

**EOC(2) 01-04(p10)**

## **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE**

**Date: 5 February 2004**

**Time: 09:30**

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

**Title: Mainstreaming equality - Emerging themes**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper summarises the emerging themes in the Committee's review of how the Assembly could mainstream equality effectively in its work.

### **Recommendation**

2. Members are invited to discuss the paper and provide a steer for the initial draft of the report on the review.

### **Background**

3. The Committee agreed the terms of reference for the review at its meeting on 10 July: "To consider how equality can be mainstreamed into the work of the Assembly and the Assembly Government." The Committee adopted the following working definition of mainstreaming:

"'Mainstreaming' equality is about the integration of equality of opportunity principles, strategies and practices into the every day work of the Assembly and other public bodies. It means that equality issues should be considered from the outset as an integral part of the policymaking and service delivery process and the achievement of equality should inform all aspects of the work of all the individuals within an organisation as they go about their business."

4. This paper has been drawn up on the basis of the evidence the Committee has gathered so far.

## **Evidence taken so far**

5. A consultation document was published at the end of July 2003 and 24 consultation responses were received from a range of organisations including the statutory equality bodies; the voluntary sector; ASPBs and from the health, education, police and local government sectors. The responses were summarised in a paper, which was considered by the Committee on 2 October 2003. The majority of responses broadly supported the initial definition of mainstreaming that the Committee had adopted.

6. At its meeting on 2 October, the Committee took evidence about mainstreaming from Professor Teresa Rees. The Committee also considered the Assembly's draft Race Equality Scheme, which is an example of one method for mainstreaming equality work.

7. At its meeting on 6 November the Committee took evidence from Charles Coombs, Strategic Policy Unit about the Assembly policy integration tool and from Naomi Alleyne, Welsh Local Government Association and Denise Dewsnap, Equality Manager, Wrexham County Borough Council, about the local Government Equality Standard. The Committee also considered the Assembly's equality annual report, which provides details of the Assembly activity in relation to equality during the previous financial year.

8. At its meeting on 11 December the Committee discussed gender budgets with the Wales Gender Budget Group. The Committee also discussed the consultation on the new Assembly building and lessons for the future on consultation good practice with the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services and representatives from the access advisory group.

9. Before a draft report is prepared, the Committee will also take evidence from representatives of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies and visit a project which has used a gender-based analysis as the basis of the project plan.

## **Emerging themes**

10. The key themes that have emerged in the Committee's discussions so far are listed below. Further details are provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

- Good start made by the Assembly and perception of a high level of commitment to equality, but need to ensure that there is consistent delivery across all areas of the Assembly's responsibility and greater ownership of equality issues across the breadth of the Assembly's functions
- Need for an overall strategy integrating all the equality strands
- Need to develop and raise awareness of equality mainstreaming tools and guidance to help officials, ASPBs and other bodies mainstream equality

- Real mainstreaming, not just looking at specific 'equality initiatives'
- Increase the Equality of Opportunity Committee's 'audit' role
- Need for more guidance on equality for other Committees (and more action from them)
- More training for staff
- Ensure that effective and inclusive consultation and communication methods are adopted
- Clear and meaningful monitoring and performance measures - that capture how policy making and service delivery as a whole are improving

11. During the First Assembly the equality duty, which is set out in Section 120 of the Government of Wales Act, provided the framework in which equality was acknowledged as a key, cross-cutting theme in all aspects of the Assembly's work. (Section 120 requires the Assembly to "make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people").

12. The consultation responses and other evidence have generally been positive about the Assembly's overall commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. Several respondents to the consultation highlighted the importance of the Assembly's equality duty as set out in the Government of Wales Act and felt that the Assembly was setting a good example in Europe. Professor Teresa Rees also noted that the Assembly was leading the way in some areas, for example through a number of specific equality initiatives on equal pay and public appointments; both of which have received a very positive response.

13. However, concerns have been identified about the extent to which this general commitment was being reflected in the day to day work of the Assembly. When it discussed the Assembly's equality annual report the Committee noted that in some policy areas consideration of equality issues seemed quite limited and that there was a lack of clear arrangements to monitor progress. The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration has acknowledged these limitations and agreed to produce a more detailed mainstreaming report for the Committee in the first half of 2004.

14. To ensure that equality is mainstreamed in policy making and service delivery several consultation responses recommended that the Assembly develop an equality strategy, which identifies priority issues to tackle, key objectives and monitoring arrangements. This was also suggested by the WLGA and local government representatives as the best way to drive forward action on equality in their presentation on the local government equality standard. Such a strategy would help officials to understand how to ensure that equality considerations are mainstreamed in their policy area. It would also bring together work on all the equality strands and avoid the need for multiple initiatives in each equality area. 'Initiative fatigue' and the need to respond to numerous separate strategies has been highlighted as another area of concern. The need for meaningful targets and robust monitoring arrangements was noted by the Committee in its discussion of the Assembly's equality annual report; this was also picked up in many of the consultation responses.

15. To ensure that a strategy delivers results, several presenters and many of the responses to the consultation, highlighted the importance of providing policy tools and guidance. Policy makers would

use the tools to help assess the potential impact of proposals on different groups. Strategic guidance, for example for ASPB's, could include more specific actions on equality and diversity.

16. Guidance and policy development tools are available in the Assembly at present, but they are not necessarily familiar to all staff and their use is voluntary. There may be a case for requiring each policy proposal to be subjected to the new version of the policy integration tools, or a similar tool, to ensure that it is checked against key strategic objectives. The development and use of other equality tools, for example gender budget assessments, could be piloted in one or two areas, as suggested by Professor Teresa Rees and the Wales Gender Budgets Group. Raising awareness of existing guidance and sources of advice would also be useful in building up expertise across the Assembly. This work would need to be supported by a strong, well resourced central equality unit, which is able to provide expert advice.

17. More effective consultation methods and greater attention to inclusive communication methods were identified in the consultation responses and by members of the New Building Access Advisory Group as a key area to improve.

18. A number of consultation responses, and the "Institute of Welsh Affairs Report - An Absolute Duty: Equal Opportunities and the National Assembly for Wales" which the previous Committee endorsed, highlighted the role the Equality of Opportunity Committee could play in ensuring that there is effective scrutiny of the Assembly's progress on equality.

## **Action**

19. Members are invited to discuss the paper and provide a steer for the initial draft of the report on the review.

## **Contact point**

## **Members Research and Committee Services**