

Health and Social Services Committee

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Date: Wednesday 13 July 2005

Venue: Committee Rooms 3&4, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Current European Issues

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide Members of the Health and Social Services Committee with an update on current European issues and to highlight opportunities for action in relation to the issues selected from the European Commission's Forward Work Programme list for 2005.

Action

2. Members of the Committee are invited to note that the European Commission has not yet published the Green Paper on their programme for nutrition and health, and the latest information suggests that it is not likely to be available before October 2005.

3. Members are also invited to note the information provided in Annex A on developments in the following three Directives:

- Services in the Internal Market
- Working Time
- Avian Influenza updated measures

4. Also attached is Annex B containing additional information that may be of interest to the Committee.

Background

5. The actions suggested above emanate from a discussion on the European Commission Work Programme (HSS(2)-04-05), presented by Anna Daniel, European Policy Analyst, Members' Research and Committee Services at the 2 March 2005 meeting of the Health and Social Services Committee. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to undertake the following actions:

- To look for opportunities to respond to the Green Paper on a programme for nutrition and health
- Follow progress, and possibly influence, the Directive updating measures to control Avian influenza

- Scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government on the implications of the Working Time Directive
- Monitor the progress of the proposed Services Directive, and in particular, the response of the UK Government

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Annex A

Green Paper on Health

To note

1. The Green paper on nutrition, diet and physical activity is not now expected until October 2005.

Services in the Internal Market

To note

2. The previous European Issues paper reported that the Internal Market Committee, which is taking the lead for the amendments proposed by MEP rapporteur Evelyne Gebhardt, was continuing its discussion of the opinion.
3. The proposal was presented in full to the European Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection on 24 May 2005, and amendments to the report will be considered in the 11 July 2005 meeting.
4. On 6 June 2005, the European Council took note of the Presidency report on the state of play regarding the proposal for a Directive on services in the internal market and confirmed its intention to continue studying this priority dossier with the aim of reaching an agreement. The UK Presidency will be taking forward discussions on the Services Directive, with a view to resolving the political and social concerns about the Directive; it is one of their major priorities. The agreement will take into account the European Parliament's opinion, which is expected during October 2005.

Working Time Directive

To note

5. Following the 10 May 2005 first reading of the Working Time Directive in the European Parliament, when recommendations to scrap the opt-out on health and safety grounds and to count "on-call" hours as working time in most cases was accepted, a meeting of EU employment ministers took place.
6. This meeting took place on 3 June 2005 but the employment ministers were unable to reach an agreement (common position). The UK Minister for Trade and Industry, Alan Johnson, led the group that wants to retain the opt-out clause in future revisions of the Directive while the French minister led the opposing group. Subsequently, the UK government is claiming that it is close to persuading other countries to retain the ability to opt out from the Working Time Directive.
7. A number of modifications were made by the Commission which have yet to be accepted but Ministers have been able to accept an extension of the reference period for calculating the 48 hour working period from 4 to 12 months.
8. With the UK having taken over the EU Presidency until the end of the year, issues around the Working Time Directive will be a priority, although it is unlikely that an agreement will be reached while the UK is in the Chair. Once an agreement is reached within Council, the dossier will go back to the European Parliament for a Second Reading.

Avian Influenza Directive

To note

9. Since the proposals for a Directive and Decision on Community measures to combat avian influenza were submitted at the beginning of May 2005, Influenza experts from the 25 Member States and other European countries held a workshop in Luxembourg during the week commencing 27 June 2005.
10. The focus of the workshop, which was organised by the European Commission, was the threat of mutant avian influenza viruses, and possible responses to a pandemic. Among the topics on the workshop agenda were how to improve co-ordination between avian and human influenza networks, and the role of various bodies in the fight against the disease, including surveillance. Markos Kyprianou, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, said:

The threat of a global influenza pandemic with serious human and economic losses is a very real one that must be addressed. In today's globalised society, unilateral responses to such possible outbreaks are not a viable option. There must be a coordinated EU approach to prevent and control diseases such as influenza.
11. The current avian influenza epidemic in Asia is unprecedented. Caused by a particular strain of virus it has already resulted in the death of more than 50 people.
12. The issue was discussed in the June Agricultural Council, and the UK Presidency will now press

ahead with work so that a decision can be taken on the proposals submitted at the beginning of May 2005.

Annex B

Additional information

UK Presidency Health Priorities

To note

1. A number of health-related issues that have been dominant on the general EU agenda will be dealt with in the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council during the UK Presidency. As well as the Green paper on nutrition, diet and physical activity that the HSSC identified from the current year's work programme, there are other issues which Committee members have previously identified. They include:

- The new Health and Consumer Protection Programme
- Pharmaceuticals, namely the regulation of paediatric medicines
- Food safety (nutrition and health claims labelling, additions of vitamins and minerals to food, food additives)

2. Key themes during the Presidency are tackling health inequalities and patient safety, and there will be two summits on these areas, on 17-18 October and 28-30 November 2005 respectively. An informal EU Health Ministerial Conference will be held on 20-21 October 2005 in Hertfordshire.

3. The Committee may also wish to be aware that it is expected the Commission will produce a Green paper on mental health in September.

European Health Insurance Cards

4. The European Commission office in London has reported during the week commencing 4 July 2005 that the UK is bringing forward the introduction of the European health insurance card to September 2005. The European card will eventually replace the E111 insurance form currently used by those travelling abroad in EU countries.