

Annex 1- Gender issues and engagement in the Social Inclusion Working Group (SIWG)

Project Summary Report

a. Purpose of the project

Equality legislation asks public bodies including the Council to involve the “relevant people.. in providing information and identifying gender equality priorities”.¹

The main mechanism available to the Council to do this, is the SIWG. However, there is no specific group that represents gender issues on SIWG. This appears to have resulted in gender issues not being brought forward to discuss and deal with.

To address this, in October 2008 a Local Government management trainee was placed in the Equality and Inclusion team in the Council for six months to:

- explore key gender equality issues as seen by people and groups that are involved in these issues in the city, so that they can inform the work of SIWG and the Council’s Equality Strategy 2009-12.
- consider how the SIWG can engage with groups that deal with and promote gender issues in the city.

The trainee was asked to do interviews with people and groups who are seen as leading gender issues in the city.

b. Who was involved

The York CVS Citizens’ Guide was used as the main source for identifying groups that lead on gender issues in the city. Groups listed in the guide as representing gender issues were interviewed, along with groups that send representatives to the SIWG, councillors who are members of SIWG, Council trade union representatives and York CVS. A list of groups interviewed is available on request from the Equality and Inclusion Manager.

¹ Gender Equality Duty Code of Practice for England and Wales, EOC 2006

c. Key issues found

Below is a summary of key gender issues in the city, as reported by people and groups interviewed for this project.

1. All-gender issues

- Domestic violence/abuse. Issues facing people fleeing domestic violence include:
 - Need for extensive emotional support
 - Having to adjust to a lower income and needing advice on the benefits available to them.
 - Need for support and encouragement to find employment or undertake further education, especially in the case of women.

Community groups dealing with domestic violence are concerned that domestic abuse is not one of the National Indicators chosen for inclusion the Local Area Agreement. They believe that domestic violence should be viewed as a major priority within the city.

- Rape.
- Single parent families face the risk of living in poverty.
- Carers face employment and social isolation issues. This appears to affect women carers more than men carers.

2. Men's issues

- A large proportion of homeless people are male, as they are much less likely to seek help when they need it. More work needs to be done to encourage men to seek help when they need it.

3. Women's issues

- There are cases of older women experiencing financial abuse that is also often linked to emotional abuse.

- Dealing with homelessness is harder for women. The centre for homeless people in York is looking to create a group that aims to deal with the specific issues facing women and to help them grow in confidence.
- Amongst some of the Black and Minority Ethnic community, women can feel isolated if there is no support network available to them. There is a strong emphasis on the family, with male members often taking charge of finances.
- Often Black and Minority Ethnic women face difficulties in spoken English, which in turn impacts on them making friends and may lead them to feeling a strong sense of isolation and loneliness.
- There are gender issues, specifically related to people with learning disabilities, for example, women with learning difficulties may not receive adequate support when seeking to have children.
- In other cities there are mental health centres for women but this does not exist within York.
- Within the Council, women employees are often unfamiliar with flexible working and job share policies. Trade Unions receive a number of maternity and paternity leave questions.
- There are links between mental health problems and gender. The Community Recovery Service reported that many of the female mental health service users have encountered gender related problems, such as domestic abuse.
- There is a disproportionately low number of leaders within Church-based organisations that are women.
- Women are currently disadvantaged in the local labour market. The recession is expected to worsen their situation.
- Key issues faced by women that work in the city relate to the glass ceiling for management posts, limited job-share and flexible working opportunities, maternity leave issues, low pay.

4. Trans Issues

Although, there are no current Trans people attending the LGBT forum they do exist within the city. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual communities are not particularly welcoming to people from the Trans community.

University of York has in place a strong support system where the needs of Trans students are met even if they do not 'out' themselves. There is a very small network of Trans students at the University of York. There are approximately seven or eight members of this network that are willing to 'out' themselves.

One general issue facing Trans people is that there is an eight-year waiting list for gender change operation. There is some anecdotal evidence that suggests that at health clinics Trans people are treated according to their original gender if no official documents are produced to the contrary.

d. Summary of suggestions for action

Those interviewed for this project report recommended the following:

- City of York Council should establish a Gender Forum that enables all the organisations working on gender issues to meet regularly. The aim would be to discuss the issues facing the organisations' service users and possible ways for the groups to work better together.
- City of York Council should take the lead role in promoting both child and women-friendly policies.
- In relation to the two points above, another suggestion made was that the Inclusive York Forum should take a bigger role in gender inclusion issues at city level, through organising a forum and promoting child and women-friendly policies.

e. Representing gender issues SIWG

Bearing in mind that there are not many groups in the city that concern themselves solely or mainly with gender issues, amongst those interviewed only the Independent Domestic Abuse Services

(IDAS) showed an interest in representing the 'Gender Strand' on the Social Inclusion Working Group.

IDAS was previously known as Women's Aid, but in 2008 their name changed, as it moved over to offering services to both men and women. Before they changed over to IDAS they consulted with a wide variety of stakeholders and the outstanding response was for the organisation to also support male victims of domestic abuse.

The organisation provides support services for victims of domestic abuse. Domestic Abuse includes physical, financial, sexual and psychological abuse. IDAS also has a refuge that provides temporary accommodation to women and their children for up to three months.

As they are a key organisation working on gender issues, it is recommended that IDAS is invited to become involved in the Social Inclusion Working Group.