

MINUTES EOC(2)01-04(min)

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE

Date: 5 February 2004

Time: 09:30

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members	Gwenda Thomas (Chair)	Neath
	Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South & Penarth
	David Davies	Monmouth
	John Griffiths	Newport East
	Helen Mary Jones	Mid and West Wales
	Laura Anne Jones	South Wales East
	Jenny Randerson	Cardiff Central
	Catherine Thomas	Llanelli
	Leanne Wood	South West Central
Standing Invitees	Will Bee	Disability Rights Commission (DRC)
	Kate Bennett	Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)
	Chris Myant	Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)

	Derek Walker	Stonewall Cymru
	Sian Parry-Jones	Welsh Language Board
Invitees	Doug Elliott	Audit Commission in Wales
	Amanda Neill	Audit Commission in Wales
	Leona Evans	Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Refugees and Asylum Seekers
	Rev. Aled Edwards	Assembly Churches Liaison Officer and Chair of Displaced People in Action
Secretariat	Claire Bennett	Committee Clerk
	Lara Date	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1 - Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest (09:30)

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Laura Jones AM who had replaced Lisa Francis AM on the Committee. Lisa Francis AM was thanked for her contribution to the Committee's work. Apologies had been received from Huw Lewis AM and Derek Walker of Stonewall Cymru, who could only be present for the latter half of the meeting.

1.2 David Davies AM declared an interest in relation to Item 5 on asylum seekers, as his wife was from an EU accession country.

Item 2 - Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising (09:33 – 09:41)

Papers:

EOC(2) 05-03(min) - minutes of meeting held on 11 December 2003

EOC(2) 01-04(p11) - Letter from the Department for Trade and Industry following up points raised by the Committee in a discussion about the UK Government consultation 'Age Matters' on 2 October 2003

EOC(2) 01-02(p12) - Letter from the Commission for Racial Equality regarding a breakdown of cases dealt with last year

2.1 Alistair Howie, Senior Policy Adviser to the Commissioner for Public Appointments, had asked for the following additions to the minutes of the previous meeting:

Para 6.2, fifth bullet point: "Scotland had undertaken a successful campaign using posters which...."

Para 6.2, last bullet, penultimate line: "...to discuss the issue, though she was not hopeful that this would result in the outcome most wanted by disabled people."

2.2 Howell Rees, Assembly Public Appointments Unit, asked that para 6.2, third bullet should read:

"Currently 34 per cent of Welsh appointees to public bodies were female in comparison to 39 per cent UK-wide. In Wales, 56 per cent of Independent Assessors are female."

2.3 Members accepted these amendments and ratified the minutes subject to these changes.

2.4 It was noted that some comments made by a member during the previous meeting's consideration of the Commissioner for Public Appointments' annual report had not been recorded in detail in the minutes. In discussion it was noted that the minutes were not a verbatim record and to minute individual comments raised the difficulty of how to record them in context. If members wished a particular point to be noted for the record they could indicate that at the time, but it was accepted that the usual practice was not to attribute comments to the particular member who made them.

2.5 Point 7.2 of the minutes recorded that the Committee would examine the issue of gender budgeting further. It was confirmed that this was included in the forward work programme.

2.6 In relation to 5.8 of the minutes Leanne Wood AM had received a letter from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) concerning the impact the rise of far-right parties was having on voter turnout in BME communities. This letter would be circulated to all the Committee members to consider before the next meeting. No response had been received from the Electoral Commission and the Chair would write to ask for one.

2.7 Members noted papers 11 and 12.

Action points:

- A letter from the WLGA to Leanne Wood AM (concerning the impact of the rise of far-right parties on BME community voter turnout) would be circulated to all Committee members to

consider before the next meeting.

- The Chair would write to the Electoral Commission to request a response on its experience relating to the rise of far-right parties.

