

**Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

**MINUTES**

**Date:** 13 April 2000

**Time:** 9.30 am

**Venue:** Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

**Attendance: Members**

Edwina Hart (Chair)	Gower
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Glyn Davies	Mid & West
Richard Edwards	Preseli Pembrokeshire
Alison Halford	Delyn
Gareth Jones	Conwy
Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
David Melding	South Wales Central
Janet Ryder	North Wales

**Advisers to the Committee**

Kate Bennett	Equal Opportunities Commission
Kevin Fitzpatrick	Disability Rights Commission
Mashuq Ally	Commission for Racial Equality

**Officials**

Mike Harper	Public Administration, Equality and Public Appointments Division
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Charles Willie

Equality Policy Unit

Andrew George

Clerk

Julie Bragg

Deputy Clerk

Apologies were received from Lorraine Barrett and Kirsty Williams.

### **Agenda Item 1: Chair's Report**

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present, especially Alison Halford who had been recently elected to the Committee. Lorraine Barrett was also a new member but had unfortunately been unable to attend this meeting. The Chair wished to send the Committee's best wishes to Val Feld, AM, Chair of the Economic Development Committee, for a full and speedy recovery from her current indisposition.

1.2 Although the Committee's last meeting had been held only three weeks previously, much work had taken place in the interim. Informal meetings had been held on consideration of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) and public appointments issues and papers relating to these would be considered later in the agenda. As a result of this work, it had not been possible for the sub-group on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry to meet but the Chair had written to the Assembly Secretary for Education and Children about the establishment of the working group of officials and awaited a response.

1.3 It had previously been planned to hold the June meeting of the Committee in North Wales. However, the advent of the seventh Subject Committee had meant that it was more problematic to undertake such a visit next term. Whilst the Committee acknowledged that it was extremely important to meet outside Cardiff, it was agreed to postpone a meeting in North Wales until the autumn when the Assembly timetable might be more accommodating.

1.4 The Chair had circulated correspondence from Val Feld on mainstreaming equality and asked the Committee's views on a response. It was agreed that a checklist provided by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) would be a good starting point. The Chair also mentioned that an organisation called SWISH had contacted the Committee to enquire whether they planned to consider the issue of sexuality. It was agreed to place this issue on the agenda for a summer meeting of the Committee.

1.5 The Chair had also been approached by Julie Mellor, Chair of the EOC, to seek a meeting on gender issues. The Chair invited the Committee to be involved in an informal meeting with Ms Mellor to discuss gender issues and the role of the Welsh Commissioner. She had already held useful informal discussions with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and wanted the Committee to be fully involved in the forthcoming Welsh launch of the DRC, possibly in the context of an event at the Wales TUC conference in May.

## **Agenda Item 2: Equality Audit and Committee's Revised Forward Work Programme**

### **Paper: EOC-03-00(p.1)**

2.1 The Chair invited Charles Willie to give an overview of the results of the Equality Audit which had considered how each of the 57 National Assembly Divisions took account of equality in its policies and practices. Charles Willie explained that this was a progress report on the completion of the first stage of the four stage programme of work which had been endorsed by the Committee at its second meeting in September 1999. A fuller report would be produced once these interim findings had been considered by Group Directors (the Assembly's senior management team) in early May and following this the process of engaging the Assembly as a whole in the results would begin.

2.2 The survey had looked at the level of knowledge and regard paid to equal opportunities, what action was available to be monitored in each division and the aims for future action. The assessment had shown a consistently high level of awareness and some good practice but there was still much to be done. The findings had not produced any surprises and the conclusions were common to most Divisions

2.3 Charles Willie commented on findings which had emerged under several headings:

- **Responsibility** - there was a very clear view that the Assembly needed to take responsibility and make a positive commitment to equality. This was especially true of Divisions which monitor and evaluate the work of ASPBs.
- **References** to equality were very often implicit in Divisional plans and other documents.
- **Recruitment practices** - Divisions acknowledged the need for more flexibility to recruit for specific needs than current practices allow. The need to review recruitment practices fitted in well with the Permanent Secretary's Better Government initiative.
- **Top level commitment** - There was a clear perception of commitment by senior officers but the way in which that commitment was demonstrated and communicated could be improved.
- In attending **meetings and** completing **submissions** of advice, officials needed to keep equality in mind at all times.
- **Monitoring, evaluation and adjustment** practices were not very well developed.
- **Training and awareness** - All Divisions said they needed training and that this would be a key priority for the coming year.
- **Consultation** - The Assembly needed to initiate more dialogue with different communities and to engage with the equality organisations at a much earlier stage.

2.4 In conclusion, Charles acknowledged that although the findings were of necessity somewhat subjective, this should not detract from the validity of the survey. The Assembly needed to provide a clear lead in mainstreaming and was in the unique position of being supported in this by the forthcoming Race Relations Amendments Bill, the Government of Wales Act and the political commitment embodied in the Equality Committee. The process initiated by the survey was about changing values, beliefs and attitudes and this would take time. However, following the interviews, Divisions had already begun to seek advice from the Equality Policy Unit and this augured well for the future.

