

Committee on Equality of Opportunity EOC-03-99(min)

MINUTES

Date: 21 October 1999

Time: 9.30

Venue: Committee Room 1

Attendance: Members

Jane Hutt (Chair) Vale of Glamorgan

Christine Chapman Cynon Valley

Jocelyn Davies South Wales East

Richard Edwards Preseli Pembrokeshire

Edwina Hart Gower

Carwyn Jones Bridgend

Helen Mary Jones Llanelli

David Melding South Wales Central

Kirsty Williams Brecon & Radnor

Kate Bennett Equal Opportunities Commission

Howard John Disability Wales

Officials

Kate Cassidy Public Administration, Equality and Public Appointments Division

Charles Willie

Matthew Quinn Policy Unit

Andrew George

Clerk

Julie Bragg

Deputy Clerk

Apologies were received from Glyn Davies and Janet Ryder.

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Report

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, especially Kate Bennett who was attending her first meeting as Director of the Equal Opportunities Commission; and participants in the recent Listening to Women Roadshow in Cardiff who were present in the public seating area: Jean Gale of the YWCA, Suzanne Smith of MEWN Cymru and Rhian Davies of the Cardiff and Vale Coalition for the Disabled.

1.2 The Chair said that she would provide a written report in good time for all future meetings. On this occasion she wished to highlight the following points:

- the Assembly had just debated European Structural Funds and it was important to ensure that equality issues were being fully addressed. The Single Programme Document was being revised by the joint secretariat in the light of the Assembly's comments. The equality bodies had been invited to submit their comments at the consultation stage. The Assembly would have to finalise its views on the document prior to submitting it to the European Commission at the end of October. The Commission would then have five months in which to respond. It was unlikely that approval would be forthcoming until at least April 2000. The next stage after that would be the production of a Programme Complement Document which would set out the detailed criteria for projects under Objective One. The equality organisations and the Committee would need to be closely involved in the production of this document. The Committee agreed that this item should be discussed in depth at a future meeting.
- the Chair had met the Welsh Women's National Coalition (who were now in touch with officials to take issues forward) and she would be meeting the Wales TUC and the Welsh Refugee Council to discuss immigration issues in the next few weeks. She would report back to the Committee on these meetings.
- following the discussion about the 'See the Person' campaign at the last meeting, she had written to the Department for Education and Employment. Margaret Hodge, Minister for the Disabled, had replied and that response had been provided for members' information.
- legal advice was being sought to clarify the extent to which the National Assembly could direct different Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to exercise their functions or powers with due regard to equality of opportunity for all people. A paper would be provided for the November meeting, although the Chair indicated a preference for the Committee to develop a dialogue with such bodies rather than rely on the legislation

1.3 In the ensuing discussion Members saw the Committee's role in promoting best practice in equality as extending to all the bodies which the Assembly worked with, supported and funded. It was suggested that the Committee might consider the Assembly's own proceedings in the light of its statutory duty to have regard to equality of opportunity in the conduct of its business. The Secretariat was asked to provide factual briefing on the relevant sections in the National Assembly Advisory Group Report and Standing Orders

Agenda Item 2: Progress Report on Work Programme

Paper: EOC-03-99(p.1) - Submission Guidance for Officials

2.1 The Chair introduced this item which dealt with the Committee's strategy to mainstream equality throughout the work of the Assembly. A copy of a letter which the Chair had written to the Chairs of Subject Committees explaining the strategy and their Committee's part in it was circulated to members. Once the equality audit of particular policy areas had been completed, the Committee would be able to meet the appropriate Assembly Secretary and Committee Chair to discuss the results. The Chair would be able to have further discussion with the relevant Assembly Secretary and Committee Chair.

