

SP 12

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Chwarae Teg
Response from: Chwarae Teg

Introduction

Chwarae Teg is working to build a Wales where women achieve and prosper. We do this by working with women to broaden their horizons and build their confidence and skills, and by working with employers to create modern workplaces that gain success through harnessing everyone's contribution. We also work with influencers, educators and decision makers to build a society that values, supports and benefits women and men equally.

We welcome the opportunity to feed into this consultation on the priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee. We agree with all the priorities proposed by the committee, and have outlined certain areas where gender needs to be a key consideration as part of these priorities.

As you're aware, gender inequality remains a significant issue in Wales and the UK, with a large number of barriers still preventing women from reaching their full potential.

While the responsibility for exploring some of these barriers lies with other committees, the ELGC Committee plays a key role in helping to coordinate a united approach to advancing equality in our communities.

We've identified two further priority areas for the ELGC committee, in addition to those proposed, to achieve this:

- Women in Public Life
The committee should explore methods to address the under representation of women in decision making positions, and hold Welsh Government to account for delivery. It's our belief that Wales could

reach gender balance on public boards within one Assembly term and with a concentrated effort, within two years.

- Gender Mainstreaming

Adopting a gender mainstreaming strategy is fundamental to ensuring that all new policies contribute to improving equality. The committee should explore the benefits and potential for adopting this strategy in Wales.

1. Proposed priorities

- 1.1 In work poverty

We believe that it's vital that gender is considered as part of discussions on in-work poverty. Women dominate in low-paid, part-time work, which largely contribute to rates of in-work poverty. 270,000 jobs in Wales, mainly held by women, are paid below two-thirds of the UK median hourly wage¹. Furthermore, it is often women's employment situation that determines whether a household is living in poverty as their income is either a second income or the only income. The risks, causes and experiences of poverty are different for men and women, and if this is not recognised, anti-poverty strategies will fail to tackle the root causes of poverty for a large portion of society.

- 1.2 Poverty and welfare reform

As Universal Credit is rolled out, it's important that the changes don't disproportionately disadvantage women. In particular, this includes the requirement for in-work claimants to increase their earnings. Women's dominance in low-paid, part-time or low-hours work, and well as the rural nature of Wales could act as barriers to meeting this requirement. Welsh Government needs to work with UK as roll out happens in order to ensure that any negative impact on women is mitigated². The committee could play in role in exploring how best this could be done.

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Wales

² Chwarae Teg (2016) Briefing Paper: In work progression in Universal Credit

1.3 Local Government reorganisation and reform

It's important that the impact of reorganisation and reform on men and women is fully assessed and analysed. Women are more likely to be affected by cuts and changes at local government as they dominate in public sector jobs and rely more heavily on public services than men³.

2. Women in Public Life

2.1 It's our firm belief that Wales can reach gender balance on public boards within this Assembly term, or even within two years with concentrated effort.

2.2 The reasons for and benefits of increasing the number of women in decision making positions has been discussed and presented in depth. These include greater diversity leading to better perspective and improved performance⁴.

2.3 This is an achievable objective that would place Wales as a leading example on the world's stage. With 35% of members of Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies (WGSB) being women, this isn't far from the 40% threshold normally taken to indicate gender balance. However, there are still shortfalls with 85% of Chairs still men, and almost half of Advisory Panels or Boards with 20% or less women⁵.

2.4 We feel it should be a priority of the ELGC committee to look at how we can best achieve this target within the next 2–5 years, and to hold the Government to account for delivering this.

2.5 There are a number of key areas that the Committee could investigate in greater detail within this policy area:

2.5.1 Projects. Successful projects such as the former Presiding Officer's Women in Public Life scheme should be repeated and extended. The scheme provided a mentoring, shadowing and training

³ Fawcett Society (2012) "The impact of austerity on women"

⁴ Chwarae Teg (2015) Response to Welsh Government Call for Evidence: Increasing the representation of women and other under-represented groups on Public Sector Boards

⁵ Chwarae Teg (2015) A Woman's Place in Public Appointments

opportunity for 14 women in Wales for a period of 18 months. Most applied for, and a number gained, a public appointment thanks to the scheme.

2.5.2 Quotas. These have been a topic of debate but have been shown to be the most effective way of increasing the proportion of women on boards quickly. Welsh Government has previously consulted on quotas and the Wales Bill could extend the power to the Welsh Government to introduce them. The Committee should scrutinise any decisions the Government makes around this.

We believe statutory quotas should be introduced as a temporary measure to bring about the necessary cultural change so that gender balance on boards becomes self-sustaining. Quotas provide a legislative “nudge” and are most effective when accompanied by action to address the structural and cultural barriers that women face when seeking positions on public boards.

2.5.2 Recruitment. We need to ensure that recruitment processes don't simply avoid discrimination but deliver on diversity. Role advertising should be gender lensed, panels should be gender balanced, and unconscious bias towards the traditional image of a board member should be challenged.

3. Gender Mainstreaming

3.1 Successive Welsh Governments have demonstrated a commitment to gender equality and to understanding and mitigating negative gender impacts of policies and decisions. The continued commitment to equality impact assessments has been a key part of this.

3.2 The next step is to adopt a gender mainstreaming strategy, ensuring that gender considerations are made at all stages of policy development. We feel that gender mainstreaming is fundamental to achieving gender equality

in Wales, making sure that initiatives and objectives with a focus on equality aren't undermined by policy making elsewhere.

3.3 It should be a priority of the ELGC committee to explore this, assessing the impact it could have on improving the rate of change, and pulling on examples of good practice from elsewhere.

3.4 One area that needs strengthening in particular is in monitoring and evaluation to ensure that new policy and projects have delivered on what they promised.

3.5 Within the remit of gender mainstreaming, tools such as gender budgeting should be used to ensure that public money and funding serves men and women equally, or where appropriate helps to advance equality.

3.6 An example of gender mainstreaming often held as best practice is Sweden. In Sweden gender mainstreaming is seen as the main strategy for achieving equality targets. The IncludeGender platform hosts a range of tools and guides to support the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy.

Conclusion

We truly believe that Wales can lead the way in addressing gender inequality in our communities but achieving this will require concentrated effort.

The priorities we have proposed are areas where significant progress can be made in the short term, and the ELGC committee can play a role in exploring these and holding the Government to account for delivering on them.