Item 3- Scrutiny of European proposals (09:41 - 09:43)

Paper: EOC(2) 01-04(p01) - Scrutinising European legislation

3.1 The Committee considered two recent European proposals relevant to equality issues. It was noted that the evaluation report of EQUAL funding (EU Ref number 5125/04, deposited 07/01/04) had relevance to the position of asylum seekers in Wales, and it was agreed to consider it at a future meeting. If necessary the Committee could then make its views known to the EQUAL Monitoring Board.

Action point:

- The Committee would give fuller consideration to the EU report on EQUAL funding (EU Ref 5125/04, deposited 07/01/04) at a future meeting.

Item 4 - Mainstreaming review: Audit Commission presentation on monitoring and evaluating progress on promoting equality (09:43 - 10.35)

Papers:

Reports for background on Audit Commission's equality work:

- EOC(2) 01-04(p02) - Equality and Diversity report
- EOC(2) 01-04(p03) - Directions in diversity: Current opinion and good practice report
- EOC(2) 01-04(p04) - Human Rights: Improving public service delivery

4.1 Doug Elliott, Head of Policy and Research - Audit Commission in Wales, and Amanda Neill, Policy Manager - Audit Commission in Wales, made a presentation to the Committee on the equality aspects of the Audit Commission in Wales' audit and inspection work and discussed that work with the Committee.

4.2 The Audit Commission in Wales had an extensive remit across health and local government. A key objective was to embed a culture of equality into its own organisation and to mainstream equality in its audit and inspection work. It aimed to report on its work to support policy-makers, service providers and service users. It worked in collaboration with equality bodies such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Welsh Language Board, the Assembly's Equality Policy Unit and the Welsh Local Government Association's Equality Unit. Most of the information provided by the Audit Commission was in the public domain but had not previously been pulled together. The Committee could expect to see more Wales-specific equality-related reporting over time, including themed papers.

4.3 The Audit Commission's Head of Diversity, Loraine Martins, was unable to attend but could provide written answers to any technical questions from members on diversity issues.

4.4 Consultation with service users and diverse communities in Wales on what areas of work to undertake was very important to the organisation but was also demanding.

4.5 The Audit Commission had a Welsh Language Scheme, a diversity scheme and a race equality scheme to mainstream equality into its work.

4.6 Large national surveys undertaken by the Audit Commission focused on the '3 e's' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The 4th 'e' of 'equality' is now taken into account by including an equality dimension to every piece of work. Specific equality inspections had also been undertaken in Wales. A code of practice provided equality guidance to Auditors in their work, and a National Risk Assessment Tool was also used.

4.7 The Commission was encouraged by some progress on equality but there was a great variety in practice across Wales. The Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) introduced in 2003 provided a framework to measure progress, and since 2002 four reports had been published that tried to identify progress in implementing the equality agenda. Some common themes had emerged:

- Commitment at the highest level in organisations was vital to embed an equality culture and incorporate it into service delivery
- There must be sustainability through inclusion of equality in service planning
- Performance management was an area where equality was rarely incorporated - targets, achievements and outcomes must be measured
- Users must be involved in service delivery and as a catalyst for change and improvement

4.8 A diverse community had diverse needs and it was vital that the WPI reflected that. How authorities interpreted it was up to them, depending on their priorities and risk areas. A shared risk assessment was developed between the regulator and the local authority so that risk areas were agreed and any gaps identified. The results were then built into the local authority's improvement plan and the regulatory plan.

4.9 Local authorities identified risk both in terms of whether they were meeting the needs of service users and whether they were complying with the law. Organisations were probably not as aware as they should be of Section 120 of the Government of Wales Act and its implications, and the Audit Commission in Wales could play a role in bringing that to their attention.

4.10 Strong evidence was starting to emerge that the WPI would drive change. Over time it would be possible to provide more information on the situation specific to Wales, to share best practice and measure compliance with statutory duties. If local authorities identified equality and human rights issues as more of a risk then specific work in this area would increase.