2.5 In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Each division needed to focus on how it could move forward. There was an enormous amount of work to be done to change attitudes and a robust procedure would need to be put in place to achieve this and to measure the level of change over a period of time. However, if small gains could be demonstrated quickly, this could have an enormous influence on the organisation as a whole.
- It was important not to create resentment by appearing to hector people. If the wrong approach was adopted, cultural and institutional resistance could mean that the initiative would fail.
- Although the three strands of equality considered by the survey were gender, race and disability, other areas including language should not be forgotten.
- The most important issues to address were awareness raising and individuals' perceptions of what constitutes equality. However, this might be achieved by changing peoples' behaviour in the first instance.
- The word "implicit" had been used several times in the analysis. There was a need to make the issues and the method of addressing them explicit in order to call people to action.
- There was a general perception that gender issues had all been addressed and the only outstanding issues were disability and race ones. This was not true.
- Training needed to be practical so that officials could see how addressing equality issues was relevant to their particular jobs. More resources might be needed for the Equality Policy Unit to achieve this and all the other tasks involved in addressing the survey findings. The Permanent Secretary had indicated at the last Committee meeting that he had kept some funding in reserve to be used to increase the staff resources of the Unit if required.
- As all officials were already very busy, it was important to strike a balance between the importance of equality work and avoiding putting too much pressure on staff. Unless commitment was demonstrated from the top, including the Cabinet, it would be difficult to effect change. Heads of Assembly Divisions needed to demonstrate their personal commitment to equality in their annual Divisional Plans.

2.6 In response to these points, Charles Willie re-emphasised the personal commitment of the Permanent Secretary and George Craig, the Assembly's Senior Director for Social Policy and Local Government Affairs. Two members of the Equality Policy Unit would be taking forward the issues on training and awareness raising. They had already started to customise this training and a pilot programme was being developed with one of the Local Government Divisions. Discussions with Group Directors and Heads of Divisions on practical steps would begin before Easter. Actions would also be routed via Assembly

Secretaries and Subject Committees.

2.7 The Chair requested a paper for the Committee on the next steps and associated time-scales although she indicated her view that if there was the political will to take action, the time-scales themselves were less important. She also felt that this paper could consider the impact of European legislation on gender equality. She suggested that the Committee should meet Assembly senior managers informally with the equality advisers to discuss what the Committee saw as priority areas. This would mean that the agenda could be developed together. She also proposed writing to the Permanent Secretary to outline the Committee's priorities.

2.8 Members informed the Committee of the varying level of consideration which equality matters had received in their respective Subject Committees. Some Committees, such as Economic Development, had been able to take account of equality in detail in its consideration of Wales' application for Objective One funding. It was suggested that equality could feature as a scheduled agenda item for all Subject Committees even though every issue under consideration would have an equality angle. Members felt that specific questions such as the ones proposed by Teresa Rees might help them to take a systematic approach to raising equality issues with the public bodies who were invited to their meetings.

2.9 The Chair reminded Members of their role to promote consideration of equality in their subject committees. She proposed writing to Subject Committee chairs to inform them of the Committee's approach. As a result of the discussion, the Chair proposed that the Committee could 'dip into' Assembly policies to get a feel for how to address equality issues in practice.

2.10 In response to a query, Charles Willie confirmed that equality awareness training for those Assembly Members involved in public appointments was being arranged. He would be writing to the Members concerned with the details in the next few weeks.

### **Agenda Item 3: Disability Rights Commission Presentation and Paper: EOC-03-00(p.2)**

3.1 The Chair invited Kevin Fitzpatrick to outline the role of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and also asked him to comment on their view of the current consultation on Special Educational Needs. He explained that he was part of a group which would meet on 19 April to look at the DRC's response nationally. His personal view was that segregated education was not appropriate except in cases where parents wanted it for their child or mainstream education did not meet the needs of an individual. Although the Commission's response would be drafted at a national level, he offered to let the Committee have sight of the Welsh response.

3.2 Dr Fitzpatrick had previously offered to inform the Committee how the DRC in Wales would work with Disability Wales. He had not yet been able to take this matter forward and he offered to report back to the Committee on this at a later date.

3.3 The DRC would go live on 25 April 2000 with a national media launch on 19 April. The DRC's aim was to achieve 'a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens'. This was a major task given that 8.6 million people nationally fall within the terms of the legislation defining disability. This figure would increase with an ageing population. Awareness of disability issues are not as widespread as gender and race but with the creation of the DRC and greater knowledge of the disability agenda, things were moving forward. The DRC would seek to articulate better the case for disabled people although attitudes were changing amongst opinion formers, especially young disabled people who were becoming increasingly vocal in making their case. Some progress had been made in the built environment, enabling disabled people to take a place in society and in transport and travel.

