

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 31ST JANUARY 2007

GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Introduction

1. By 24 January 2007, 27 responses have been received to the consultation on the draft Gender Equality Scheme:

▪ Individuals	15
▪ Voluntary organisations	2
▪ Schools	2
▪ County Council staff (groups and individuals)	5
▪ Other local authorities	2

General comments

2. A significant majority of respondents are positive about the Scheme and the commitments within it e.g.
 - appropriate, important and very pleased to see the intention to "go beyond the legal duties".
 - The scheme is very clearly laid out and easy to understand.
 - respondents from two separate local authorities thought the scheme was very clear and the best they had seen and asked to use it as a template to develop their own schemes.
3. A number of comments about ensuring that the scheme is translated into practice including:
 - the need for training and achieving a cultural shift
 - avoiding a mechanistic 'tick box' approach to targets
 - making sure the scheme is a working document that leads to improvement in standards
4. Transgender issues need to be covered in the scheme.
5. Some of the priority categories are too broad e.g. older people, children and young people.

6. Should be more consultation with voluntary sector and investment to deliver priorities.
7. Public would feel it difficult to challenge Council, they do not have same legal back up and do not know how to go about complaints procedure which can also be long and drawn out.

Services

8. Comments about services include:
 - Many services naturally have more male or female users. Physical differences affect such things as sport or physical activity. The Council cannot increase the educational achievement of boys if they don't want to.
 - Need to encourage physical activity particularly with girls by using a wider range of choices and interests.
 - More community transport could be provided by the voluntary sector in which a high percentage of women work.
 - Should provide more support to ethnic minority groups in the area of domestic violence, as a lot of them have language barriers.
 - How will the council monitor the satisfaction and take up levels of all services by gender? Some of the statements do not make it clear how the actions will happen - this is particularly relevant to the "hearts and minds sorts of issues".
 - Should improve services to be high quality and value for money. All other abstract concepts e.g. quality of life, healthier communities, are not part of the Council's remit.
 - Using this scheme to improve quality of life will make gender equality a favoured approach

Employment

9. Comments about services include:
 - Need to be more specific about the difference between part time working and job share arrangements especially for senior jobs. There aren't any jobs which can't be job shared (CE's of NHS trusts did this in the 1980's) but there are some senior jobs which cannot be performed on a part time basis. This issue also needs to be addressed as part of managers development and understanding about different working arrangements.
 - Flexible working, and promoting a variety of employment opportunities, will lead to a more productive workforce.
 - Employ more men in Children's Services, do not forget people who do not fit into boxes and do not focus on so called minority groups.
 - One female respondent commented that the policy is encouraging females into non-traditional roles, but once they are in the role, there is no support, even though they may be in a potentially hostile environment/culture – something which she has and continues to experience.

- Short listing panels should not see personal details of candidates, hold more job fairs across the County to attract different sections of the community and work more with schools and colleges, Connexions, Next Steps, Job Centre Plus and training providers to identify suitable jobs.
- Although there is a need to attract part time staff, there needs to be a balance. The Council may lose full time posts which might discourage young people who wish to have a career with the County Council.

Officer to contact

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