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**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Wednesday, 14 February 2000</b>
<b>Time:</b>	<b>10.00am</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Committee Room 1, National Assembly</b>

**Subject:** Equalities Issues in Welsh Local Government.

**Purpose:** Report to the Equality of Opportunity Committee

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Councils fully appreciate that equality of opportunity is the only way to ensure access for all to a range of services, and the moral and legal duties to develop additional or alternative services to meet the diversity of needs in the community. The Local Government Act 2000 enshrines a power to “do anything” to secure the economic, social and environmental well-being of local communities. Equalities issues are at the forefront of this agenda and is a core value for local authorities. It is inextricably linked to issues such as inclusion, community safety, educational opportunity and community regeneration.

## **2. Roles**

- 2.1 Both the WLGA and Syniad have central roles in ensuring that this issue is fully addressed in local government. The WLGA is the representative body of Welsh Local Authorities and seeks to represent and influence its membership in ensuring that Welsh Local government is at the forefront of the policy agenda in Wales. Syniad is the development agency for councils, and it is tasked with the implementation and development of equalities issues particularly through the Best Value process. Syniad is also the employers’ organisation for local government in Wales, supporting authorities in their important capacity as major public sector employers.

## **3. Corporate Leadership**

- 3.1 Equalities is a complex and challenging area of work that demands strong corporate leadership, support, clear direction, sustained commitment and in-house expertise. The responsibility and expectations in the new political structures of leading the equalities work needs further consideration. There has been a clear commitment to mainstreaming equal opportunities in Welsh local authorities, integrating equal opportunities into policy development, implementation, evaluation and review processes.
- 3.2 There remains however much more work to do and the need for more commitment. The LGA in England has recently conducted a survey to discover that many public sector bodies are making slow progress on the measures required from the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry.
- 3.3 Some authorities are resourced in a manner which allows for larger corporate centres which are often the focus for such work. A number of authorities are trying to integrate equality issues within a broader social policy perspective which promotes equality of opportunity as a way of enabling everyone, from all sections of our community to participate in social, cultural, political and economic life. Others are frankly suffering from initiative fatigue and lack of resources which means that support and assistance is vital.
- 3.4 It is because of the factors highlighted above that the WLGA and Syniad working in partnership with the statutory Equalities bodies want to move the

equalities agenda forward into areas where local authorities can measure progress and seek support should it be required to promote these issues at the local level. The following report describes suggested relevant measures to achieve this. If judgements were to be offered however then to use an analogy there are many “green shoots” but these need to be encouraged and in some areas developed at a quicker rate of growth!

- 3.5 The positive role of local authorities as one of the major employers in Wales committed to good employment practice cannot be underestimated. Local Government is a market leader in developing robust procedures to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in recruitment and selection. It is also at the forefront of developing employment and disciplinary procedures which uphold equalities legislation. The new approaches will built on this but also move towards a more rigorous assessment and measurement process which will provide an objective view of progress made. The following report highlights this approach.

### 1. The Wales Charter for Councillors

The Charter for Councillors which was launched in September 2000 with the support of the WLGA has two key aims, to encourage the provision of development opportunities for councillors in support of the modernisation agenda and to encourage wider representation from the community in the democratic process.

Local authorities and other stakeholders in local government have been invited to sign a declaration of commitment to support the aims of the Charter. As well as local authorities, Syniad and the WLGA will call upon political parties, the business community in Wales, other public sector bodies including equalities organisation together with senior officer groups such as SOLACE to sign up to the Charter

The Charter recognises the fundamental importance of:-

- Local councils leading their communities
- Councils being representative of the communities they serve
- Councillors providing democratic leadership, scrutiny of services and high standards of conduct
- Councillors being supported, equipped and developed to fully undertake their roles
- Public service as an elected councillor being fully valued

By signing up to the charter local authorities commit themselves to: -

- Agreeing a development strategy for all councillors based on the council's key aims and priorities
- Establishing an annual development programme for councillors which recognises new roles and responsibilities, identifies individual learning needs and is based on principles of good practice including equalities
- Examining the way its business is conducted to facilitate the involvement of people with family and work commitments as councillors
- Developing a strategy to encourage under-represented groups in the community to consider service as councillors.

A number of authorities in Wales have already signed up to the Charter and the others are considering the issues it raises.

## 2. Councillor training and development

Syniad is assisting councils and individual members with a range of programmes and initiatives. The programme known as Member 2000 Wales is delivered regionally with opportunities for councillors to attend modules in both North Wales and in South Wales.