4.11 Performance indicators (PIs) defined by the Assembly were used to measure progress in different equality strands, for example levels of learning Welsh in schools, tactile road crossings for disabled people, proportion of BME staff in the workforce, number of women in management posts. In some areas there has been more change than in others. Good performance in one equality strand did not necessarily mean that a local authority was doing equally well in other strands, which is why it was important to look behind the PIs at the issues behind the figures.

4.12 There was discussion of recruitment diversity targets, and the difference between positive discrimination, which was illegal in the UK, and public bodies choosing to take legal affirmative action to encourage greater diversity in their workforce.

4.13 The 'Equality and Diversity' report published in 2002 had not taken account of the Welsh linguistic dimension but there was now a commitment to embedding Welsh language. It was particularly important in relation to Joint Reviews, for example work on fostering. The Commission was keen to build its database of information on Welsh language issues and future reports would report on this aspect of the equality agenda.

4.14 There had been little change on implementation of the Commission for Race Equality's Standard, and some authorities had dropped to a lower level of implementation of the Equality Standard. Overall the results suggest that local authorities need to place more emphasis on mainstreaming equality. There was a tendency to be too process-focused and inward-looking, and there was scope to look externally, and to do impact assessments with service users. It was hoped that the Local Government Data Unit performance measurement project led by Angela Evans would be able to explore that further.

4.15 Difficulties were identified with disability PI's being process-driven, for example if reaching a target set for the number of tactile road crossings meant diverting funds from normal pavement maintenance, the overall quality of life for disabled people would not be improved. The number of people using services such as day centres or meals-on-wheels might merely reflect the fact that they had no alternative to that service, not that it best met the customers' needs.

4.16 Measures of ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation were based on how people self-identified. With regard to people declaring themselves disabled, DRC suggested that the figures might be underestimates. It was important for people to be surveyed in a supportive context.

4.17 Members were interested in how to stimulate better progress by NHS bodies, which the reports showed had been poor to date. The Audit Commission in Wales was carrying out a major review of adult mental health issues, and looked at other service-specific issues. It saw the development of a NHS performance management framework as a positive step by the Welsh Assembly Government, with the opportunity to measure its effectiveness through future audit and inspection.

4.18 Members noted that the Audit Commission was a designated body that 'whistleblowers' could report to under the Public Interest Disclosure Act. They welcomed steps by the Audit Commission to

promote this role in its literature, particularly as internal 'whistle-blowing' procedures did not always work.

4.19 There was room for improvement in providing guidance on embedding the promotion and protection of human rights. The co-ordinating role of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) had been identified in the report as important in this respect in the police service. There was a role for the Assembly to provide leadership to encourage a co-ordinated policy and approach on human rights across local authorities and the NHS.

4.20 Planned legislation would merge the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office in 2005 and should improve coherence and help align equality performance indicators across Wales. It was part of the evolution of a more Wales-specific audit and inspection function since devolution. The Audit Commission in Wales' Strategic Plan was the first time it had consulted specifically in Wales on the agenda for regulation in Wales.

4.21 Reporting from the perspective of the service user, and understanding how best to engage with service users was also part of the evolution. A practical example was the MORI-designed framework that put the onus on local authorities to segment their customer base and take a more informed view of who they were and how to consult them in a meaningful way to develop appropriate policies. If successful in one pilot authority the framework would be rolled out across Wales.

4.22 There was an expectation that equality issues would be more mainstreamed in the second tranche of Joint Reviews due to take place in Wales. There was a greater awareness of equality issues and more likelihood of challenges on those issues than in the first tranche that started in 1999.

