

Committee on Equality of Opportunity**MINUTES**

Date: 11 July 2001

Time: 9.00 am

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

Attendance:

Members	Edwina Hart (Chair)	Gower
	Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
	Eleanor Burnham	North Wales
	Ann Jones	Vale of Clwyd
	Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
	David Melding	South Wales Central
	Jonathan Morgan	South Wales Central
	Janet Ryder	North Wales
	Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Advisers to the Committee	Mashuq Ally	Head of Commission for Racial Equality in Wales
	Will Bee	Disability Rights Commission
	Kate Bennett	Equal Opportunities Commission
Officials	Jon Shortridge	Permanent Secretary
	Mike Harper	Head, Public Administration, Equality and Public Appointments Division

Laurie Pavelin	Financial Accountability Division
Michael Trickey	Head of Financial Planning
Tamlyn Rabey	Financial Planning
Philip Elkin	Office of the Counsel General
David Williams	Office of the Counsel General
Russell Keith	Committee Clerk
Phil Mulraney	Acting Deputy Committee Clerk

Apologies for absence were received from Christine Gwyther.

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Report

1.1 The Chair informed the members following the general election the Disability Rights Commission had been moved to under the Department for Works and Pensions; the Commission for Racial Equality had stayed with the Home Office and the Equal Opportunities Commission would be accountable to Baroness Sally Morgan in the Cabinet Office, and to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Agenda Item 2: McKenzie Report - Action Plan

Paper: EOC 06-01(p1)

1. Jon Shortridge introduced the paper which set out the action plan produced by the implementation group, chaired by Roger McKenzie, in relation to his report 'Lifting Every Voice'. The report made 43 specific recommendations, aimed at ensuring that the National Assembly addressed the issue of institutional racism in its employment practices. The action plan sought to address all possible forms of discrimination.

2.2 Of the 43 recommendations, 16 had already been put into effect, 12 were underway and 15 were yet to be implemented. Across the department the report had been broadly welcomed and had drawn a positive response from staff. There had been some interest and controversy, though, surrounding recommendations 7 and 9. These call, respectively, for all posts to be advertised and open to external competition; and for the practice of recruiting to generic grades to be ended and replaced with specific job titles with their own competencies and job descriptions.

2. The task now was to consult with staff and trade unions over implementation of the

residual issues in the action plan and address the necessary cultural changes, both within the department, and in the wider community. To this end, it was proposed that a steering group be established to oversee the implementation of the action plan. This would be chaired by the Director of Personnel, Management and Business Services, and its members would include representation from the Assembly trade unions. This group would report to the Permanent Secretary and the Management Board. The Permanent Secretary would provide a progress report to the Committee on a six-monthly basis.

3. The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee also needs to consider recommendation 37 which would require Assembly Members to undertake training on race issues. This presented some difficulty as it may not be legally possible to make this mandatory for elected members. It was suggested that sessions on race awareness could be part of the induction process, to be undertaken on a voluntary basis, for the next intake of AMs. These issues will be considered by the next meeting of Committee.
- Another suggestion was that any Member wishing to take part in recruitment processes for Public Appointments, or for Special Advisors to committee policy reviews, should be required to attend training on equality of opportunity. The Chair undertook to write to committee chairs expressing this view.
- Appointment to specific posts would enable people to apply for jobs for which their experience and interests made them better suited. Furthermore by opening up all posts to application career progression may be enhanced.
- The Permanent Secretary was required to balance his responsibilities to ensure diversity in the Assembly's workforce, to provide career opportunities for existing staff, and to ensure that the business needs of the Assembly were met in an efficient manner.
- It was understood that there would be circumstances where it would be neither possible nor desirable to advertise specific posts externally, but the normal practice would be to do so. The Permanent Secretary stated that this would become normal practice as soon as possible, and that he would include information on exceptions to the norm in his reports to the Committee.
- It was considered important that the Assembly Trade Unions be fully involved in the implementation of 'Lifting Every Voice'.

2.4 The Committee noted the report and looked forward to receiving regular progress reports.

Agenda Item 3: Remuneration of Public Appointees - Report on the responses to the consultation Paper: EOC 06-01(p2)

3.1 Tamlyn Rabey introduced the paper which summarised responses to the consultation exercise on

remuneration and expenses of chairs and board members of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies and NHS bodies. A full copy of the responses was available should any member require it. Detailed proposals would be presented to the Assembly in the Autumn.

3.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- It would be useful to have the principles in the report in place before the structural reforms to NHS bodies take effect.
- The principle of banding of posts was accepted as a necessary step to bringing consistency to the arrangements. However the Committee felt strongly that there should be a rolling programme of job evaluations, and in the meantime, any banding system adopted should be simple and transparent, with a maximum of 3 or 4 bands.