Member 2000 Wales consists of a variety of modules concerned with the modernising agenda and offers a specific workshop on “Equalities and social inclusion in the modernised authority”. This focuses on the councillors’ role as community leader and champion of equality, explores the growing body of equality law and considers the collection of performance data.

The Member 2000 Wales programme has covered the role of scrutiny, best value, the representative role, developing roles of councillors and corporate parenting. Equalities are woven into the materials used in each module; for example case studies include issues which relate to equalities considerations in the community. Guidance on consultation encourages councillors to recognise the diversity of the communities they serve when exercising their functions in scrutiny and public debate. Similarly on the module on best value members are drawn to issues of equality through discussions on the best value process and specifically in relation to corporate health indicators.

Member Development is also offered on an in house basis for councillors and all existing modules can be tailored for their use including the module on equalities and social inclusion. The in house workshop on planning a member development strategy is based on the requirements of the Charter and include references to equality issues concerning existing and prospective councillors

RSG funding has been obtained for the next financial year in order to expand the regional programme and offer joint learning to neighbouring authorities. As well as the existing modules there are plans to include some workshops on community planning, community consultation, health issues, ethics and probity and e-government. It is intended that equalities will be an integral thread to the workshops that are delivered.

The importance of member development as a support to elected councillors moving into new roles in new political structures, is emphasised in the draft guidance from the National Assembly which states

“all councillors will have a key role as part of the full Council, the main policy arena for the authority. All councillors will also continue to undertake their fundamental role as representatives of their community. In these roles there will be a continued need for updating and training on a range of issues, affecting **all** members such as new legislative requirements, responsibilities as employers and generic matters such as **equality of opportunity** and Welsh language policies”

This guidance will strengthen the importance of member development in authorities generally and recognises the pervasive importance of equalities through all council functions.

### **3. Equalities and Best Value**

All authorities in Wales are moving ahead with their programmes of best value reviews. The preparation of the Best Value Performance Plan and the process of reviews provides a major opportunity for equalities issues to be mainstreamed within the review of service provision.

For example,

- There must be a statement of the authority's equalities policy in the annual best value performance plan
- Equalities goals, targets and performance indicators can be included as key performance indicators (and must be included in relation to statutory PIs)
- Equalities "checklists" are being developed by many authorities to ensure that equalities issues are fully addressed and recognised
- Equalities legislation and standards can be used as benchmarks for comparison and target setting
- Consultation on levels of satisfaction and performance of services should involve representative groups of all parts of the community
- The review of crosscutting issues allows for the examination of issues from a service user perspective, for example, looking at all services to a people with visual impairment in an authority
- Employee involvement in reviews can ensure a range of perspectives
- The review process provides an opportunity to look in depth at equalities issues, for example one council has undertaken a BV review of equality in employment

Syniad is working with a members and officers in a range of authorities to support them to improve their systems of performance management and their approach to the methodology for their reviews. Many authorities are picking up the issue of equalities in their training for members and officers internally.

Best value provides an opportunity which can be seized by local authorities to mainstream equalities issues – the development of generic standards will assist this process.

### **4. Partnerships to promote Equality in Welsh Local Government**

- A. Equalities Partnership Meeting
- B. The Equalities Network for Welsh Local Government.
- C. The Millennium Action Learning Set
- D. Joint Council for Wales Task and Finish Group on Equalities

The **Equalities Partnership** meeting comprises -

Anne Abel,	Syniad;
Dr Mashuq Ally,	Commission for Racial Equality;
Will Bee,	Disability Rights Commission;
Kate Bennett,	Equal Opportunities Commission;
Kate Cassidy,	Local Government Modernisation Division, National Assembly for Wales.
Rhys Dafis,	Welsh Language Board.
Steve Thomas,	Welsh Local Government Association;

This is a regular meeting convened by the WLGA and Syniad to discuss how best to take forward Equalities issues in local government. This Partnership has been responsible for the development of the Generic Equality Standard for local government with the Employers Organisation for Local Government. It is the intention to seek representation from the Wales TUC.

It reports into a wider **Equalities Network** of relevant practitioners within Welsh Local Government. This has met twice in recent weeks as part of a growing recognition of the of the burgeoning equalities agenda facing local government. The Equality Network of for Welsh Local Government held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001 was attended by 19 Welsh Councils and the meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2001 will be a joint event between Equalities officers and Heads of Policy and Best Value throughout Wales.

The **Millennium Action Learning Set** which has been running for approximately a year now consists of dedicated equalities officers in local authorities. It was set up to improve the skills of people already charged with supporting equalities in their organisation especially so that they could be proactive in organisational development.