Break: 10.35 - 10.55

Item 5 - Issues facing asylum seekers and refugees in Wales (10:55 - 12:06)

Papers:

EOC(2) 01-04(p05) - Report from the Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

EOC(2) 01-04(p06) - A Welsh Asylum Narrative

EOC(2) 01-04(p07) - Report from the CRE on experiences of asylum seekers and refugees

EOC(2) 01-04(p08) - Outline of Assembly Government work in this area

5.1 Leona Evans, Manager of the Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Refugees and Asylum

Seekers, and Reverend Aled Edwards of Displaced People in Action, discussed their work and key current issues with the Committee:

- The Consortium acted as a conduit between the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and UK Government departments and the regions. It worked with stakeholders (private, public and voluntary sector bodies and asylum seekers and refugees) and aimed to promote and enable integration.
- Since dispersal began in 2001, 2,205 asylum seekers had been dispersed to Wales. Most asylum seekers were housed by local authorities, but some were in privately provided accommodation.
- One-stop shops in Wales reported lower levels of racist attacks than in English regions, although it was not clear whether this was the result of lower levels of these incidents or under-reporting.
- When the dispersal system was established it was anticipated that the majority of people who received a positive decision while living in Wales would move to other parts of the UK where there was a larger population from their community. In reality the opposite had occurred, with 75 per cent of people remaining in Wales. This gave a positive message about the experience of living in Wales and the services provided.
- Current issues included the Ministerial decision on 23 October 2003 for indefinite leave to remain to be granted to people who applied for asylum over three years ago - interim arrangements would be used to support these people as the decision was implemented over the next six months. The aim was to ensure people could stay in their current homes to avoid homelessness. The decision affected thousands of families in the UK and groups had been set up to assist transition. So far, six families had been identified who would be affected in Wales (3 in Newport, 2 in Cardiff, 1 in Swansea).
- Enlargement of the European Union had implications for asylum as there were a small number of asylum seekers from enlargement countries. The UK Government had made it clear that it would continue its programme of removals prior to the accession of new EU Member States on 1 May. After 1 May asylum-related support would be withdrawn but the asylum seekers from those countries would then be able to draw on mainstream benefits, subject to habitual residence rules.
- There was concern over plans to restrict free NHS treatment to emergencies and treatment of infective diseases such as TB that could be picked up through health screening. Provision of anti-retroviral drugs to treat HIV-positive asylum seekers would no longer be provided free of charge. The Consortium was interested in the Assembly's view on this issue. Most members expressed concern that the proposal posed a risk to both the asylum seeker and the indigenous population.
- There was concern over the lack of support services for asylum seekers outlined in the paper to Committee, including under Section 4 of the National Immigration and Asylum Act (2002). A recent judgement had been highly critical of the Home Office approach. Hard case support was not available in Wales and many Welsh asylum seekers did not want to move to England to access it and leave an area where they had built up a support network. There was an additional problem in that during the time taken to answer requests for hard case support, people could be evicted from their accommodation. The policy encouraged asylum seekers to become 'sofa-surfers' and to 'disappear'. The Consortium was asking the Home Office for provision for hard case accommodation in Wales to be made.
- Section 55 of the Act allowed for the removal of support to those deemed not to have applied for

asylum 'as soon as is reasonably practicable' after arrival in the UK. It was noted that in 2002, 68 per cent of asylum seekers did not apply at the point of entry and so were only eligible for hard case support, which led many to become destitute. On 17 December 2003 the time limit within which people had to apply for asylum had been extended from 24 hours to 72 hours. This flexibility had been welcomed by agencies working with asylum seekers. The new legislation also made it an offence to arrive without a passport, which was a likely situation for someone fleeing persecution. The importance of having a food project coordinator to help support destitute asylum seekers was recognised.