2.2 Charles Willie reported on progress with the audit so far. 32 interviews out of a planned 51 had already been held with Heads of National Assembly Divisions. The rest were planned for November, and officials would report to the Committee in January 2000. The interviews were based on a questionnaire which touched on four main areas: business strategy and aims; top level commitment; monitoring and guidance and training. The main outcomes to date included a raised awareness of equality issues and consideration of how they could be addressed; a belief that top management needed to demonstrate more explicitly their commitment to equality of opportunity; a lack of consistent procedures and monitoring; and the need for guidance and training on equality issues. On the positive side, much good practice had been observed and a number of interviewees had recognised that equality of opportunity was a core value for their teams.

2.3 Members noted that the findings were typical of most large organisations and thus were not surprising. It was proposed that awareness raising and training should also include Assembly Members and their support staff. The Chair asked officials to consider how this could be achieved most effectively and to report back in due course.

Agenda Item 3: Listening to Women

3.1 Kate Cassidy presented a report on "Listening to Women", an initiative which was being led by the Cabinet Office. A roadshow had been held in Wales. The exercise had indicated that the most important issues for Welsh women were balancing work and homelife; getting their views heard; violence; and the pay gap. These largely reflected the UK findings.

3.2 Specific issues which the Assembly needed to consider included access to training and work for women in rural areas; providing visible black and ethnic minority women role models; building diversity into the National Curriculum; provision of flexible working practices and affordable childcare; valuing carers; and providing career opportunities for girls.

3.3 Members noted the Government's response. Producing the Report of such an exercise in this "women's magazine" format was felt to be inappropriate and did not provide the reader with sufficient information. The Chair suggested that, in the Welsh context, the Committee should consider proposals for action arising from the initiative at a future meeting.

Agenda item 4: MacPherson Report

4.1 The Chair welcomed Roger Mackenzie of the Public and Commercial Services Union; Rob Cater and Jazz Iheanacho of Race Equality First who joined the meeting for this item. Mr Mackenzie spoke about his Union's involvement in the Stephen Lawrence campaign. They had considered this to be an important civil rights issue and a full-time union officer had been seconded to the campaign to provide practical assistance. The MacPherson Report had serious implications not just for the Metropolitan Police but for all providers of public services. Its recommendations could provide the opportunity for real change if people in senior positions took them seriously and lead from the front in implementing them. The Assembly was in a good position to do this because it was starting afresh.

4.2 Any organisation wishing to take race equality into account should address three simple questions which had been suggested by the Commission for Racial Equality as a useful starting point:

- Are we acting fairly?
- Does the service we provide reach all the communities for which it's intended and does it meet their needs?
- Are we using the same professional standards in assessing this?

He felt that the equality audit was a valuable way forward in this process and the Assembly should take the opportunity to promote it to other organisations.

4.3 Jazz Iheanacho and Rob Cater looked at the MacPherson report in more detail in the light of their involvement with the inquiry and their experience of dealing with race issues in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. They emphasised the significance of Sir William MacPherson's statement early on that the inquiry had implications for all public service providers and was not just about an isolated racial incident in London. This was particularly important given the young age of many perpetrators of incidents of racial harassment and discrimination.

4.4 The Report made 70 recommendations under 13 main headings with implications for organisations from the Assembly down to small employers. Some would lead to primary or secondary legislation so the Assembly would need to be alert to the changes that would occur. One of the main areas to address was education because encouraging young people to embrace equality of opportunity was crucial. The National Curriculum should encompass these issues and ESTYN should be encouraged to include this in their school inspections.

4.5 In a wide-ranging discussion, it was agreed that the Chair would write to the Secretary for Education and Children, Rosemary Butler, to invite her to outline how the Report's recommendations about education were being implemented in Wales. The need to raise awareness in areas with small black and ethnic minority communities was also emphasised. The Chair asked officials to draw up an action plan for taking forward the relevant recommendations (which might include a conference involving public bodies) in consultation with a working party of volunteers from the Committee.

Agenda item 5: Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Paper: EOC-02-99(min)

5.1 These minutes would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 11 November.

5.2 The meeting closed at 12.35.