The set is about to conclude in February and an evaluative report will be then available. There is very little training available for equality officers and this action learning set has proved to be extremely developmental for those who have attended. It is hoped that this core group will be able to be more effective in supporting their authorities and in particular working with elected members to take forward the equalities agendas.

In December 2000 the **Joint Council for Wales** agreed to set up four task and finish groups. One of these is concentrating on equalities. The task and finish groups are composed of councillors, trades unionists and human resource professionals. They offer an opportunity for individual development alongside group research.

The equalities task and finish group is considering the draft paper on a generic standard for equalities for local authorities in Wales. It will also map the current under-representation of women, the disabled and people from ethnic minorities in senior positions in local authorities and identify barriers to progression for the selected groups.

The outcomes of the task and finish group are expected to be appreciation of the need for striving for a better balance of people at senior levels, support for a generic approach to equalities and the ability to give a considered response to the draft guidelines which will accompany the generic standard.

## **5. Equalities Audits in Welsh Local Government**

The Equalities Toolkit for Welsh Local Government was produced in 1999 and was endorsed by the Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Wales, the Equal Opportunities Commission, Syniad and the Wales TUC. It aims to:

- set a framework for the corporate management of equal opportunities
- promote higher levels of achievement across local government in Wales
- advocate best and innovative practice in employment, service delivery and community leadership
- set standards by which the public can judge the individual and collective performance of local authorities
- set a common target for local authorities for the year 2000.

The Equalities Toolkit is a practical equalities framework for councils in Best Value and service delivery, employment, and community leadership. The circumstances of local authorities in Wales vary considerably. Some councils are more advanced than others in the field of equal opportunities and no piece of guidance can be prescriptive in its recommendations. As such the Toolkit is a best practice guide and while authorities are urged to sign up to its principles it is not mandatory. Fundamentally it is for local authorities themselves to decide an approach which best suits their local management arrangements in terms of audits.

The current position is that 10 authorities have completed equalities audits while 7 are in the process of undertaking equality audits. Those authorities that have not undertaken an equalities audit intend to address this issue in local performance plans and progress this through best value reviews and the extensive “in house” preparation which underpins this process. For those who have not followed the route specified in the toolkit this does not mean progress is not being made.

Torfaen CBC for instance is not directly using the Equalities Toolkit but has developed an extensive “*Equalities and Inclusion Strategy for 2000/2001*” which has led to the establishment of a Social Inclusion Unit, a detailed benchmarking process against CRE and EOC standards and a new commitment to gender equality through the establishment of senior management working group progressing this issues through coordinated and Agreed Action plans.

Annex A sets out examples of work being undertaken within local authorities as an illustration of progress being made.

## **6. An Equalities Unit for Welsh Local Government?**



It is the view of the Equalities Partnership that the work undertaken through the Equalities audits the toolkit has created a framework for action and considerably raised the profile of these issues in local government. The group has recently considered proposals from the Assembly for a baseline survey of all local authorities. While this could draw upon information already produced by the “audits” there are concerns that local authorities will react negatively to “another survey”.

Alternatively there was agreement that investigation should occur on the establishment of an **Equalities Taskforce or Unit for local government** which would be charged with supporting local authorities, delivering training programmes and encouraging good practice.

This Unit would be based with the WLGA/Syniad and its prime purpose would be to develop and implement a new **Generic Equalities Standard for Welsh Local Government** (see below).

The Unit would be tasked to initially carry out research aimed at ascertaining top level commitment to equality across all aspects of the work of local authorities in Wales. This could be a powerful way of raising awareness of new responsibilities and giving impetus to action.

It is suggested that these interviews should be conducted with all cabinet members of local authorities plus the chairs of scrutiny committees and the chief executive/management team. This would build on existing audits but also gauge where an authority sits relative to the levels of proposed generic standard. More work is needed between the agencies to firm up a programme of action particularly relating to exactly what resources are needed and of what type, to help implement the programme. A business plan will be produced in this regard. However there is a broad consensus between the partners that this is the way forward and this links clearly into the recommendations agreed at the last Partnership Council held on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2000 between the Assembly and Local Government where the following was agreed: -

- The possible establishment of an “Equalities Taskforce” for Local Government is examined in terms of resources and a report on its potential establishment is produced for the next Partnership council.
- The establishment of a Pathfinder scheme for Local Government is examined in terms of resources and a report on its potential establishment is produced for the next Partnership council.

## 7. The Generic Equality Standard for Welsh Local Government

Local government is currently working with a number of programmes to improve quality through the modernising agenda, best value, community planning, Local Government Improvement Programme, Communities First and Sustainable Communities.