- The argument that asylum seekers were an economic burden was a myth, as most were graduates, qualified people who were willing and able to work. The policy of not allowing most asylum seekers to work created more problems by forcing them into earning low wages in the black economy while awaiting a decision. Agencies working with asylum seekers were keen that initial asylum decisions were correct - it was to everyone's advantage to quickly differentiate genuine asylum seekers from economic migrants. The Home Office had previously calculated that Vietnamese refugees had contributed £2.5 billion more to the UK economy than they took out in benefits. Members welcomed the initiative in Wales to help asylum seeker doctors qualify to practice here - thus addressing the current shortage of medical professionals in Wales.
- It was important to remember the work that was done to help people return to their country of origin. Thousands of people had returned to Afghanistan for example, although not everyone was suitable to return.
- The Committee was presented with details about a 15 year-old asylum seeker in Cardiff who had asked for her story to be told. It illustrated many of the problems facing asylum seekers, including the impact of leaving extended family members behind in their country of origin and fear of authority figures that made them reluctant to approach uniformed officials for help. Whilst technically a dependant child, the girl spoke English and so carried the significant burden of dealing with lawyers and public agencies to claim asylum and access support services for her family. The family's asylum claim had been affected by not being told that they should have produced vital documents to support their claim early in the process.
- The child concerned was a Sunni Muslim from Iran who spoke four languages fluently, and had learnt English and some Welsh in a local school within seven months.
- The Committee were also informed about the first baby that had been born in Wales to an asylum seeker who could not return to their country of origin. The mother's claim had been rejected but she could not be returned to Zimbabwe. Currently she lived with her sister in Wales, and had the option to move to a 'hard case support' centre in England where she would receive accommodation, food and £10 spending money, but would have no provision for the care of her child. Her other option was to place her child in the care of social services. Rev Aled Edwards asked if the Committee would ensure that the child would be treated in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular clause 9, that stated the only reason to remove a child from its parents was if it would be of benefit to the child. It was also noted that Section 107 of the Government of Wales Act required the Assembly not to contravene the Human Rights Act. The Children's Act said children could be taken into care if parents neglected the child but asylum seekers were forced into destitution.

- It was regretted that the Children's Commissioner for Wales did not have powers to safeguard the rights of asylum seeker children in Wales, who were the most vulnerable. It was questioned whether the intention to place responsibility for children living in Wales in the hands of an English Commissioner was appropriate.
- Members questioned why NASS had withdrawn its contract offer to the Consortium - it was disappointing that NASS had refused to pay back the pre-contract costs incurred by the Consortium. The Consortium would write to the Committee with more details.

5.2 The Committee appreciated the extensive briefing it had received on what was a complex subject. In discussion some members noted the large number of people worldwide who were living under oppressive regimes and raised concerns about the potential burden on the UK, and in particular on the national health service, if the UK chose to accept all those who might seek asylum. It was noted that 99.998 per cent of asylum seekers worldwide did not come to Wales - the vast majority were taken in and supported by neighbouring countries that were often very poor. Two years ago, Tanzania had accepted twice as many asylum seekers in one week as Wales did in a year.

5.3 The myths about asylum seekers that were perpetuated by some media outlets were regretted, for example that they got more benefits when in fact they were only entitled to 70 per cent of income support rates and were at the back of the queue for NHS treatment. It was unfortunate that whilst the Welsh media was much more responsible and accurate in its reporting, a lot of people in Wales read non-Welsh newspapers that portrayed asylum seekers very negatively. Concerns were expressed at the 'demonisation' of muslim asylum seekers and refugees partly as a result of the 'war on terror'. It was ironic as the majority of asylum seekers in Wales did not come from countries identified as having harboured terrorists. Some members believed there might be an under-reporting of the level of racist attacks and that negative media coverage was unhelpful. There were some examples of good practice, for example the police and education authorities working together in schools to break down barriers to under-reporting and giving guidance on how to report an incident.

5.4 There was discussion of links between the rise in support for extreme right-wing parties in the UK, UK government policy on asylum, and negative media portrayal of asylum seekers.

5.5 The CRE had identified a particular problem with newspaper chat rooms and wanted to see them better moderated, including through wider intervention from the regulators OFCOM and the Press Complaints Commission. They were also drawing up guidance on how to treat incitement in the media - in the past CRE had been inconsistent in what it reported to the police. A public consultation was also planned that would cover asylum seekers in England and Wales.

5.6 Members wanted to know how the standard and appropriateness of accommodation for asylum seekers was being monitored, including meeting the needs of disabled asylum seekers. They were also keen to know what was being done to meet mental health needs, to identify children with special needs and to address the language barriers and provide advocacy and support. Legal services were being cut -

the consortium would report back to the Committee on the status of advocacy services in Wales.

