales. The need for European structural funds to be drawn down until the end of 2018 was highlighted.
- 2.5 The refreshed Strategic Equality Objectives for 2016-2020 had been published and were available on the Welsh Government website.
- 2.6 The Cabinet Secretary asked the group to think about whether now would be an appropriate time to review the Framework for Action on Independent Living and consider what more could be done to make progress in the priority areas. He also said he wanted the Forum to be a place where members brought forward ideas and issues for discussion.

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

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

3. Minutes and action points from previous meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting on 25 November 2015 were agreed as a true record.
- 3.2 There were 2 action points from the previous meeting:
 1. *Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty to write to the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport regarding the opportunities for highlighting the employment of disabled people in grants provided to businesses.*

This was completed.

The response from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport highlighted the advice and support offered by Business Wales to individuals who want to start their own businesses along with the specialist advice available to businesses to improve their equal opportunities policies and practices.

The response also gave an update on driver training in relation to disability awareness confirming that there was a consultation underway at this time. This proposed that to qualify for any Welsh Government funding under the Bus Services Support Grant Scheme, an operator must ensure that its drivers have completed a disability awareness CPC module, with the financial award increasing as the percentage of drivers having undertaken these training increases.

The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the Welsh Bus Quality Standard was published in March 2016 and will raise the standards all passengers may reasonably expect.

2. *Fairer Futures to talk to Owen Williams about Access to Work and add to the agenda for the next meeting.*

This had been included at Agenda item 5 of today's meeting.

Action: Fairer Futures to circulate a link to the Welsh Bus Quality Standard to Forum members.

4. Housing – Aids and Adaptations ***Alyn Williams – Welsh Government***

- 4.1 Alyn Williams said that over £50million was spent each year on adapting people's homes by Local Authorities, Housing Associations and the Welsh Government. Around 4,500 people receive Disabled Facilities Grants, over 17,000 people are helped by the Rapid Response Adaptations Programme and over 30,000 people receive help from Care and Repair agencies.
- 4.2 A review of the housing aids and adaptations system was undertaken in 2014 with the results published in 2015. The review identified that some people found the system difficult to understand and did not know what help was available or how to access it. Anecdotal evidence also criticised the system for being a 'postcode lottery'.
- 4.3 On 01 April 2016, an enhanced system entitled 'Enable – Support for Independent Living' was rolled out across Wales to make it quicker and easier for people to get help when they need it. The help will be available to all, irrespective of age, disability, tenure or location.
- 4.4 Individuals who need help to adapt their home can expect prompt assistance and a seamless service which delivers the assistance irrespective of the first point of contact or identification of the need.

- 4.5 There are three broad categories of help:
- Very small – eg. grab rails, stair rails
 - Small – eg. walk-in showers, stair lifts, ramps
 - Large – eg. adaptations requiring a major structural change or extension
- 4.6 The system's approval mechanisms have been simplified and standardised to deliver adaptations more quickly to people who need them. For example, 'very small' adaptations will not be means tested nor require an occupational therapist assessment. This will also apply to some 'small' adaptations.
- 4.7 An independent evaluation of the enhanced system is being commissioned. This will provide a more comprehensive set of data on adaptations delivered and their impact, including customer satisfaction feedback from those who have received assistance.
- 4.8 Common data will be collected from providers irrespective of the source of delivery or funding for the adaptation required. This will be used to evaluate the system and will inform any further developments.
- 4.9 Forum members raised the following points:
- It will be important to publicise the enhanced system as widely as possible to reach those who may not know what is available or who do not perceive that such a system can assist them.
 - Disabled people need to know about the changes. Suggested ways of targeting people were through disability organisations and through GP surgeries. Alyn Williams confirmed that it was the intention to issue scheme information in different formats.
 - It will be important to capture information about those people who are not deemed eligible for an aid or adaptation. Alyn Williams confirmed that this information would be collected.
 - Leonard Cheshire is currently running a campaign about the lack of disabled-friendly houses and how some houses won't withstand the required adaptations. Alongside the provision of aids and adaptations, it will be important to look at the building process itself.
 - The Wales Quality Housing Standard was highlighted as it requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level by 2020. It will ensure dwellings are of good quality and suitable for the needs of existing and future residents.
 - The Cabinet Secretary explained that, at the time of the launch of the enhanced scheme, the pre election period meant there were restrictions on the action which the Welsh Government could take to publicise the scheme. However, this was no longer the case and all efforts would be made to maximise opportunities to raise awareness of the changes.

