Objective

1. The Committee is invited to note and discuss the report "From the Margins to the Centre" which provides the National Assembly with an overview of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) housing needs in Wales.

2. The report was written by Mutale Nyoni, a secondee from the black voluntary sector to the National Assembly. The purpose of the secondment was to ascertain how well social landlords (local authorities and registered social landlords) in Wales were meeting the housing related needs of BME communities. The report is based on surveys of and discussions with the housing departments of all local authorities, with registered social landlords with over 100 properties, key statutory and voluntary organisations and 100 BME individuals and has taken into account their views and comments.

3. The issue forms part of the Committee’s agreed forward work.

Summary

4. This review is the first attempt to assess the housing needs of BME people in Wales. There has been relatively little previous public debate on the subject and much further work is needed to identify the local needs of the various minority communities. The report highlights a number of areas which are critical for improving the position of BME people in regards to social housing. It identifies the need for action to promote the involvement of BME people and organisations in the management of social housing, in order to make services more accessible, and to empower the BME communities. The report also emphasises the key role to be played by local authorities in developing strategies to assess and meet BME needs, and also the importance of the Best Value regime in ensuring that local authorities meet this responsibility. Also highlighted is the need for further research in this area to establish an accurate picture of BME people in Wales, and in particular of local assessments of their needs.

5. The Assembly Secretary for the Local Government and Environment Committee has indicated that the report will be published as Mutale Nyoni’s report to the National Assembly.

Timing

6. We understand that the Committee has asked that this work not be subject to any delays.
Background
7. The review has taken place against a backdrop of concerns about how well the housing needs of black and minority ethnic groups are currently being met by Welsh local authority housing departments and registered social landlords. The recent MacPherson report has highlighted the need for an overall aim to eliminate racial prejudice and disadvantage and to demonstrate fairness in all areas of public life. These concerns were substantially underlined by the Welsh BME Steering Group - a group of housing professionals and community leaders - who reported that many social housing landlords in Wales were perceived by the black community as predominantly "white" organisations, this perception being reinforced by the low percentage of black housing employees (particularly in senior positions) and those on registered social landlord boards of management. They felt that this had resulted in many black people perceiving social housing as being "not for them", and that they were therefore less likely to look to local authorities and registered social landlords for help in solving their housing problems.

8. It was thus agreed that there was a need to ascertain how well social landlords in Wales were meeting the housing related needs of BME communities. The objectives of the review were:

- to ascertain what registered social landlords and local authorities in Wales were doing to meet the housing related needs of BME communities;
- to identify good practice policies and procedures;
- to assess whether there was a need for a BME Housing Strategy for Wales; and
- if a strategy was needed, to draft a strategy for submission to the National Assembly for Wales, for approval to consult in Wales.

Consideration
9. The review found that whilst most social landlords have adopted policies on equal opportunities, only a small number have adopted specific strategies to meet BME housing needs. The report highlighted a number of key areas which, it recommends, social landlords need to take account of, including:

- the needs of BME families in the development and adaptation of accommodation e.g. the requirement for larger houses and the need to take account of any religious requirements;
- ensuring that BME people are not discriminated against by any move away from housing according to need, but rather that they are given choice on the areas where they might live;
- taking action to encourage more, appropriately-skilled, BME members onto the boards of registered social landlord, and for ongoing support and training to retain their involvement;
- the advantages of employing staff with relevant specialist skills, who are appropriately trained, and the need to ensure that they have proper career development opportunities;
• offering BME contractors a fair opportunity to be considered for work; and
• monitoring and taking action where necessary on access to housing and employment
  within the organisation in relation to ethnic origin.

10. The review identified the area of racist harassment as one which required particular efforts
    by social landlords and other organisations to work to current models of best practice. Also of
    concern was the evidence from BME tenants which indicated that few are involved in tenant
    participation initiatives or aware of opportunities to get involved. The report recommends that
    social landlords need to work proactively with tenants’ organisations to ensure that BME
    tenants are encouraged to join in with tenant participation processes.

11. Although the review identified a number of initiatives which have been established by
    social landlords in Wales to meet BME housing needs, it found that specialist provision was
    very limited. The review did, however, establish the key role which community organisations
    served in articulating and representing BME groups and highlighted a number of projects
    currently operating in Wales based on partnerships between social landlords and BME
    voluntary organisations.

12. The case of a black-led Registered Social Landlord is considered specifically by the report,
    and further steps are discussed.

Recommendations
13. The report contains a total of 27 recommendations but the following are those which are
    specifically for the National Assembly:

• The report should be made available to all relevant organisations to inform the
  discussion on the development of a Housing Strategy for Wales.
• A strategic approach to identifying and meeting BME housing needs should be
  incorporated in the National Assembly's overall Housing Strategy for Wales.
• Further research is required across Wales into the social and economic circumstances
  of BME people, and how this impacts on their housing needs. This research should be
  co-ordinated at an all-Wales level by the National Assembly.
• The National Assembly should take account of the needs of BME communities when
  setting design standards for social housing.
• The National Assembly should expect RSLs and LAs to have allocation systems that are
  accessible to ethnic minorities and which are periodically reviewed to ensure that they
  do not discriminate against ethnic minorities.
• The National Assembly should consider representations from BME groups on the case
  for establishing a BME-led RSL.

14. We support these recommendations and commend them to the Committee.
Cross-cutting themes
15. The issue of addressing BME housing needs has implications for policies aimed at combating social exclusion and for the National Assembly's duties under the Government of Wales Act in respect of discharging its functions with due regard to the principles of equality of opportunity and sustainable development.

Action for subject committee
16. The committee is invited to note and comment on the report "From the Margins to the Centre" and to consider its recommendations (which need to be seen in the context of other policies and commitments of the Assembly).

Housing Performance and Finance Division
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