3.4 There were six areas in which the DRC could work most effectively: advice, conciliation, legal enforcement, attitudes, standards and law. From September, there would be a call centre to deal with queries, a website, case workers, an advice service, consultants working in close collaboration with ACAS and employment tribunals, and legal support for individual cases. The DRC would seek to secure change by abolishing barriers to education and by lowering the employment threshold of the Disability Discrimination Act. The DRC would monitor the impact of its activities in Wales. He acknowledged that it would be more effective to work with employers to bring about change rather than forcing compliance. There would be 10 staff in Wales who would be based in Cardiff.

3.5 On the subject of any influence the DRC could have on the design of the new Assembly building, Dr Fitzpatrick was advised that the issue of the building was currently on hold. Disability Wales would be undertaking a consultation exercise during May and would report back to the Committee.

#### **Agenda Item 4: The Committee's First Annual Report**

**Paper: EOC-03-00(p.3)**

4.1 The Chair invited the Committee to consider the draft skeleton of the Committee's Annual Report. Members queried whether there was sufficient time available in monthly Committee meetings to make progress on all of its priorities and to meet groups throughout Wales. The Committee might consider meeting informally if undertaking a particular enquiry or delegating small numbers of Members to deal with certain topics. Some topics e.g. public appointments could also be pursued in other committees including the Regional Committees. It was suggested that it would be useful for the Annual Report to include some key indicators of equality. Members agreed the proposals in the paper for the scope of the report and to consider a draft at the next meeting.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Public Appointments**

**Paper: EOC-03-00(p.4)**

5.1 The Chair introduced this paper which outlined an approach to widening the pool of people applying for public appointments. Members were generally content but made some detailed points: equality training should be mandatory for those involved in public appointments; the principles would be relevant to the private sector and not just ASPBs; and organisations should be reimbursed for the time

spent by their employees involved in serving public bodies. It was also proposed that any targets should reflect the percentage of different groups within the population.

5.2 Members queried whether there was guidance on the number of public appointments that one person could hold; what debriefing was given to those who were unsuccessful in applying for an appointment; and whether the age and occupation of applicants was monitored. The Chair said she would write to the Deputy Presiding Officer to request information on the Llais Ifanc project which had considered how younger people could be encouraged to become involved in public service; and about providing information on public service in the education centre being developed in the Pierhead Building. She also proposed that, in the context of finding out more about current practice in public appointments, it would be useful to have a presentation at the next meeting on the work of the NHS Public Appointments Unit.

### **Agenda Item 6: Scrutiny of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies**

**Paper: EOC-03-00(p.5)**

6.1 Members agreed the approach to consideration of equality issues in relation to ASPBs set out in the paper. Following the Committee's consideration of a particular ASPB, the Chair undertook to write to the Chair of the appropriate Subject Committee as well as the Assembly Secretary to make them aware of the points raised in discussion.

6.2 Members also expressed an interest in the work of local authorities in implementing a wide range of Assembly policies. It was suggested that the Welsh Local Government Association could be invited to a Committee meeting to make a presentation about how they saw their role in promoting equality.

### **Agenda Item 7: Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Paper: EOC-02-00(min)**

7.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed in general although Kevin Fitzpatrick would be writing to the Clerk to suggest a few specific changes to his comments. One member wished to record his view that the evidence from ACCAC had been far from satisfactory.

7.2 On the subject of Assembly representation at the Beijing Plus Five event, the Cabinet Office's Women's Unit had advised that the UK delegation would number approximately 20. This included Baroness Jay and Tessa Jowell, representatives from a variety of Government Departments, the Women's National Commission and one representative from each of the devolved administrations. The Assembly could nominate more than one representative but it was understood that Baroness Jay, who would be authorising the list of attendees, would have concerns if the delegation were to grow beyond the current 20. Each department or devolved administration would be responsible for its own costs. There would not be an opportunity to influence policy development at Plenary within the United Nations chambers (as only two to four seats are allocated to each country) but there would be much opportunity for networking at the various groups and fringe meetings. It was entirely the Assembly's decision whether it should be represented by a Member or an official.

7.3 The Chair felt that it would be appropriate for two Assembly representatives to attend. The Cabinet would have the final decision but Members felt that at least the Chair should attend. The Conference was of huge significance to women and the Assembly needed to be seen to have high level representation at it. The Chair would write to the First Secretary to ask him to make the Committee's views known at Westminster.

7.4 The Chair expresses her thanks to Judith Jones of the Commission for Racial Equality for the work that she had put in to being the Commission's representative at the Committee for the past 12 months.

7.5 The Chair informed Members that the dates of the two meetings of the Committee scheduled for the summer term had now been confirmed as 25 May and 29 June.

7.6 The meeting closed at 12.20pm.