

TASK FORCE ON POLICY REGARDING EMIGRANTS

**Report from Leeds Irish Community
Compiled by Leeds Irish Health and Homes
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INTRODUCTION

Leeds Irish Health and Homes, in conjunction with Leeds Irish Centre, held an open forum on Thursday 31st January 2002 at Leeds Irish Centre, York Road. The forum was in response to the Irish Governments Taskforce regarding emigration.

Work prior to the open forum to encourage attendance:

1) Flyers (appendix A) were distributed to various people and organisations namely:

- Leeds Irish Health and Homes tenants (approx 60 tenants);
- The Irish Centre;
- Parishes

2) A press release (see appendix B) was sent to Irish papers and local press to let people know about the evening.

3) Finally a survey (appendix C) was handed out at Leeds Irish Centre's Day Club for the elderly (approx 200 people) and to our members of our own Day Club (approx 30).

AIM OF THE FORUM:

To harness and collate the opinions of Irish emigrants in Leeds who want the Irish Government to acknowledge the type of information that is necessary for

- ◆ Emigrants leaving Ireland today;
- ◆ Irish living in the UK wishing to return;
- ◆ Irish living in the UK but unable to return to Ireland except for holidays due to family commitments, money constraints etc.

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To gain the opinions of the Irish community about current practice and how it can be improved to provide the support services, advice and information necessary to make informed decisions.
- ◆ To encourage inter-organisation talks between Irish groups in Leeds.
- ◆ To record and present findings from the open forum to The Taskforce for action.

FORMAT OF THE EVENING

7.30pm Guests arrive.

8.00pm Introduction from Ant Hanlon, Director, Leeds Irish Health and Homes about the taskforce and its aims.

8.15pm Break up into 5 groups with a representative from Leeds Irish Health and Homes facilitating each group. Group discussion about what issues were important to the Irish Community in Leeds.

8.40pm Feedback from each group.

8.55pm Questions and Answers and general discussion from the floor about issues highlighted in feedback.

9.15pm Finish.

NUMBERS ATTENDING: 30

FEEDBACK

Although each group gave individual feedback it was found that common issues were arising. These have been grouped below.

How can the Irish Government help the Irish Living in England who want to remain living in UK?

◦ **Funding**

- ▶ More financial assistance needs to be given to existing organisations working with vulnerable Irish in the UK.
- ▶ Increased emphasis on funding for Irish groups **OUTSIDE** London.
- ▶ Funding for full time workers to co-ordinate information and activities for the Irish Community.
- ▶ More community partnerships to be funded and supported.
- ▶ Funding for respite care for ill/elderly people living in their own homes and wishing to spend their last days there.
- ▶ Funding for transport to take elderly people/families that cannot afford it on organised day trips.

◦ **Travel**

- ▶ Irish citizens of pension age should be entitled to free travel while on holiday in Ireland
- ▶ Special travel rates/subsidised fares for people wishing to return on holiday to Ireland
- ▶ Holiday schemes in each county for older Irish who wish to return, especially those who no longer have any family there but would like to go back.

- **Recognition**

- ▶ For people's contribution to Ireland whether that be as a resident in Ireland or as part of the Irish Diaspora.

- **Benefits**

- ▶ Information about access to help with regards to the issues such as pre-1953 pension. General communication to Irish organisations about the system of payments has been very poor and consequently poor understanding about entitlements.

- ▶ Support for organisations who can advise about entitlements for the Irish in the UK.

- **Grants/ Housing**

- ▶ Irish grants towards improving housing/living conditions for the Irish in the UK, especially the elderly and those with young families.

- ▶ More secure homes and supported housing specifically for the Irish community.

- **Health**

- ▶ More outreach workers to be employed to go out into the community and help isolated Irish, those with mental health difficulties, family difficulties, and loneliness issues.

How can the Irish Government help Irish currently living in England but wanting to return to Ireland?

◆ **Current lack of information**

▶ Information about returning to Ireland or agencies who can help with benefits, advice and support should be supplied directly to places where Irish people gather and other representative organisations.

◆ **Pensions**

▶ Should be allowances for those who did not pay stamps or who have no proof of paying stamps. Common culture of pre-1950's not to have stamps especially farm labourers - many do not have proof of people paying stamps on their behalf and are consequently losing out on pension payments.

◆ **Housing**

▶ It was noted that prices in Ireland are excessive. More social housing is therefore needed to facilitate those Irish that want to return to Ireland in retirement.

▶ Adequate housing in place before returning e.g. sheltered accommodation/warden.

▶ Details of availability, cost and location of housing.

