

A Response to DETI Consultation:

“Draft DETI Corporate Plan: 2008-2011”

April 2008

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Introduction

Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an infrastructural umbrella organisation, which provides support services to, and represents over 40 groups (see Appendix 1 for full member and associate member listing) including; community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups.

WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network aims to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups and to promote and develop networking opportunities, to enable collective action and to impact upon policy and decision making processes. The WSN provides an accessible, feminist, relevant and high quality support service and resource for its member groups. The Network is also an important information resource on issues relevant to community-based women's organisations and for other infrastructure groups, nationally and internationally.

WSN welcomes the opportunity to comment on DETI's draft Corporate Plan which aims to outline the main functions of the Department and its economic priorities.

General Comments

WSN welcomes the publication of the draft Corporate but notes with some concern that it is a 'gender-neutral' document. Whilst WSN welcomes the inclusion of equality considerations in an Annex and reference to the Gender Equality Strategy, WSN would wish to see more reference throughout the Corporate Plan as to how DETI will promote the equality of opportunity between men and women throughout its PSA priorities for 2008-2011.

Specific Comments

WSN would like to make a number of specific comments relating to economic context, departmental functions, productivity growth, increasing employment and equality considerations.

1 Economic Context

1.1 WSN notes that the focus of the Corporate Plan is on High Value Added sectors such as ICT, finance and business. Evidence suggests that such services are heavily male dominated.¹ Whilst it may indeed be the case that these sectors are important for increasing prosperity and living standards, **WSN would ask DETI to set out in the Corporate Plan how it will promote the equality of opportunity between men and women in these High Value Added Sectors.**

2 Functions

2.1 The functions of the Department include: economic development policy; economic advice and research; statistical services; business regulation; health and safety at work and geological survey. **WSN notes that there is no reference to promotion of equality of opportunity and we would recommend its inclusion.**

¹ European Commission "Social Agenda" Issue No 16, February 2008.

2.2 WSN notes DETI's departmental goal as set out in the Corporate Plan is "to grow a dynamic and innovative economy."² Whilst this is commendable, **WSN believe this should be to "grow a dynamic and innovative economy based on the principle of equality of opportunity for all."**

3 Productivity Growth

3.1 WSN notes under PSA 1 Productivity Growth, one of the objectives is to promote a competitive and outward looking economy. The Corporate Plan states that it will support 45 new start ups outside the UK and 300 exporting to GB. **WSN would recommend that DETI and Invest NI would support companies that pursue best practice on the promotion of equality of opportunity.**

3.2 WSN notes an objective under PSA 1 Productivity Growth is to attract and support high quality investment. One of the targets to meet this is the creation of 6500 new jobs from inward investment. **WSN would ask DETI to ensure equality of opportunity and would request that DETI set out in the Corporate Plan how they intend to pursue this.**

3.3 Another objective WSN would like to draw attention to under PSA 1 Productivity Growth is to ensure a modern and sustainable economic infrastructure to support business. One of the actions set out to meet this objective is to stimulate the construction of between 13 and 16 workspace units. WSN notes there is no reference to the role of women and draws DETI's attention to the recommendations of Women and Works Commission report entitled "Towards a Fairer Future", particularly relating to women in non-traditional trades. **WSN would request that DETI include in its corporate how it will support the implementation of the Women and Works Commission report and promote the employment of women in non -traditional trades.**

² DETI Draft Corporate Plan 2008-2011, Pg 5.

3.4 WSN notes the emphasis on skills such as science, technology, maths and engineering in objective 5 under PSA 1 Productivity Growth. **WSN would recommend that DETI sets out in the Corporate Plan how it will work with DEL to promote equality of opportunity between men and women in these skills areas where women have traditionally been under-represented.**

4 Increasing Employment

4.1 WSN notes reference in the Corporate Plan in section 4 to low employment rate and the prosperity gap between NI and other UK regions. WSN notes that there is no reference in the Corporate Plan the differential impact between men and women and low employment rate. Statistics have shown there are 337,000 women who are economically inactive compared to 209,000 men.³ **WSN would ask DETI to reflect these statistics in its Corporate Plan and set out how it will work to reduce the levels of unemployed women in NI.**

5 Equality Considerations

5.1 WSN welcomes the section on equality considerations as set out in Annex D of the draft Corporate Plan. WSN particularly welcomes commitments to promote equality of opportunity, equality screening and drafting an equality scheme. WSN also welcomes references to the Gender Equality Strategy and looks forward to the publication of the departments Gender Action Plan implementing the Gender Equality Strategy. WSN looks forward to the publication of the results of the screening process and Equality Scheme. **WSN would suggest that it would be beneficial to refer to promoting equality of opportunity throughout the Corporate Plan to strengthen the department's commitment.**

³ These statistics are for the period April to June 2007, DETI "Women in Northern Ireland", September 2007, Pg 15.

6. Conclusion

WSN welcomes the publication of the draft Corporate Plan. WSN believes that equality of opportunity between men and women is beneficial for the growth of a dynamic and innovative economy. Furthermore WSN has offered some constructive suggestions as to how the Corporate Plan can be improved and we hope that these will be given consideration.

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Ardoyne Women's Group
ATLAS
Al Nisa Women's Group
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Group
Belfast Travelers' Support Group
Carrickfergus Women's Forum
Carew II Newtownards Road Women's Group
Causeway Women's Aid
Clan Mor Women's Group
Derry Women's Centre
Falls Women's Centre
First Steps Women's Group
Footprints Women's Centre
Foyle Women's Information Network
Greenway Women's Centre
Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
Lesbian Line
Lenadoon Women's Group
Ligoneil Family Centre
Markets Women's Group
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
NIWEP (NI Women's European Platform)
Newry & Mourne Women
Older Women's Network
Shankill Women's Centre
Strabane & Lifford Women's Centre
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Aid
Women's Aid Federation
Women into Politics
Women's Information Group
Women's News
Women's TEC
WRDA

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ballymena Community Forum
EBCEC
Newtownabbey Community Voice
Parents Advice Centre
WEA
Rasharkin Women's Group