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Allister leads women into battle in Brussels

06 November 2008

Traditional Unionist MEP Jim Allister has led a deputation in Brussels from the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland to meet with top personnel in Commissioner Hubner's Cabinet to discuss the severe funding crisis particularly affecting training for women.

Under the Peace II Programme TWN (Training Women's Network) was an IFB (Intermediate Funding Body) charged with the distribution of funding for training women back into work. It excelled in surpassing all its targets, both in terms of returning women to work and attaining accredited qualifications. Measure 1.5 which it administered was the most successful of all the measures. Yet, bizarrely under Peace III this special focus on women's needs has been abandoned, with economic delivery replaced by peace and reconciliation goals. In consequence numerous women's training programmes are facing the end of the line.

The situation is compounded by the fact that though £2.7M of funding has been approved for TWN, under Peace III, not a penny of funding has flowed, nor has even an official letter of offer been furnished, leaving TWN and the groups under its umbrella starved of funds and facing imminent closure. This blockage in funding, almost 2 years after Peace III was scheduled to start, was one of the issues pressed home with the EU officials.

The gross disparity in funding was also raised, in particular the fact that ex-prisoners groups have been gifted a staggering £10M of Peace III funding. Ex-prisoners represent less than 2% of the population but are to get a handout which equates to £300 each, while women, who make up 51% of the population get what equates to 32p each. This scandal was forcefully drawn to the Commission's attention. When the neglect of the victims sector under Peace III is added to the mix, then there is indeed a scandalous abuse of this funding afoot.

Speaking after the meeting Jim Allister said, "I congratulate Norma Shearer, Chief Executive of TWN, and her colleagues on the tenacious and persuasive way in which they presented their case. To me it is unanswerable, but we wait to see what action the Commission can force on SEUPB both to speed delivery and bring equity to the distribution. I will now be raising the issue of the unacceptable ratio of funding distribution with the DFP Minister, Nigel Dodds MP, particularly the monstrous over-provision for ex-prisoners, the neglect of victims and the derisory treatment of the women's sector. I will be urging him to block the £10M handout to ex-prisoners."

Peace Funding

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