5. Measuring Disability Disadvantage at Work ***Dr Victoria Wass, Cardiff Business School***

- 5.1 Dr Wass delivered a presentation (attached) on measuring Disability Disadvantage at work. She said that trends in the employment rate for disabled and non-disabled people were a key indicator of the progress towards disability equality.
- 5.2 She said disability was a complex issue – it was not fixed, often hidden and often not disclosed. Unlike other protected characteristics groups, such as race or gender, which require equal treatment, a disabled person often requires different treatment to ensure a level playing field. Employment gaps are often wider for disabled people than for other protected characteristics groups.
- 5.3 In its 2015 manifesto, the Conservative Party had pledged to halve the disability employment gap during the current term. The trend in the UK appears to show the gap in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people has reduced. However, the trend can differ depending upon which survey is used.
- 5.4 Since a review of health and work undertaken by Carol Black in 2008, the UK Government has used the Labour Force Survey as its source for data. However, the General Household Survey shows that there has been no narrowing of the employment gap. Both surveys are collected and published by the UK Government.
- 5.5 The Labour Force Survey shows a greater percentage of disabled people are self employed or in part time work. It is necessary to determine whether this is due to disabled people's choice or whether circumstances are forcing them into it.
- 5.6 The survey results also indicate that disabled people have less job satisfaction which, in turn, affects staff retention. The survey results also indicate that factors such as the recession adversely affect disabled people.
- 5.7 Cardiff Business School has built up a large knowledge of this area and has an array of data sets. Much of their work is only published in academic journals so they are looking to engage with a wide range of groups to disseminate their findings more widely. They also offer groups the possibility of investigating problems through the existing data or through new research.
- 5.8 Dr Wass said the figures provided in the surveys may require further analysis and research to determine the underlying causes. Quantitative data has limitations. Qualitative research is required to find out what lies behind some of the issues identified, such as job satisfaction and the recession.
- 5.9 Forum members raised the following points:
 - There was still a low level of awareness amongst employers about making the recruitment process accessible and the help that is available to make workplace adjustments. Access to Work needs to be more effectively publicised.

- It is important to emphasise the social model of disability when looking at barriers to employment although it was recognised that the medical model of disability, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, is usually the source of disability data.
- Further work needs to be undertaken to find out the underlying reasons behind the figures.
- Reports being published during 2016 by the relevant parliamentary select committees will provide further information.

6. Access to Work for people with Sight Loss

Owen Williams, Wales Council of Blind People & John Dixon, RNIB

- 6.1 Wales Council of Blind People and the RNIB had been consulting people with sight loss in Wales in order to develop a report for submission to the DWP in relation to the Access to Work scheme. The RNIB had run workshops across the UK, where the findings were broadly similar to those in Wales.
- 6.2 The report which is in draft format and awaiting translation into Welsh, included 22 recommendations (see presentation attached). The headlines from the report were that:
- There is an unemployment rate of 75% amongst people with sight loss, and the Access to Work scheme is vital in supporting people to gain employment and remain in employment.
 - There has been a reduction in the quality of the service provided and the value of the help available through the scheme.
- 6.3 Forum members raised the following points:
- One of the difficulties in promoting Access to Work is that it is a DWP scheme, not a Welsh Government scheme. Due to its importance in the chances of disabled people finding and retaining employment, it would be beneficial if the Welsh Government could take the lead in promoting awareness of it in Wales.
 - Linda Davis informed the group that work was underway between Welsh Government, DWP and JobCentre Wales to develop a Welsh awareness raising campaign, aimed at engaging with people at all the entry points into employment, including FE colleges and apprenticeship schemes.
 - There may be scope for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) to introduce disability into its training courses.
 - A review of the Framework for Action on Independent Living could highlight Access to Work due to the significant role it plays in allowing disabled people to gain employment.

- There seems to be a lack of specialist guidance available from Access to Work assessors – the individual is now expected to know what assistance they need.
- Many employers already think it is difficult to employ someone with sight loss. If Access to Work is also seen as being difficult, employers will be even more negative when we all want them to have a positive experience.

7. Any other business / date of next meeting

- 7.1 It was suggested that the next meeting be devoted to employment issues, including Access to Work.
- 7.2 The next meeting is to be arranged in November/December 2016, date to be confirmed.