

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE

Date: 5 February 2004

Time: 09:30

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

Title: Mainstreaming equality - Work of other Assembly Committees

Purpose

1. This paper summarises how other Assembly Committees are taking equality into account in their work at present.

Recommendation

2. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper as part of the mainstreaming review.

Background

3. On 27 August the Chair of the Equality of Opportunity Committee wrote to other committee chairs inviting them to contribute to the mainstreaming review by responding to the following questions:

- To what extent did your Committee consider equality issues in drawing up its forward work programme?
- Does your Committee consider the equality perspective on all issues it looks at? If not, how does the Committee decide which issues warrant consideration from an equality perspective?
- Can you give any examples of the Committee either considering a specific equality issue, or including equality issues in more general consideration?
- What, if any, additional advice or support would your Committee find helpful in ensuring that it

gives proper consideration of equality issues?

4. The responses from the other Committees are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Audit Committee

5. The Audit Committee has a particularly constrained role under Standing Orders; specifically it is not permitted to "question the policy objectives of the Assembly", which limits its ability to consider equality of opportunity issues.

6. The Committee makes every effort to ensure that its meetings and proceedings are accessible to the public.

7. The Committee would welcome suggestions of how it could improve its consideration of equality issues.

Culture Committee

8. The Committee welcomes the review and acknowledges the need for Committees to ensure that equality issues play a central role in the delivery of their work.

9. The Committee considered a number of equality issues in drawing up its forward work programme. The Committee has followed these principles in both its policy reviews by undertaking extensive consultations that have included all the main equality bodies. It is envisaged that the Committee's current policy review of the contribution of arts and sport to community regeneration will have a strong equality theme running through it.

10. The Committee has also chosen to place particular focus on the Minister's Sport and Active Recreation in Wales Strategy and will have discussed this strategy twice prior to the end of the year. The predecessor Committee's policy review of participation in sport and physical exercise influenced the compilation of this strategy. The review identified barriers to access as one of its three main themes and examined factors affecting participation of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people. The Committee is keen to ensure that the Minister will adopt a number of recommendations made on these issues.

11. Finally, the Committee will be undertaking a number of informal activities which will focus on equality of opportunities for all people. These will include a visit to the Welsh National Opera to view rehearsals of school children singing with the full orchestra of the Welsh National Opera. The schools were particularly chosen for their mixture of children from displaced communities and are due to compete in the British Council's 'A Sense of Place' conference, which looks at displacement and integration in Europe.

12. The Committee recently undertook visits to each of its ASPBs to scrutinise their draft corporate plans. A key section of the discussion involved the equal opportunities policy of the ASPB and the progress that had been made in their implementation. Particular focus was placed on the customer focus aspect of their policy and their managerial hierarchy.

13. The Committee would welcome any further guidance which may be available.

Economic Development and Transport Committee

14. Equality of opportunity is a fundamental employment issue and as such is embedded in everything the Economic Development and Transport Committee does. The Committee has regard to equality of opportunity over the full range of issues within its portfolio and this is highlighted in its work programme with specific reference to the duties placed on subject committees within the Government of Wales Act 1998.

15. The Committee's first policy review will look at economic inactivity in Wales with an initial emphasis on the barriers to employment caused by lack of child and elderly care facilities and the availability of appropriate transport.

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

16. The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee did take equality of opportunity issues into consideration in drawing up its forward work programme. The Committee is conducting a review of special education needs and in the New Year the Committee is likely to examine issues raised by the Equality of Opportunity Committee's report on The Review Service Provision for Gypsies and Travellers.

17. The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee would appreciate early advice on topics for consideration in reviewing its strategic and detailed forward work programmes.

Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee

18. The Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee makes specific reference to the equality duties set out in section 48 and 120 of the Government of Wales Act in its work programme. Specific work includes the Committee's review of the planning aspects of affordable housing and sustainable communities in the countryside.

19. The Committee would welcome suggestions of how it could improve its consideration of equality issues.

European and External Affairs Committee

20. The European and External Affairs Committee's role is to monitor the effectiveness of the Assembly's relationship with the European Union and the rest of the world and ensure that there is a strategic approach to European issues. Equality of opportunity, and ensuring that the needs of the most disadvantaged groups in Wales, have been raised frequently in relation to structural funds reform.

21. The Committee is considering the latest WTO round and wider fair trade issues at its meeting in November. Members identified this topic, and its obvious equality and fairness aspects, in drawing up the forward work programme.

22. The European and External Affairs Committee would like to take a more active role in promoting events like Europe Year of Disabled People in future.

23. There are some similarities in the roles of the European and External Affairs and Equality of Opportunity Committees as both Committees are charged with monitoring the effectiveness of the Assembly's arrangements in a particular area. One of the ways that the European and External Affairs Committee carries out this monitoring role is to invite subject committee chairs, on an annual basis, to report on how their Committee is taking account of European issues.

Health and Social Services Committee

24. Consideration of equality issues is central to the work of the Health and Social Services Committee and is something that individual Members, and the Committee as a whole, takes very seriously.

25. The Committee, and its predecessor, have scrutinised NHS restructuring and resource allocation to ensure that health inequalities are being tackled. The Committee is conducting a policy review of the interface between health and social care, which will focus on meeting the needs of patients and client groups. There will be a particular focus on vulnerable groups, for example ethnic minorities, the elderly, the young, chronically sick and disabled and their carers.

26. The Committee is also paying particular attention to children's issues. The Committee is concerned by the number of inspection reports of social services that indicate that children are not being well served and has discussed the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the report by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié.

27. Not sure that the Committee needs additional advice or support, but would be interested in examples of good practice and advice on improving the way we work.

Legislation Committee

28. The Committee does not draw up a forward work programme; its work is dictated by the submission of statutory instruments to it, which it is required to scrutinise in accordance with the requirements of the Government of Wales Act as embodied in Standing Orders.

29. The Committee does consider the equality perspective in its work, within the context of its very focused remit. So far, the Committee has not had occasion to formally report any defect in a statutory instrument by reason of failure to comply with equality requirements. However there have been minor drafting matters such as the Committee drawing attention to instances where the Assembly practice of using gender neutral terminology in legislation has been overlooked.

30. The Committee is required to scrutinise the legislation as submitted to it, but inclusion of background papers, such as the Business Committee Memorandum, could be helpful.

Local Government and Public Services Committee

31. The Committee is only able to provide limited evidence at present because it was only established recently. The Committee is conducting a policy review of the success of the new political management structures in local government, looking particularly at how the decision-making process is affecting the general public. The Committee has invited submissions from a number of equality related organisations.

32. The Committee is contributing to an Electoral Commission review of the minimum age for voting and candidacy in UK elections.

33. The Committee is open to suggestions on additional advice on ensuring that equality issues are taken into account in its work.

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

34. The Social Justice and Regeneration portfolio includes the promotion and development of equality and equal opportunities, as well as, anti-poverty initiatives, community regeneration, substance misuse and youth justice.

35. The Committee's forward work programme includes a policy review on housing for older people and substance misuse. Consultations on both reviews will include a wide range of organisations including those representing black and minority ethnic people and disabled people.

36. The Committee gives detailed scrutiny to the Minister's report and focuses on one other, major item in each meeting. The Committee is also conducting visits to ensure that it involves as many people as possible in its work.

Action

37. Members are invited to note this paper as evidence for the mainstreaming review.

Contact point

Members Research and Committee Services