5.7 Those working with asylum seekers were concerned that the mental health needs of traumatised asylum seekers were not being met and sometimes service providers used the excuse that patients might not be in the UK long enough to benefit from treatment.

5.8 Members were concerned about the breakdown of family units, and whether incidents of bullying and suicide rates among destitute asylum seekers were being monitored. The number of hard case support cases in Wales was not known, nor whether whole families would be taken on or whether there would be cases of children having to go into care. Suicide figures might be held by NASS at national level.

5.9 Drop-in centres were available, and could be used as an opportunity for members of the indigenous community to meet asylum seekers and refugees and encourage understanding and integration.

5.10 In Wales, asylum seeker children were integrated into mainstream education much more quickly than in English regions. Schools did face a challenge in supporting asylum seeker children's language needs, and local education authorities should have a bigger role in providing centralised resources to help.

5.11 The Committee questioned whether asylum seekers were still being provided with support in the form of vouchers, or if this had been scrapped. The Consortium said that subsistence vouchers were provided to asylum seekers who volunteered to stay with family members already in the UK.

5.12 The Chair explained that many of the recommendations put to the Committee by the Consortium Destitute Asylum Seekers Sub Group were not within the powers of the Committee to act on. However, the Committee was concerned about many of the issues raised and would raise them with the relevant Ministers. Some members would have liked to see the Committee undertake a more detailed review of the issue but it was noted that the Committee already had a full work programme and was committed to a policy review on young disabled people. Members wanted to see where there was room to do things differently in Wales and to put pressure on the UK Government to reconsider aspects of its policy. It was recognised that the Minister for Social Justice had already undertaken to raise certain asylum issues that had been raised in plenary debate with the Home Office. It was proposed that the Committee considered the Assembly's powers in relation to asylum and raised specific issues of concern with the Assembly Ministers who had devolved powers in those areas at a future meeting. Sufficient time should be allocated to the item to allow full consideration of all the issues.

Action points:

- The Chair would write to the relevant Ministers to ask:
- what could be done to provide hard case support to asylum seekers in Wales
- if the list of recommendations from the Destitute Asylum Seekers Sub Group could be considered

- and any actions or developments in those areas reported back to the Committee
- drawing attention to the plight of the young woman from Zimbabwe and her baby and asking what could be done to help
 - how the Minister for Health and Social Services would use the full extent of her powers to address the health issues raised in the Committee meeting.
 - what could be done to expand the powers of the Children's Commissioner for Wales so that he could intervene to safeguard the rights of asylum seeker children living in Wales
 - A legal scoping paper explaining the powers of the UK Government and the Assembly in relation to the asylum seeker issues raised would be prepared for consideration at a future meeting. The Ministers for Social Justice, Health and Social Services and Education and Lifelong Learning would all be invited to attend that meeting to discuss issues related to their portfolios.
 - The Consortium would write to the Committee with more details about:
 - NASS's reasons for withdrawing its contract offer and refusing to reimburse the pre-contract costs incurred by the Consortium.
 - The status of advocacy services for asylum seekers in Wales

(Break 11:35 - 10:55)

Item 6 - Mainstreaming equality review - emerging themes (12.06 - 12.33)

Papers:

EOC(2) 01-04 (p09) - Mainstreaming equality in the work of other Assembly committees

EOC(2) 01-04 (p10) - Emerging themes in the Committee's Review of mainstreaming equality in the work of the Assembly

6.1 The Committee was concerned at the mixed responses by Assembly Committees, specifically:

- There was a lack of detail and information provided by some Committees and not all had sufficiently answered the questions posed.
- Some Committees were doing equality work but had not recognised it in their responses, for example the Audit Committee had identified that its ability to consider equality issues was constrained as it did not have powers to "question the policy objectives of the Assembly", but in fact it did have powers to review performance against objectives and compliance with equality

legislation.

