

COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Date: 25 May 2000
Time: 9.30 am
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building
Title: **LISTENING TO WOMEN**

BACKGROUND

The "Listening to Women" programme was carried out UK wide by the Women's Unit of the Cabinet Office during 1998/9 and involved four elements:

- 'Talk Back' Postcards
- Regional Road Shows
- Discussions with women's groups
- People's Panel Groups

The Government reported on the programme in a magazine style publication called 'Voices'.

The Women's Unit reported the results as follows:

'Talk Back' Postcards

The 'Talk Back' survey required women in the United Kingdom to complete three questions on pre-paid postcards which were available from branches of BHS, Marks and Spencer and Superdrug and in public libraries and some doctors' surgeries. The Women's Unit have advised that the UK wide response was 17% with around 800 responses from Wales (taken from post codes).

The survey required responses to three questions: -

1. What do you think is the single most important issue facing this country today?

Response:

NHS - UK 23%; Wales 25%

Crime - UK 16%; Wales 18%

Economy - UK 17%; Wales 17%

Education - UK 18%; Wales 15%

2. What do you think is the single most important issue facing women today?

Response: -

Balancing paid work and family life - UK 50%; Wales 46%

Getting women's voices heard - UK 15%; Wales 17%

Violence against women - UK 11%; Wales 13%

The gap between men and women's pay - UK 9%; Wales *

Women's health issues - UK 7%; Wales *

Teenage years for girls - UK 5%; Wales *

Other - UK 9%; Wales *

3. What should the Government do to help women?

Response:

Address issues around caring, parenting and family support – UK 68%; Wales *

*No figures were available from the Women's Unit for * above.*

Regional Roadshows

There were twelve UK regional Roadshows with one held in Wales (Cardiff) which was the last event held due to the Assembly and European election campaigns. The event, co-hosted by Jane Hutt, AM, Baroness Jay and Teresa Rees (EOC Commissioner), took place in County Hall on 16th July 1999 and was attended by 140 women from across Wales.

Feedback from the Cardiff Roadshow is reported by the Cabinet Office as:-

"... strong messages about poverty and problems of access facing women in rural areas and the opportunities needed to keep families afloat.

Teenage girls could see the pay differential opening despite doing better at school. They feel women are still stereotyped into arts courses and then come off second best in terms of pay.

Single mothers - especially teenagers - see society treating them like criminals.

There was also concern that the country needed visible black women role models."

Resulting Action in Wales

'Voices' reports action taken as listed in Annex B.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

There have been separate meetings with established women's organisation in Wales and individual women between January to April 2000 (see Annex B). Their main concern regarding the 'Listening to Women' exercise was the lack of awareness about the exercise. A vast number of women were unaware of the exercise as they either did not shop in any of the retail outlets, had not visited their doctor's surgery or, if they had, had not been aware of the survey cards. Many areas of Wales are not served by the stores involved.

There was mixed reaction to the Cardiff Roadshow. Many groups said they had not been invited to attend and would have liked to be involved.

Baroness Jay and her colleagues visited South Glamorgan Women's Workshop prior to the Roadshow at County Hall. The trainees and trainers felt that they had no opportunity to express their views. When I visited the group they were very open and honest and highlighted many concerns about the benefit and poverty trap, transport and childcare amongst others.

NEXT STEPS

The above provides an outline of the work undertaken to date. The overall conclusion above is that Welsh women's voices were not adequately represented in the Women's Unit exercise. The work that the Equality Policy Unit has done since has been to develop a better understanding of Welsh women's concerns. The aim is to establish a baseline position from which the Assembly can take action to meet those concerns. Every women's group identified as a concern the lack of influence that they had on policy making. As a result liaison arrangements between Welsh Women's Aid and relevant policy

divisions in the Assembly have already been established. Similarly we are working with the Welsh Women's Coalition to develop its role as a focus for consultation on women's issues.

A detailed plan of action will be produced next month setting out the specific tasks and resources required to meet the issues identified by women in the short, medium and longer term. The plan of action will provide guidance and advice on the approaches needed and those groups best placed to assist the Assembly in taking this forward.

ANNEX A

ACTION POINTS AS REPORTED IN 'VOICES'

Public Health Strategy for Wales Equal Opportunities Committee - National Assembly for Wales Welsh Capital Challenge

National Childcare Strategy

National Carers Strategy

Parentline; The National Family and Parenting Institute; Family Support Grant

Fathers Direct

Proposed arrangements for second pensions

Employment Relations Act; New Deal Programmes

University for Industry concept – to be launched Autumn 2000

National Minimum Wage

Reform of National Insurance Contribution

Changes to Income Tax; Working Families Tax Credit

Code of Practice on age diversity

Report on "Bridging the Gap: New opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training'

New Student support arrangements

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant

NHS Direct; Health Skills Programmes; Expert Patient Programmes

Girl Sport

Screening for breast and cervical cancer

RESPECT programme

Social Exclusion Unit report on Teenage Pregnancy

Break the Chain – domestic violence awareness campaign

Living without Fear – an integrated approach to tackling violence against women

Crime Reduction Programme

Women’s National Commission

National Sustainable Development Strategy; Urban Task Force; Countryside Agency

Food Standards Agency

Homelessness Action Scheme

Single Regeneration Budget

Housing Improvement Agencies

ANNEX B

The Equality Policy Unit has met with:

The Equal Opportunities Commission

The Commission for Racial Equality

Chwarae Teg

Welsh Women's Aid

National Federation of Women's Institutes

South Glamorgan's Women's Workshop

Mewn Cymru (Wales)

Mewn Cymru (Swansea)

NHS Equality Unit

Enterprising Women

South Glamorgan Women's Farmers Union

Permanent Waves

Wales Assembly of Women

Welsh Women's National Coalition

Newemploy Wales

Welsh Women's European Network

Health Promotion Wales

Welsh Development Agency

South Wales Federation of Townswomen's Guilds

Fernhill Women's Drop-In Centre