The Generic Equalities Standard provides a framework for integrating these initiatives with the council's own Equal Opportunity Policy to provide a systematic approach for developing an anti-discriminatory approach to service delivery and employment. The approach will ensure that equalities are effectively mainstreamed across all departments and services.

The standard is based on five levels of attainment. Each level is the essential foundation for the next. The five levels of achievement and outcome are based around the following key ideas of effectively

1. Establishing a Comprehensive Equalities Policy
2. Setting Equalities Objectives and Targets
3. Setting up Monitoring Systems
4. Measuring Progress against Targets
5. Achieving and Reviewing Outcomes

It remains the intention to present the Standard to the next Partnership Council. However it is the view of the WLGA and Syniad that the Assembly's Equality of Opportunity Committee could be a key consultee in this process and the committee may wish to consider a further presentation on this prior to formal adoption at the Partnership Council. *The views of the Committee are sought on this.*

The Generic Standard will:

- Provide local authorities with an "aspirational" benchmark and an objective standard to which they can aim in equalities work:
- Provide a systematic framework for the mainstreaming of equalities;
- Provide a systematic framework for measuring equalities which could eventually become the main performance measures in this area;
- Ensure local authorities are able to meet their obligations under the law;
- Integrate equalities policies and objectives with Best Value;

- Encourage the development of anti-discrimination appropriate to local circumstances;
- Provide a basis for tackling forms of institutionalised discrimination: and
- Provide a framework for improving performance, over time.

This is a major initiative which will greatly assist local government in moving forward against agreed levels of progress in relation to equalities.

The following part of the paper looks at three important aspects of equalities where action is currently being developed to support local government move ahead in this field.

## **8. Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 Code of Practice**

Extensive discussions have taken place with Dr Ally of the CRE in advance of implementing the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. CRE Wales have proposed to convene a Public Sector Round Table of Chief Executives from all parts of the public sector in Wales, to liaise with a similar Round Table working with the CRE in London on the drafting and implementation of codes of practice under the Act. The Round Table will be supported by an operational task force.

The WLGA and Syniad will be represented by Councillor Shan Wilkinson, WLGA Equalities spokesperson. The new WLGA director, Mr Sandy Blair and Bethan Evans, Director of Syniad will be representing local government at the Roundtable. Steve Thomas (WLGA) and Anne Abel (Syniad) will be on the Operational taskforce. Other representatives of relevant sectors from local government will also be included and are subject to confirmation by Dr Ally.

As a result of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 there would be a code of practice for local government and specific services, as well as one for the NHS. The codes of practice would have statutory force and local government has already discussed the implications of this at two all Wales Equality Networks of Local Authorities held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001 and 13<sup>th</sup> February 2001.

It is fully accepted that the code of practice under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 has to be a specific document, and it is felt by all partner bodies that it needs to be compatible with the generic equality standard. In this way, local authorities could use the standard as a single reference point to work on equalities issues in the round, without having to work to a different template for the code of practice. The planned timing means that the generic standard would be launched before the code was introduced.

## **9. Representation and Gender**

Representation is very much about involving more people in decision-making at all levels which more accurately reflects the composition of the population at large. This is particularly pronounced in Wales in terms of gender balance Women are often

disempowered or alienated by processes that exclude or inhibit them from taking on roles as representatives of their communities. In terms of local government, women are generally under-represented in council chambers and in senior management. There are only 3 women chief executives in Wales out of 22 in total. New performance indicators also give a clearer picture of the number of women in senior management in the top three levels of local government but again under representation is a key feature.

The WLGA, along with the Syniad are beginning to examine prospective initiatives aimed at addressing such under-representation including the development of a **Gender Equality Strategy for Welsh Local Government**. Work also needs to be conducted with the party political groups and at local level. There is also a need to change some people's perceptions of the local authority councillor, as a means of attracting more women into local politics. People need to be made more aware of what modern local councillors do and how important it is that the composition of councils reflects the diversity of the communities they represent.

The first National Census Survey of Local Authority Councillors, conducted in 1997 by LGMB, revealed that only 27.3% of councillors are women. In Wales the figure is lower at around 20%. Whilst the disproportionately low number of women councillors is the main concern with regard to representation, there is also an issue as to the role of those women who are elected. The 1997 survey revealed that, whilst 2.5% of male councillors are Council Leaders this is the case for only 1.2% of female councillors. In effect, male councillors are twice as likely to be elected as leader of their authority as are their female counterparts. Similarly 22.5% of male councillors were committee chairs compared to 18.7% of female councillors.