- Even the most experienced equality practitioners should be open to what they could learn and it was therefore of concern that one Committee did not feel it needed any additional support
- There did not seem to be a lack of willingness on the part of Committees to mainstream equality, but there was a lack of understanding and clarity about what mainstreaming was and how they could achieve it. This included how to monitor equality outputs from their work.
- Most Committees had identified a need for greater advice and support and the Equality of Opportunity Committee should explore the most effective way to provide this to individual members and the Committee as a whole.

6.2 The Equal Opportunities Commission noted the Local Government and Public Services Committee policy review on the new political management structures in local government and agreed that it would be useful for the Committee to ask for information about what impact the new structures were having on gender balance.

6.3 The following areas were discussed and identified for inclusion in the emerging themes for the draft 'Mainstreaming Equality' review report:

- Section 120 of the Government of Wales Act should be central to the work of the Assembly, but an overarching strategy was needed from the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure people understood what was required, and they must be given the guidance and tools to achieve it.
- The CRE noted that there seemed to be a lack of understanding in the Assembly about what mainstreaming meant. There was good practice taking place within parts of the Assembly which needed to be recognised and shared more widely. These issues were discussed in paper EOC(2) 01-04(p07) on asylum issues, which would be taken into consideration in the report
- The Committee needed to do more to scrutinise but it could not do everything and should therefore identify the best way to help other Committees to scrutinise too. A balance must be struck between the Committee's scrutiny powers and its role as a catalyst for other parts of the Assembly to mainstream equality. It was important to move away from a 'tick-box' approach for Committees to use to measure how they were mainstreaming equality.
- The emerging themes for the policy review should include ensuring mainstreaming equality was happening in ASPBs and Local Government who were vital to delivering services on the ground.
- The report should include a proposal for the Committee to work with the Minister responsible for a Welsh Assembly Government policy division to pilot a monitoring exercise, measuring how that division was trying to mainstream equality and what the outcomes were.

6.4 The Committee agreed it would be useful to meet informally to discuss how it could best exercise its powers, and to identify its future key priorities. Standing invitees stood willing to offer their advice and expertise and should also be involved in the meeting.

6.5 It was important to review how the Equality of Opportunity Committee could and should interface

with the Welsh Assembly Government, both the Minister responsible for equality and other Assembly Ministers, in order to mainstream equality. The question was raised of whether the Committee's work programme would allow it to receive presentations from other Assembly Committee Chairs in the same way as the Standing Committee on European & External Affairs.

6.6 Members would also welcome training and briefing sessions on equality issues including legislative aspects of equality and the statutory duties on the Assembly and ASPBs.

6.7 The Equality Policy Unit (EPU) was an important resource not just to advise the Minister but also to provide advice and guidance to the Committee and support the mainstreaming of equality across all parts of the Assembly, including the Presiding Office. It was recognised that there might be difficulties in expecting civil servants working to the Minister responsible for equality to also advise the Presiding Office on its equality scrutiny work in Assembly Committees and that other sources of support should be explored. The Chair would write to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to clarify the role and resources available in EPU to support this need.

Action points:

- The draft 'Mainstreaming Equality' review report would take account of the additional emerging themes and comments raised in the meeting, and the CRE paper on asylum and race relations - (EOC(2)01-04(p7)).
- The Chair would write to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to clarify the Equality Policy Unit's role as a resource to provide necessary advice, guidance and support to the Committee, the Presiding Office and across the Assembly.
- Members' Research and Committee Services would explore possible options for Members briefing sessions on equality issues, including legislative aspects of equality and the statutory duties on the Assembly and ASPBs.
- The Committee team would schedule an informal meeting for Members to discuss the future operation of the Committee and its future key priorities in relation to its agreed forward work programme. Standing invitees would be invited to participate.
- The Chair would write to the Chair of the LGPS Committee to ask what impact the new political management structures in local government were having on gender balance

6.8 The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions. The next meeting would be on 4 March 2004.

The meeting closed at 12.33.