3.3 The Committee noted the responses to the consultation.

Agenda Item 4: Terms of Reference for Equal Pay Working Group

Paper: EOC-06-01(p3)

4.1 The Chair introduced the paper which set out the proposed terms of reference for an informal working group on equal pay, as requested by the Committee at its meeting of 13 June 2001 and noted that an amended version omitting reference to "privileges" had been circulated that morning.

4.2 The Committee agreed the terms of reference with the proposed amendment (Annex A), and that political groups would nominate party representatives by 20 July.

Papers to Note

Paper: EOC 06-01(p4): Generic Equality Standards for Local Government

The Chair informed members that she hoped to make an announcement in the Autumn on how this issue would be progressed in conjunction with the WLGA.

Paper: EOC 06-01(p5): Physical Access to Historic Buildings

Concern was expressed about the need to take a flexible approach in order to ensure that, where possible, historic buildings were maintained as useful public buildings rather than historic monuments open to the public. The Committee agreed to invite both CADW and the Minister for the Environment to come before the Committee during the autumn term to discuss these and related equality issues. Committee members were further invited to consider what other issues within the Minister's portfolio which they would like to raise with her at the same time and to forward any suggestions to the Clerk by 20 July.

Paper: EOC 06-01(p6): Assembly Response to Joint Committee on Human Rights Request for Views on Establishing a Human Rights Commission

The Committee noted the contents of the paper.

Agenda Item 5: Asylum Seekers in Wales

Evidence gathering session

Witnesses:

Welsh Local Government Association	Colin Berg, Director of Social Services, Monmouthshire
Welsh Local Authorities Consortium for Asylum Seekers	Graham Bingham, Strategic Director, Newport
Bro Taf Health Authority	Trish Johns
Welsh Refugee Council	Dr Bill Smith
	Cllr Harry Ernest, Chair
	Mohammed Yusef, Director
	Eid Ali Ahmed, Assistant Director
Oxfam Cymru	Keith Roberts
Detention Services Directorate, UK Immigration Service	David Wilson, Deputy Director
Cardiff Law Centre	Sheilagh Croskery
Cardiff Asylum Seekers Network	Rev Aled Edwards
Rees, Wood & Terry, Solicitor and Notary Public	Julian Phillips

1. In discussion, the Committee agreed the following action points:

- The Committee would accept the Rt Hon Jeff Rooker’s offer to hear from a representative of the National Asylum Support Service at its meeting on 31 October 2001.
- Copies of the Oxfam report on media treatment of the asylum issue to be circulated to Committee members
- The Minister would establish a Working Group on Strategy for dealing with financial implications of dispersal policy

- The Chair will write to the Home Office to raise the Committees concerns over the principal of, and the operation of, the voucher system; the identified failings of the National Asylum Support Service; and to obtain further information on the budgetary implications of the dispersal policy for Local Government.
- The Chair will write to the Immigration Service to request information on the criteria used for determining whether detention is appropriate in individual cases and, if so, whether the individual concerned should be held in a Detention centre or Prison and on the initial mental and physical health screening process used to identify the suitability and safety of prison as a place of detention for that individual, and to raise the Committees concerns over the safety and suitability of prison as a place of detention for such people.
- The Chair will write to the Prison Service and Immigration Service to obtain statistics on self-harm and suicide of asylum seekers in prison.
- The Chair will consider whether it would be appropriate to invite Home Office Minister to speak to the Committee.
- The Chair will write to the Immigration Service to request that details of asylum seekers held in Cardiff Prison be sent to the appellate authority (Taylor House?) on a weekly basis.
- The Chair will write to large supermarket chains in Wales asking what training is provided for staff to assist them to deal with voucher users with sensitivity and discretion.

A verbatim transcript of this item will be attached as an annex to these minutes.

5.2 The meeting closed at 4.40pm.

Annex A

Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Equal Pay

The Committee on Equality of Opportunity is to establish a Working Group on Equal Pay to:

- advise the Committee on Equality of Opportunity on strategies to promote equal pay in Wales, including ways of redressing:
 - Discrimination in pay systems;
 - The effects of childbearing and rearing; and

- Job segregation.
- facilitate the co-ordination of action to promote pay equity in Wales.

Membership

The Working Group shall comprise:

- one member from each party from the Committee on Equality of Opportunity;
- a representative from the Equal Opportunities Commission
- a representative of the Trade Unions Congress
- a representative from any other organisations agreed by the Working Group.

The Chair of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity will write to the external organisations inviting them to participate in the working party and to identify a representative for their organisation.

The Chair of the Working Group is to be appointed by the Committee on Equality of Opportunity from its members.

Form

The working group is an informal body to assist the Committee. It is not a sub committee established under standing order 8.26 and does not share any of the functions or powers of the Committee.

Secretariat

The Committee Secretariat will provide secretariat support for the Working Group.

Officials

The Working Group may seek the assistance of officials as required.