◆ **Travel**

▶ Free travel on public transport in Ireland should be extended to those Irish of pension age living in Britain.

▶ Discounted travel costs for those wishing to return to Ireland for good.

▶ Assistance with furniture removal/fares etc.

◆ **Health Care**

▶ More information is needed about the type of medical care one would receive on returning to Ireland e.g. costs and medical cards. Information about nursing home/ home help facilities also needs to be provided.

◆ **Social Services/Benefits**

▶ Is it on a par to what is available in Britain?
▶ More information about the entitlements to benefits on return e.g. reciprocal pension/income support like the UK?

◆ **Education**

▶ For people returning with families information was required on nurseries, primary/secondary/tertiary education available. Student grants/student loans etc.

◆ **Employment**

▶ Information about boom industries in Ireland. Possible agency in UK that could provide recruitment advice and possible placements before people get to Ireland so that they have a job to go to.

◆ **1st generation Irish**

▶ What procedures could be put in place to assist and assess 1st generation Irish wishing to return home?

- ◆ **Educate Irish in Ireland about returnees**

- ▶ Concern over how Irish in Ireland would view returnees after a long time away? Research into this area to combat any fears/worries. Use media and other communication channels to promote a positive light to Irish returning to Ireland e.g. highlighting importance played in the Irish economy with culture of sending money home.

- ◆ **Dual residence**

- ▶ Possibility of schemes that would allow part of year in Ireland and part of year in England, especially for those that have family in both countries.

- ◆ **Information**

- ▶ Central information bureaus in all main cities especially with high Irish contingency where it is easy to access a person with all the knowledge of documents required and processes necessary if wishing to return to Ireland. Some people do not like to have to rely on immediate family the whole time to get information.

- ◆ **Funeral assistance**

- ▶ Very expensive to be buried in Ireland especially transport of the body. Possible assistance from the Irish government?

QUOTES FROM THE EVENING AND SUGGESTION FORMS

“Just in Leeds alone, there is a need for some form of organisation to get Irish people together, like LIHH or the Irish Centre to understand the plight of some Irish who are experiencing difficult circumstances. We need, most of all a spokesperson or organisation like LIHH, with some clout to put our views over to the Irish government. We alone might not be strong enough but with support we can be.”

“I can’t arrange transport or accommodation because I can’t afford it but would love to go back.”

“It is great to see the Irish government ready to look at Irish living abroad but there is the fear that this initiative may not be followed up. The Irish community in Leeds will want to see some results from meeting like this as soon as possible.”

“The problem is that I would love to go back to live in Ireland but there is the difficulty about where to find out all the information. There needs to be some sort of booklet about whether I can get housing, benefits and support in older age when I have been away for so long.”

“I would not go back to live in Ireland as my family are here, but it would be great to see the Irish government extending benefits or discounts to the Irish living in Britain. Holidays are very expensive these days – surely the Irish government could liase with Irish airlines and ships to get discounted rates especially at expensive times like Christmas and Easter.”

CONCLUSION

The items above were the main talking points from each group. It is necessary to note that each topic came up several times within the forum and each group repeated the need for the services above.

It was agreed that one of the best ideas that came from the discussion was perhaps the need for an Emigration Liaison Officer in various UK regions who could advise and assist with all the information needs mentioned above.

Other recommendations included a general booklet to be available to all. I have noted from having access to the web and being Internet proficient the information on www.emigrantadvice.ie. However if we are looking at the older generation most of them do not have access to the web and consequently this information is inaccessible. I also noted that Emigrant Advice, Information and Counselling Service in Dublin launched a booklet in January that is free. Is it possible for the Irish Government/ Embassies to send copies of this booklet to Irish organisations or at least do a campaign to push awareness of this booklet in regional media? We have a printed a copy from the web in the office and can help people who approach us but reprinting, advertising and circulation of this document is costly.

However, as an organisation we have approached the Emigrant Advice service in Dublin and are hoping to organise a seminar towards the end of the summer in Leeds for those who are thinking about returning to Ireland. Obviously it is resources and funding that are going to limit the success of this seminar. Maybe this could be a consideration in the recommendations of the Taskforce to provide for ventures like this.

As an organisation we feel that the information that this forum requested is out there but access and knowledge of where to go is limited. As an advice organisation we feel that we do not have the resources at present to provide all this necessary advice but that it would be a strategic move and development in our services to the Irish community in Leeds, to be able to provide an Emigrant Liaison Officer. As an advice centre for Irish people we recognise the need for qualified people to provide a variety of information to the Community. The Irish Centre does an excellent job in Leeds in a social capacity. A combination of these strengths should hopefully flourish in the new Community Forum that is to develop from this Task Force meeting.