New political management structures, now being introduced by local authorities, may have an impact on the role of women councillors. EO surveys are identifying the roles that women councillors play within their authorities but it is too early to say what impact new political management structures are having in the Welsh context. Local authorities must seek to ensure that the split between the executive and scrutiny functions does not further exclude women from executive roles.

The WLGA, along with Syniad are encouraging Councils to examine prospective initiatives aimed at addressing the under-representation of women in local politics. In particular we would wish to see a Cabinet member responsible for Equality of Opportunity in all executives. Work will need to be conducted with the party political groups and at local level and there is a clear role for the latter in their selection processes which local government as an institution cannot determine.

The Association welcomes the announcement made at the Local Government and Housing Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> November where Edwina Hart announced that the scope of the study on members allowances would be expanded to include:

- ways to encourage and support a more diverse cross-section of the population to become Councillors including the young, people from deprived areas, minorities and all under-represented groups.

- the various issues which might hinder people becoming councillors and ways to overcome them: e.g. paying employers to release staff; pensions; e-mail access, claims for using own computers, travel and subsistence.

This will provide vital information on the image of the local authority councillor, emphasising the diversity of the role and the need for a diverse spread of candidates to fulfil the role, as a means of attracting more women into local politics. It would be sensible to conduct such a campaign with the broader aim of addressing under-representation, not only in terms of gender but also where it exists in relation to age, disability and ethnic background.

The WLGA believes that legislation should impose a wide-ranging duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for all persons, irrespective of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion. The Race Relations (Amendment) Bill does not introduce this wider duty. The WLGA would support the call by Equalities bodies for a far reaching **Equalities Bill** to be introduced by the next government

The current government has promised that it will consult widely on the introduction of broader legislation placing a duty on all public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and that such legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows. During the passage of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 the LGA successfully lobbied for a duty on the GLA to promote equality of opportunity.

## **10. Disability Rights and Welsh Local Government**

The Disability Rights Commission is a new arrival on the scene in terms of the statutory equality agencies. Yet in a short period of time it has made a real impact.

For Welsh Local Government as an employer of over 150,000 people the issues associated with the DDA are hugely significant. Many authorities do not as yet have a clear picture of disability within their areas. There is a danger of disability being seen purely in a Social Services context or a buildings context. Obviously those people receiving care packages or attending day or respite care are an important client base, but this does not represent the totality of disabled issues. This has been recognised by many authorities who are working in partnership with other bodies to ensure a corporate approach. This can include working in broad policy areas such as the Governments drive for "Better Government for Older People" or it can mean more specific measures: -

- Newport CBC for example has been working with the Employment Service to meet the requirements of the Positive About Disabled People Symbol. There have been issues with a certificate indicating that we meet the requirements and the Council will be using the symbol in their recruitment advertising from 1st January 2001. Resulting from this there has been a review of the Council's application form to incorporate the requirements of the Positive About Disabled People Symbol, and also to increase the font size of the text, as there had previously been concerns that the previous size was too small to meet the requirements of visually impaired individuals. The Council has also added

Disability Equality Training to their programme of training events, and have already run events with a plan to offer more in 2001. The Directorate of Social Well-being and Housing have published a Community Care Charter which includes details on equality of access to the service for all, and also employs a coordinator who deals with clients who have disabilities.

- In Gwynedd an officer working group has responsibility to ensure that the Authority is proactive in responding to the needs of people with disabilities, and an action plan is in place to develop this approach with funding set to meet recognized needs on an annual basis. This group takes advice from a number of Disability Action Groups across the whole of Gwynedd.
- In both the Vale of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire the Social Model of disability has been adopted as a principle for service planning and employment. This is being implemented on a structured basis commencing with programmes of Disability Equality Training in both authorities for members and officers.

No one in Welsh Local Government would proclaim total satisfaction on these issues, neither is anyone complacent. In access terms many council buildings require considerable adaptation to meet the requirements of the DDA. The capital investment required to have full access by 2004 is massive and Councils are working with Disability Wales and local access groups at the local level to prioritise work. Possibly worse in relation to the prime exercise of rights is that disabled access to many polling stations is non-existent particularly within Valleys areas.

The legacy of decades will not be solved quickly, but many of the issues involved can be tackled immediately. The recent concerns of the Committee in terms of the response by local authorities to the SENSE Cymru survey on standards for deaf and blind people has been taken on board by the WLGA and SENSE Cymru will be asked to make a presentation highlighting their concerns to an impending Coordinating Committee.

