

Local Government and Public Services Committee

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Venue:	Committee Room 3, Senedd, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff
Subject:	Equal Opportunities Commission Paper

The Equal Opportunities Commission's remit is to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality and to advise government. We are pleased to submit this paper which highlights sex equality issues for consideration by the Local Government and Public Services Committee at its meeting on 2 March 2006.

Equal pay

Closing the pay gap between women and men is at the top of our agenda. Currently there is a pay gap of 12% between women and men's hourly earnings widening to a gap of 31% for part time workers. This has a number of causes including:

- pay discrimination
- stereotyping where men and women tend to be concentrated in particular jobs and
- responsibility for caring for children and vulnerable adults which tends to fall disproportionately on women adversely affecting their ability to secure and progress in higher graded better paid jobs

All these factors are at play in local government and all local authorities in Wales are operating at high risk of losing equal pay cases. Particular issues in local government include:

- bonus payments which go almost exclusively to male workers and
- the undervaluing of caring jobs, which are mainly undertaken by women.

35 years after the Equal Pay Act there has been much analysis of local government pay from a gender perspective, some equal pay cases have been taken and won, and there is a commitment by all local authorities across Wales to complete a job evaluation exercise by 2007. There is however a likelihood that before 2007 equal pay cases could be pursued on behalf of women workers either by trade unions or by no win no fee solicitors. Where this has occurred elsewhere - notably in the North East of England and in Scotland - local authorities have faced very large settlements. A £40million settlement was agreed in one Scottish authority.

The EOC has worked with the WLGA and individual authorities to address this issue and some WAG funds have been made available, however no authority has resolved the issue. While equal pay problems persist local authorities are operating at some significant risk and there are other implications in terms of their ability to deliver on the rest of their equality agenda.

Key Performance Indicators

Local Government does not have adequate performance indicators to measure progress and delivery on equality - this needs to be addressed. There is the Generic Equality Standard but engagement with it and implementation is patchy.

It may be that delivery on the Race, Disability and Gender Equality Duties should become performance indicators and measures. The EOC advises that carrying out a gender pay analysis and rectifying any inequalities must be included in any performance measure.

Leadership of Local Authorities

- Only 22% of Councillors in Welsh Local Government are women
- Only 11% of elected Cabinet and Board roles are held by women (24 out of 220)
- Only 18% of Council Leaders are women (4 out of 22)
- Only 9% of Council Chief Executives are women (2 out of 22)

This picture needs to be examined closely and strategies to achieve change identified and actioned. While our local authorities are led primarily by men – though 78% of staff are female – it is unlikely that councils will set priorities that meet everyone's needs equally. Leaders and decision makers are inevitably guided by their own life experiences and expectations. It is therefore vital that we have leaderships that reflect the whole population – in respect not only of gender but also race, disability, sexuality, age, faith and linguistic preference.

Gender Equality Duty

The Equality Act which received Royal Assent on 15 February 2006 introduces the concept of a Gender Equality Duty. This will come into force in April 2007 and will require public bodies to promote equality in both their employment and service delivery functions.

We suggest that, in particular, authorities will need to give consideration to whether adequate resources are being devoted to services that are of special importance to women – such as childcare or services to support women who have suffered from or who are at risk of domestic violence. Providing services that take everyone's needs into account will ensure compliance with the law as well as securing best value for public money.

We are currently raising awareness of the Duty and consulting on the new Code of Practice. Three events are being held in Wales on

- 6 March - University of Wales Cardiff
- 21 March - Ruthin (venue to be confirmed)
- 23 March - Media Resource Centre (Llandrindod Wells)

As the Duty does not come into force till 2007 it is not possible to give any indication of engagement or compliance yet! However building on the experience of introducing the race and disability duties we are keen to get engagement at an early stage and have secured commitments from 25 public organisations in Wales to pilots in advance of the legislation coming into force.

The intention is to identify priority areas for action, highlight obstacles and find out where data or information is lacking. Nine of these are local authorities and we will be able to report on progress by the autumn.

In conclusion.....

The services authorities provide are vital to all our lives, but the poorer and most vulnerable in our society are even more dependent on these services. Two thirds of people over the age of 80 in Wales are women. Welsh women's retirement income is only 57% of mens.

Local authority leadership is mainly male. Staff are overwhelmingly female with many working in part time lower paid roles.

Eradicating the pay gap and ensuring that services are responsive to the specific needs of women and men is vital to the Assembly's strategies of promoting social inclusion and building strong safe communities.