

Gender Equality Forum Meeting

Date: 6 October 2022

Time: 11.30-13.00

Teams Meeting

Attendees

Minister for Social Justice (Chair)

BAWSO

Cardiff University

Chwarae Teg

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Wales

Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales

Oxfam Cymru

Plan International UK

Women Connect First

Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales

Welsh Government officials

Equality and Human Rights Division

Women and Children's Health

Unpaid Carers and Older People's Rights

Equality Evidence Unit

Social Partnership Division

Budget Improvement

1: Welcome and Introductions (Minister for Social Justice)

The Minister for Social Justice welcomed members to the first meeting of the Gender Equality Forum as a group in their own right. The group previously met as a sub-group of the Strengthening and Advancing Equality and Human Rights steering group. The Minister outlined her hopes for working together to achieve a shared vision for a Gender Equal Wales and invited members to introduce themselves in the chat.

The Minister started the meeting by summarising progress made so far by the subgroup, including identifying three priorities moving forward:

- Women's Health
- Unpaid care falling disproportionately to women
- Intersectionality and alignment between the equality plans

With regular updates on the work of the Equality Mainstreaming pilot and Gender Budgeting Pilots.

The Minister welcomed the Forum's support to oversee implementation of our Advancing Gender Equality in Wales plan and to also highlight emerging issues resulting from the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis.

2: Agreeing Terms of Reference and membership (Minister for Social Justice)

The Minister asked members to agree the Terms of Reference and membership considering the group's new status and in line with the Terms of Reference of other Equality Fora. Members raised the following points:

- Invite academics with expertise on topic areas to meetings
- Publish the minutes of the Gender Equality Forum on a dedicated page on the Welsh Government website
- Include an ask in the Terms of Reference for members to consult their wider membership
- Need to consider how we work on the implementation gap between what is said and action – how will what this group says translate to policy and public bodies delivering on plans

3: Discussion on Women's Health Plan (Welsh Government policy officials)

- At previous meetings, the group identified Women's Health as a priority. The Head of Women and Children's Health Branch attended the meeting to discuss the upcoming Women's Health Plan further. Members were provided with a paper in advance of this meeting to aid this discussion.
- It was explained that women's voices and experiences would be central to the plan and that they have received almost 5,000 responses to a survey that they launched between August and September.
- They received responses from women in a range of locations and ages – from 16 to 85 and above.
- The original intention was for the plan to be published in the autumn term, but the timeframe has been extended to process all the data.

Points raised by the group:

- It would be helpful to have the health actions from the Advancing Gender Equality in Wales plan on the paper to see how this relates.
- Importance of gynaecological health and addressing the fact that cervical screening has gone down.
- Will the Women's Health plan provide an opportunity to explore health inequalities more generally (low income, poor housing etc)? It was confirmed that the Women's Health plan will be produced by NHS Wales so it will be a clinical plan. However, there may be scope for further conversations on wider issues after that.
- Is the plan for the research fund to fund clinical research or to embrace wider studies to look at impact of poverty on women's health?

- What percentage of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women responded to the survey?
- Need to make the link between women's health and poverty clearer.
- Feedback received from members that trans and non-binary individuals did not have a positive experience with the survey – WEN Wales to provide Welsh Government with further detail.
- Important for action to take place on Maternal health and impacts on Black and Minority Ethnic women.
- The Quality Statement on Women and Girl's Health has shortcomings when it comes to ethnic minority women – for instance it did not take account of the fact that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women are 3 to 4 times more likely to self-harm.

Discussion on Unpaid Carers paper (Welsh Government policy officials)

The Minister thanked members for their contributions so far. Policy officials from the Unpaid Carers and Older Persons Branch attended the meeting to discuss the work Welsh Government is undertaking in relation to unpaid carers. Members were provided with a paper ahead of the meeting to aid this discussion.

Members raised the following issues:

- Many women care for both older and disabled relatives as well as children.
- What can we do to mitigate against women leaving the workplace because of childcare costs and unpaid caring responsibilities?
- Difficulty with short breaks scheme as there is a shortage of social care workers.
- What work is happening on creating a register of unpaid carers?
- Oxfam Cymru are undertaking research into perceptions of care – to challenge the undervaluation of care.
- Worth re-looking at research by WAVE which looks at low paid workers in the public sector in part-time work due to caring responsibilities.
- Can Welsh Government do more to look at the group of women doing low paid, low hours work because they are carers by encouraging public bodies to offer more flexible working options?
- There is a roundtable being hosted by the Minister for Economy later this month on caring and flexible working.
- Cost of living crisis and childcare – can the extension to two years olds be rolled out more quickly?
- Eligibility of childcare offer – can we target this at families most in need?
- We must not forget disabled people who provide care – who can often be overlooked.

Action: Officials to circulate details of roundtable with Minister for Economy on flexible working and the charter for unpaid carers.

Action: Evidence units to consider WAVE research report.

Action: Members to consider whether they would like another session on childcare.

5: Discussion about priorities and timeframes

- Some members requested more to time think about priorities.
- Mainstreaming project review – unearthed good evidence in terms of inequality in workplaces that need to be addressed if we are to achieve a just transition to net zero that promotes equality.
- Rather than focusing on prioritising specific recommendations from the Gender Equality Review it may be worth revisiting some of the broad themes – for instance;
 - Gender budgeting is progressing, but it would have been helpful to receive the evaluation into the first pilot before progressing.
 - Recent recruitment for senior civil service roles – is this leading to changed behaviours? What are the high-level reflections on work to diversify public appointments and the senior civil service?
- Important to not just focus on policy priorities - but also on how the Government works. For instance – have we moved away from traditional way of assessing impact to mainstreaming?
- Equality in STEM board – can we bring the outcome of this discussion to the board
- Must ensure that the voices of ethnic minority women are heard.

6: Any other business

The Minister explained that the forum will meet four times a year and the next meeting will be in December. The Minister will chair two meetings a year so the next meeting will be official led.

The Minister opened the discussion for any other business.

Pregnant Then Screwed are holding a 'March for Mummies' in Cardiff which forum members were invited to attend.