## **11. Conclusion**

The above report outlines the current initiatives and, in relation particularly to the generic equalities standards and the potential creation of a taskforce, offers a way forward with the equalities agenda in Welsh Local Government. This approach will involve an injection of resources, but at the same time it should provide vastly improved services for all members of local communities.

The report also provides a snapshot of progress and barriers to it, in relation to race, gender and disability. Obviously other issues are equally important such as broader human rights concerns and language issues. These could be subject to separate reports should the committee desire further information.

Attached as an Annex is a summary of some of the work in progress/initiatives by local authorities in Wales, highlighted as a result of the audit of activities.

## **Annex A**

### *EVIDENCE TO THE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY COMMITTEE*

#### *EQUALITIES PRACTICE IN WELSH GOVERNMENT*

This annex sets out purely selective examples of work being undertaken within local authorities as an illustration of progress being made. The main parts of this are based on initiatives arising for the Equalities Toolkit. It also highlights areas of good practice and innovation.

**Cardiff City Council** is one of the first authorities in Wales to undertake a cross cutting best value review on equalities issues. This is a corporate review in the true sense as gauges the impact of equalities across all relevant service areas. The scope of the review is to consider the following areas of equality -

- access to facilities and services,
- consultation,
- publicity,
- training and recruitment.

The authority has undertaken consultation with service users and representatives using focus groups based on set questions. They have also undertaken comparisons with other local authorities and identified good practice from the private, public and voluntary sector. Good examples in Cardiff have included swimming sessions specifically for Muslim women, training courses in ethnic minority languages in key health and safety areas e.g. food hygiene, information in various formats to meet specific needs. The review is planned for completion in May 2001. Equality training for members has been undertaken within the last 18 months. Equality also forms part of the Corporate Induction and Recruitment and Selection training for staff.

**Swansea City Council** have used the 10 point corporate challenge arising from the equalities toolkit to build commitment at all levels of the organisation and public commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities. This has led to the establishment of an Equalities and Access Policy Development Team (PDT). A Cabinet member is allocated responsibility for equality issues and another senior councillor chairs the PDT.

Arising from the toolkit Swansea has developed and published an Equal Opportunities policy, a Race Relations Policy and is committed to develop further equality related policies and an extensive draft strategy for Disabled People is currently being developed in consultation with relevant bodies. The Council two personnel staff trained in conducting access audits.

The authority has been particularly active in its response to the Macpherson Report. Late last year 2 training sessions were held for Directors and Assistant Directors, and another for senior managers at third tier level. The training session provided an



opportunity to reaffirm the pertinent aspects of the Macpherson report; to review progress made within the organisation in implementing the Macpherson recommendations; and to appraise officers of the content of the corporate training course on race awareness. The training also covered the amendments to the Race Relations Act; the Human Rights Act; and the new European Directive approved in June, which expands the definition of indirect racial discrimination. Additionally Directors report on progress of all equal opportunities issues at individual meetings with the Chief Executive that occurs on a regular basis. The Chief Executive also heads a strategic multi agency forum on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry that shares good practice on race/equalities issues.

The authority is a member of the Swansea Multi Agency Forum Against Racial Attacks and Harassment. This organisation formerly covered Neath Port Talbot but was relaunched in the Council Chamber at County Hall in November 2000 as a separate organisation for Swansea. The common reporting form used by all member organisations was introduced in 1999. Feedback from the Forum indicates that the numbers of recorded racial incidents has decreased slightly during 2000 and the reasons for this remain unclear, however, it is believed that lack of awareness regarding the reporting process may be an issue so the Forum is currently designing posters to advertise the existence of the form. The City & County of Swansea will be taking measures to ensure that the form is widely advertised within the authority.

The authority, with input from the Police and ethnic minority staff, has developed a corporate race awareness-training course and is available for all employees. The courses challenges perceptions and attitudes; deals with the implications of the Macpherson report for the authority; and includes case studies for analysis.

**Gwynedd Council** has worked for several months, following a series of training events led by experts in the Human Rights field, on a corporate action plan which has been further developed into departmental action plans. A lead officer group, representing each department has responsibility (reporting to the Management Team) for the action plan. Each department reports on progress, which also raises awareness, to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, thus ensuring that Human Rights are seen as a whole authority issue. Arrangements have been made to raise awareness with contractors and any organisation dealing with the Council who can be made aware of the requirements. Schools have also been provided with guidance. One of the Scrutiny Committees has overall responsibility for reviewing equal opportunities within the Council and an action plan was agreed in 2000 by that Committee. The action plan also includes the Authority's Social Inclusion Policy and Action Plan. This is an attempt to integrate fully all issues related to equalities. The Welfare and Social Services Scrutiny Committee has begun to work effectively in raising awareness of equality issues and has call policies and procedures to be revised in terms of equality and inclusion. The Council has a cabinet member responsible for equalities.