People also highlighted that it was important to see some action now. They were concerned that they had provided this information but that it would not be acted upon. We reassured them that the Taskforce would be hoping to provide a response by June 2002 and that as a Community Forum we could start getting acting on the need for this information together.

In conclusion, as a mark of success from the evening it was decided to confirm another meeting for **Thursday March 21st at 7.30pm, Irish Centre, York Road** to develop an Irish Community Forum in Leeds/Yorkshire. Advertisements nearer the time will hopefully go into local press.

IRISH GOVERNMENTS TASKFORCE ON EMIGRATION 'YOUR SAY'

Venue: Leeds Irish Centre, York Road

Date: Thursday 31st January 2002

Time: 7.30pm

The Irish Government has set up a Taskforce to assess the role of the Government and voluntary organisations in assisting Irish emigrants past and present.

As there is a large Irish Community in Leeds, The Irish Centre and Leeds Irish Health and Homes have teamed up to hold this event so **come along and let us hear your views.**

Some issues that may be tackled include:

- Improving access to all benefits and support services for Irish in all age groups
- Support for Irish Pensioners in Ireland and the UK
- Outreach services to housebound and isolated Irish pensioners
- Receiving the Irish Pension
- Improving day care facilities for older Irish

For more details on the event please contact:

Anna Dunne, Leeds Irish Health and Homes on 0113 240 1130

PRESS RELEASE

DATE: 24/01/02

Ref: 02/02

LEEDS IRISH COMMUNITY JOIN FORCES FOR THE TASKFORCE ON EMIGRATION

Leeds Irish Health and Homes, in conjunction with Leeds Irish Centre, are holding an open forum on **Thursday 31st January 2002, 7.30pm** at Leeds Irish Centre, York Road. The forum is in response to the Irish Governments Taskforce regarding emigration.

The two main concerns to be addressed at the meeting are:

- How the Irish Government prepare people living abroad for their return to Ireland?

and

- How the Irish government meet the needs of Irish people living abroad, that are not able to return, but who may need support?

The forum wants the opinions of the Irish Community about current practice and how it can be improved to provide the support services, advice and information necessary.

Ant Hanlon, Director, Leeds Irish Health and Homes commented:

“As an organisation we feel that Irish people, especially the older generation should be a major consideration in this public consultation and this forum gives Irish individuals a chance to provide a combined response. It is important that we try to reflect the diverse opinions and experiences of the wider community and I hope the Irish population take advantage of this opportunity.”

Tommy Mc Loughlin, Manager, Leeds Irish Centre commented:

“ We are delighted to host this event and welcome the connection of Irish Groups in the Leeds area. As a pivotal organisation in the Irish Community we hope our members, especially the older generation, acknowledge the importance of this Taskforce and use this evening to air their views.”

-END-

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For more information about this evening people can contact:

Anna Dunne, Communications and Fundraising Officer, Leeds Irish Health and Homes

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Notes to the Editor

- Leeds Irish Health and Homes was established in 1996
- Our organisation offers three services:

Supported Housing Service – providing fully furnished single tenancies and ongoing support, tailored to suit individual needs.

Irish Elders Outreach Service - provides associated advice, information and support to older Irish people living in Leeds. An over 55 Day Club also runs weekly for those who may feel isolated and want to meet new people.

Health Outreach Service – provides short and long term support around a wide range of health issues.

- We also run **Leeds Irish Women's Group** which organises monthly meetings and social activities for Irish women.

TASK FORCE ON POLICY REGARDING EMIGRANTS

The Irish Government have set up a 'Task Force' to assess ways in which they can help people who are thinking of emigrating and those who are already living abroad with advice and support.

In response to this we have organised an open forum on **Thursday 31st January** at the Irish Centre, York Road starting at **7.30pm**.

We would love to see you there to discuss any issues you may have. Alternatively please fill in the form below with regards to an issue you think the Irish government should consider.

Examples of the type of issues you may like to discuss include:

- Free transport for older Irish wishing to return to Ireland;
- Assistance with arranging accommodation in Ireland to return to;
- Funding for organisations to support and advise the Irish in Britain on employment, housing and general welfare issues;
- Better communication with regards to benefits in Ireland, such as the pre-1953 pension, which is available to Irish in Britain.

I would like the Irish government to consider: (please include reasons why and how exactly they could help change the situation)

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Please hand this form back to a member of staff from Leeds Irish Health and Homes.