

National Assembly for Wales
Equality of Opportunity Committee

Legacy report

March 2011



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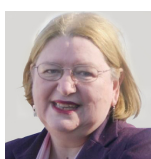
Equality of Opportunity Committee

The Equality of Opportunity Committee is appointed by the National Assembly for Wales to consider and report on the relevant duties contained in the Government of Wales Act 2006 placed on the Assembly, the First Minister, Welsh Ministers or the Commission.

Powers

The Committee was established on 26 June 2007 as one of the Assembly's scrutiny committees. Its powers are set out in the National Assembly for Wales's Standing Orders, particularly SO 17. These are available at www.assemblywales.org

Current Committee Membership



Ann Jones
(Chair)
Vale of Clwyd
Labour



Mohammad Asghar
South Wales East
Welsh Conservative Party



Veronica German
South Wales East
Welsh Liberal Democrats



Janet Ryder
North Wales
Plaid Cymru



Joyce Watson
Mid and West Wales
Labour

Equality of Opportunity Committee 2007-2011 Legacy report to the Fourth Assembly

Introduction

The Equality of Opportunity Committee was established on 26 June 2007. Its remit was to consider and report on the relevant duties contained in the Government of Wales Act 2006 placed on the Assembly, the First Minister, Welsh Ministers or the Commission.

The Committee has carried out an important role in holding the Welsh Assembly Government and the Assembly Commission to account, and through its inquiry work, has provided opportunities for stakeholder groups and members of the public, who might not otherwise get their views heard, to engage in the democratic process. We believe that this important role of scrutinising the duty placed on public bodies to promote and ensure equality can only be sustained by a dedicated Equality of Opportunity Committee, and would strongly recommend that such a committee be established in the Fourth Assembly.

Inquiry work

Accessibility of Polling Stations in Wales

This was the Committee's first inquiry which was published in December of 2007. The aim of the inquiry was to assess the accessibility of polling stations for disabled people in Wales. As part of its findings, we learnt that many people thought access for disabled people at polling stations was improving although it was noted that there was still a long way to go. The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government to improve the situation.

The Committee has continued to monitor the progress made by the Welsh Government in implementing the recommendations of this inquiry. In March 2010, the Committee held a further evidence session with representatives from Scope Cymru, the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators to see whether they thought the situation had improved, and followed this up with a session with the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government in September 2010. We noted that while improvements had been made, we were still concerned that further work was needed to ensure that all polling stations were accessible. **We would recommend to our successor Committee that they follow up this issue with the Minister for Local Government to assess what improvements**

were made for the National Assembly for Wales election in May 2011, and what lessons can be learnt for future elections.

Issues affecting Migrant Workers in Wales

The Committee undertook an inquiry into the issues affecting migrant workers in Wales and made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government. We then followed this up by holding a session with the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to see how the implementation of the recommendations had progressed. **We would recommend that our successor Committee gives further consideration to this issue in the Fourth Assembly, particularly the employment opportunities for qualified migrant workers.**

We would also recommend that the successor Committee receives an update from the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority on its remit following the passing of the Gangmasters Licensing (Extension to Construction Industry) Bill.

Home Maintenance and Housing Adaptations Services for Older People in Wales

The Committee undertook this inquiry to explore the issues being faced by older people in applying for home maintenance and housing adaptations services. We found that the system of applying for and delivering home adaptation grants to older people across Wales was complex and often inconsistent. We learnt that older people were waiting unacceptably long times for adaptations, and that these waiting times could be longer for people living in different parts of Wales or different types of housing.

One of our recommendations was that the Welsh Government reported annually to the Equality of Opportunity Committee on progress made against the recommendations in the Disabled Facilities Grants Review of 2005, and the recommendations in this report. **We would recommend to our successor Committee that they continue to receive an annual update on the progress of these recommendations.**

Discrimination Experienced by People Living with HIV by Healthcare Professionals and Providers

Following concerns raised by AIDS Trust Cymru, the Committee undertook an inquiry to assess the levels of discrimination experienced by people living with HIV by healthcare professionals and providers. The Committee concluded that the situation had improved since an amendment to the Disability

Discrimination Act in 2005 changed the definition of disability to ensure that people living with HIV were entitled to the same rights against unfair treatment, however further awareness raising was required to improve the situation further. The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government to improve the situation.