Each Scrutiny Committee is receiving a Service report in this committee cycle via each Department raising awareness of the requirements of the Act and then each Department's Action Plan as well as the corporate action plan

**Newport County Borough Council** has been highlighted in the main report for its work on disability issues. This extends into other areas of the equality agenda: the

following are examples: -

The Council has recently undertaken a review of many of its Human Resources Policies and Procedures and has ensured that equalities issues are addressed through this, and that they have the full support of the Trade Unions

The Council has added Disability Equality Training to their programme of training events, and has already run events with a plan to offer more in 2001. Racial and Cultural Awareness Training will be re introduced in 2001 and potential providers of this training are currently being contacted.

The Council remains committed to tackling issues of race through its role as Chair of the multi agency Newport Forum to Counter Racial Harassment, and continues to provide support for SEWREC. The Gwent Education Multi - Ethnic Support Service have produced guidance documents for all the schools on Newport outlining appropriate procedures and policies for tackling racial issues affecting pupils.

The Council's Best Value Service Reviews have acknowledged and responded to the need expressed by the National Assembly to ensure that services are effective, accessible and responsive to all groups in the community.

**Denbighshire County Council** has implemented an Integrated Equalities Policy, which covers both employees and services, is coordinated by a Corporate Equal Opportunities Group with a specific reporting route to the council. This group represents all directorates and includes 3 members.

**The Vale of Glamorgan Council** formally adopted the Toolkit in March 1999 and recommended 'that the Toolkit action points form the basis of the Council's Departmental and Corporate Equality Programme.

The Authorities progress was reported to Syniad in March 2000 and achievements are as follows: -

Equalities audit completed by June 1999 collating information on: -

- Departmental staff profiles by grade, sex, disability and ethnicity
- existing arrangements to ensure access to services by target group
- proposed initiatives to increase employment for under represented groups
- proposed initiatives to increase access to services to target groups
- consultation mechanisms with target groups and user groups
- the Council has provided Human Rights Act training for 147 staff and elected members.

Also 10 workshops have taken place in areas such as: -

Social Services (Children and Adult Services); Education; Employment; Leisure; Planning; Licensing; Waste Management; Enforcement x 2; Housing.

The Council's Corporate Equalities Officer has been identified as Lead Officer for co-ordinating progress with the Toolkit. The Council has also established the Vale

Internal Network for Equalities (VINE) to work on the development of a Corporate Equalities Action Plan and progress the Toolkit. The Council's Best Value Performance Plan will be strengthened in the coming year in relation to equalities issues. Each service area is currently developing local equalities performance indicators to be mainstreamed into the corporate plan.

**The Race Relations Employment Advisory Service uses Monmouthshire County Council's equality-based recruitment and selection procedures as a model approach.** Monmouthshire have a member who chairs the equal opportunities working group that is made up of representatives from directorates and six members. He takes a lead role on equalities issues but doesn't have a specific 'portfolio' for equalities as such. The Council recently ran training on racial equality and racism awareness for members that particularly links to new the performance indicator on recording and reporting racial incidents. The Council's generic equalities training course is open to members and are constantly revised in light of new responsibilities and legislation.

The Council has produced a best value equalities checklist and there will be an equalities training module as part of our mandatory best value training programme. Equalities considerations are built in to the service review methodology. The Council have also introduced equal opportunities action plans and are trying to get people to work towards improvements in the areas highlighted by the national PIs (workforce makeup, accessibility of buildings etc) as well as develop local PIs. The racial equality PIs developed following the Stephen Lawrence report have also been circulated to all departments.

**Caerphilly County Borough Council** is undertaking awareness training for staff and members based on the 'Crucial Crew' training programme, developed through the Corporate Working Group with advice from Disability Wales, VALREC, Menter Iaith, Gwent Association of the Blind and Morgan Cole Solicitors. The council aims to raise the awareness of 10% of the workforce through the training sessions, which will be followed up by more intensive programmes focusing on specific equalities issues with front line staff.

An Equalities leaflet has been produced and is distributed to the public. The leaflet provides information about what the authority is doing to ensure equal opportunities in service delivery and how the public can complain if they feel that they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against. The leaflet also provides background information on the various Acts relating to equalities. The bilingual leaflet is available in a variety of formats, including large print, braille and audiocassette.

**Local authorities are establishing good working relationships and networks with outside organisations, relationships that are further enhanced through local compacts and the development of community plans. Groups and equalities organisations are regularly contacted for advice, guidance and consultation on equalities policies, literature and access issues.**

Following the equalities audit undertaken, **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council** has implemented a number of systems to tackle equalities issues in service delivery and employment. The authority has established a Local Equalities Network of all departments to review the range of its activities relating to equality. The authority's Community Plan for 2001-2004 is currently being prepared and will include an Equality of Opportunity section with clearly defined targets. The authority has also established a reciprocal arrangement with the South East Wales Race Equalities Council, where the council provides funding support to the organisation in return for expert advice on service delivery issues.

**Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council** adheres to the principle of mainstreaming equality; every elected member has responsibility for ensuring equality of opportunity within his or her remits. However, in accordance with the Council's strategic approach, Councillor Pauline Jarman A.M. is the elected member with particular responsibility and Tony Wilkins (County Borough Council Officer for Human Resources) is the recognised 'champion' for the workforce.

Training for elected members has included seminars on the Human Rights Act (which of course includes all major equality issues). Five members are presently undertaking sign language training, leading to BSL qualification. In forward planning for 2001 - 2002 members will be offered the opportunity to take part in the I&DeA 'serving disabled customers' distance learning scheme alongside our front line work force. There will also be seminars on the Race Relations (Amendments) Bill and further training offered on the HRA.

The authority has adopted a formal Corporate Equalities Strategy, based on the 'Equalities Toolkit', although updated to take into account the HRA. As part of this strategy, all front line managers are being given the opportunity to undertake the I&DeA 'serving disabled customers'. There are several on going courses for BSL training, which we, as employers are sponsoring. Mary Powell, the Equalities Adviser, has undertaken equality awareness training for the Community Housing Division, and the Council believes this to demonstrate best value through using competent internal trainers rather than external sources.

In the year 2000, the corporate typeface of the Authority was changed to Ariel 12 point. All publications are now expected to be delivered in this as a minimum point size. This has been coupled with a drive to use plain language for leaflets etc. to ensure a greater percentage of the public can read with understanding - this has been particularly relevant to our Council Tax section.

Commencing in April 2001 a full Disability Access Audit of all properties (over 400) owned by the Council will begin. The Council has prepared this audit 'in house' after consultation with Access groups and the NHS. It is committed to recognize the social definition of disability; consequently we propose to carry out the audits using volunteers who have first hand experience of disability, coupled with seconded officers with building control experience.

On Friday, March 2nd at the Sobell Centre in Aberdare, RCT are holding a daylong consultation conference called 'Thinking Aloud' a day dedicated to disability issues.

Each Division will host workshops focusing on their areas of responsibility in service delivery. Over 100 voluntary groups linked to disability have already been given the opportunity to take part and put their issues to our Chief Officers. Commissioner Dr. Kevin Fitzpatrick from the DRC is the principal guest speaker.

**Conwy County Council** are currently piloting equalities training sessions throughout the authority which will lead to a programme for members. This has included sessions for our senior managers in December and the authority plan another two in March, at which all Directors and Assistant Directors will attend. The training has been of extremely high quality and the authority see this as a good starting point to equip managers to undertake further equalities work - such as auditing.

This training should also equip the managers to examine their service delivery policies and practices in the light of Best Value. The training focused on sex, race and disability and looked particularly at discrimination and challenged prejudices and stereotypes. This training was delivered by a private company Equilibra, and the authority envisage asking them to adapt this for our members. As well as the above, Conwy have also undertaken a one day seminar on the Disability Discrimination Act delivered by Disability Wales.

Many authorities are attempting to tackle the root causes of inequality in their communities, for example, **Torfaen County Borough Council** has established a Social Inclusion Unit, which includes the post of Equalities Officer, demonstrating that the authority's appreciation that social inclusion and equalities are inextricably linked. The unit has also appointed co-ordinators to focus on Community Strategy Areas, within which they will work to enable groups and individuals to become more confident and empowered. The authority is also developing an integrated strategy to deal with under-achievement of boys in schools, designed to address their academic performance, social support systems, employment opportunities and their role in the community. The Education and Leisure, Youth and Culture Departments are considering introducing pre-parenting skills at schools and youth clubs.

***Tackling the issues of equalities has significant resource implications, of particular concern is the capital investment required in the tackle access issues as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act.***

It is true to say that all authorities in Wales are committed to tackling equalities. However, it is clearly evident that some authorities are more committed than others, principally the result of competing priorities and resource allocation. It is also acknowledged that there is a great deal of additional work to be achieved particularly to sustain initiatives already established.