The Committee was pleased that in her response of June 2010, the Minister for Health and Social Services was able to accept the majority of our recommendations. During the debate in Plenary, the Minister undertook to raise the issue of a national awareness campaign with her counterparts in other UK administrations. Due to time constraints, it has not been possible for this Committee to follow up on the action taken by the Welsh Government to implement our recommendations. **We would therefore urge our successor Committee to undertake a follow up session to ensure that this important issue is not forgotten.**

Accessibility of Railway Stations in Wales

The accessibility of railway stations is an issue that can affect anyone who uses rail services in Wales not just those with a disability, but parents with young children or people struggling with heavy luggage. We heard from many people of the problems they experienced with footbridge only access to platforms, unreliable lifts, large gaps between the train and platform and inaccurate information. Whilst we recognised the constraints around the largely Victorian infrastructure, and welcomed the improvements that had taken place, we felt that much more could, and should, be done to improve the accessibility of railway stations in Wales.

The Committee was pleased that the Deputy First Minister was able to accept all the recommendations we made as part of this inquiry, either in full or in principle. We were particularly pleased that he agreed that the Welsh Government should incorporate station accessibility issues into the specifications for the next round of the Wales and Border franchise. **We would recommend to our successor Committee that they undertake a follow up session with the Minister for Transport and other stakeholders to assess how our recommendations were implemented by the Welsh Government and the impact this has had to improve accessibility.**

The Impact of Welsh Government Policy on the Accessibility of Transport Services for Disabled People in Wales

Following on from our inquiry into the Accessibility of Railway Stations, the Committee decided to undertake a short inquiry

focussing on other aspects of public transport, including the accessibility of bus and taxi services and how all elements integrated with each other. We also explored issues around concessionary travel schemes and how they impacted on people's ability to use public transport. We noted that improvements had been made, but the experiences of some of those we heard from told us that further enhancements were still needed. We hope that some of the practical recommendations we made in this report will result in better experiences for everyone in Wales.

Given the timing of this inquiry so close to the end of this Assembly term, it has not been possible to arrange a Plenary debate on this report. **We do expect the Deputy First Minister to respond to our recommendations and recommend that our successor Committee follows this up with the Minister for Transport to ensure that our recommendations are put into force.**

Other areas of work

Equal Pay

The Equality of Opportunity Committee has been very concerned at the progress of implementing Equal Pay in local government and has continually monitored the situation. The Committee dedicated a number of meetings to this issue and heard from trade unions and employer representatives. We also held a session with the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government and raised our concerns at the amount of time it has taken to rectify the gender pay gap. **We recommend that our successor Committee in the Fourth Assembly continues to monitor the implementation and effects of the Equal Pay Campaign.**

Equality Budgeting

As part of its scrutiny of the draft budget 2011-12, the Committee explored with the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government the mechanisms used by the Welsh Government in assessing the impact of its policies and budget allocations on the different sectors of society. The Committee welcomed the Minister's assurance that the budgetary decisions had been based on an assessment of equality impact, however, we recommended to the Finance Committee that these results should be published. **We would encourage our successor Committee to continue to scrutinise the Welsh Government on the way in which it assesses the equality impact of its policies and budgetary allocations and to push for the publication of the assessment results.**

Scrutiny of Annual Equality Reports

Throughout the Fourth Assembly, the Equality of Opportunity Committee has scrutinised the Assembly Commission and Welsh Government on their annual equality reports. This has been a very important aspect of our scrutiny work to ensure that both institutions put equality matters at the heart of their work. **We would encourage our successor Committee to continue to scrutinise the annual equality reports in this way.**

Service Provision for Disabled Young People

The Committee received an update from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning on the progress made since the publication of the report on Service Provision for Disabled Young People by the predecessor Committee in 2007. The Committee acknowledged that a significant amount of time had passed since the publication of this report, and **we would encourage the next Committee to carry out a fresh inquiry, taking evidence from a new group of disabled young people.**

Employment Opportunities for those with a Disability

We have not had an opportunity during this Assembly term to hold an inquiry into the employment opportunities available to those with a disability, however we would like to highlight to our successor Committee this important issue and ask that they consider undertaking work in this area in the Fourth Assembly.

Working with other UK Legislatures

The Equality of Opportunity Committee has built good working relationships with its counterparts in the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly. It has met with both Committees on an annual basis to share experiences and learn from each other's work. **We recommend that the successor Committee builds on this good relationship and continues to hold these valuable meetings with its counterparts to discuss equalities issues.**

Equality of Opportunity Committee
March 2011