

Annex 2. 7

Women / Equalities

7.1 Introduction

1. In July 2007 the Minister for Women and Equality announced action in the three priority areas detailed below designed to make a positive difference to the lives of women in Britain.

2. At the same time, changes were being made to the institutional structures that drive the equalities agenda in Britain. The new Government Equalities Office (GEO) was created to support the Ministers of Women and Equality and, in October 2007, the new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) came into being. This brought together the three commissions on Disability, Gender and Race into one body dedicated to combating discrimination. The EHRC is one of two non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the GEO, (the other is the Women's National Commission), and they are key partners in the fight for fairness and equality in the United Kingdom.

3. The GEO acts as a catalyst in the work of other government departments and partners in the private and voluntary sectors to drive progress in the three priority areas identified by the Ministers for Women.

4. The Government Equalities Office has drawn up a report that shows the UK Government has made significant progress against the Ministers for Women priorities, laid out in July 2007, which are:

- Supporting women and families who are caring for children and elderly relatives;
- Tackling violence against women, and changing the way we treat women offenders; and
- Increasing the representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women

5. The last year has marked a sea change in attitudes towards equality with the establishment of the new Government Equalities Office, which is responsible for the Government's overall strategy, legislation and priorities on all equality issues, as well as the launch of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

6. Since July 2007, the Government has:

7.2 Priorities

Priority 1: Supporting Families Caring for Children and Older and Disabled Relatives

- Decided to extend the right to request flexible working to parents of children aged 16 and under – helping an additional 4.5 million parents.
- Announced that there will be a major information campaign to raise awareness of who has the right to request flexible working, as currently only one in two people know who is eligible.
- Launched a new strategy to support people who care for others, including much needed breaks and financial help.
- For the first time, committed to a target to narrow the gender pay gap. Despite falling by nearly five percentage points in the last decade, men working full time are still paid on average 12.6 per cent more than women working full time, and nearly 40 per cent more than women working part time.
- Set out radical proposals to improve transparency on gender pay in “Framework for a Fairer Future – The Equality Bill”, which include banning ‘gagging clauses’ which stop people talking about and comparing their salary; working with business to develop a new equality “kite-mark”; and collecting more evidence on how effective equal pay audits may be in narrowing the gender pay gap. Requesting the Equality and Human Rights Commission to conduct inquiries into particular sectors, such as Finance and construction sectors.
- Announced significant new investment in the extended schools programme, children’s centres, early years education, and childcare.
- Announced £12.5 million to help women set up their own business, as well as improved advice and mentoring in the Enterprise Strategy.
- Sponsored the ‘Quality Part-Time Work’ programme with some 13 projects across the country to improve the availability of good quality part-time work opportunities.
- Held a major conference on Trade Union Equality reps showcasing their work and exploring ways to strengthen their roles.
- Identified ‘Exemplar Employers’ highlighting best practice on gender pay and flexible working.

Priority 2: Tackling Violence Against Women and Improving the Treatment of Women who Commit Crimes

- Published in April 2008 ‘*Tackling Violence Against Women: a Cross-Government Narrative*’, which set out how different departments across government are working together to tackle violence against women.

- Created a cross-government £1million emergency fund to support rape • crisis centres which provide vital support to rape victims.
- Reviewed the law of murder, looking at the partial defences to murder • of provocation and diminished responsibility, complicity in relation to homicide, and infanticide. We propose to abolish the provocation defence, replacing it with two new defences including one for those who kill out of fear of serious violence.
- Ministers met with members of the newspaper and advertising industry • and guidance has since been tightened up. Many newspapers are now refusing offending adverts.
- Published a report entitled • *‘Women Not for Sale’*, highlighting how small ads in newspapers can fuel demand for women trafficked for sexual exploitation.
- Set up a review to look at what more can be done to reduce demand for prostitution. This included visits to Sweden and the Netherlands to look at legislative and non-legislative approaches to prostitution and how other jurisdictions are tackling human trafficking for sexual exploitation. The review will report later in 2008.
- Made significant improvements in the treatment of women offenders (many of whom are vulnerable and have young children) through implementation of the Government’s response to Baroness Corston’s review last year, including: piloting changes to full body search procedures in women’s prisons; an upcoming pilot to increase the use of conditional caution; exploring the use of other alternative and community-based sentences for women who are not violent; and prevention of offending through better support for women’s centres which provide services to vulnerable women.

Priority 3: Increasing the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Women

- Launched a new taskforce, chaired by Baroness Uddin, with a specific • remit to encourage more Black, Asian and minority ethnic women to step forward to become a local councillor as they currently make up less than one per cent of councillors across England, despite making up more than five per cent of the population.
- Commissioned research on the routes into public life and politics for • BAME women, plus a series of fact sheets on women’s and BAME women’s representation in public and political life.
- Announced in March that we will be legislating to enable political parties • to use all-women shortlists until 2030. There are now record levels of

women in the UK Parliament, but women still make up only 20 per cent of MPs compared with less than nine per cent before 1997. This is still gross under-representation as women make up more than half of the population.

- Announced that targets will be set on public appointments for women, race and disability.
- Announced that we will consider with the Commissioner for Public Appointments whether a specific power to encourage diversity for appointments within her remit would assist her.
- Held a major event in July to increase the number of women appointed • to public bodies, bringing together women's organisations, head hunters and government departments. This includes a new project led by the Women's National Commission to raise awareness of vacancies and increase the number of applications from women.
- Launched the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG) set up by the Department for Communities and Local Government to advise Government on increasing their participation in civic, economic and social life. Members of the group will act as Ambassadors and role models, and provide leadership for Muslim women.
- Commissioned research into the opportunities for BAME women to • start social enterprises.
- Announced £1.5 billion over three years in the • *Working Neighbourhoods Fund*, to help get people from deprived areas back to work.
- Launched the *Women Take Part* campaign in October 2007, which provides models and networks to help women get involved in decision making and enter public life.
- Announced that under the Equality Bill, employers will be allowed to take positive action to increase the number of staff from under-represented groups, provided candidates are equally qualified, and so allow workforces to better reflect society.

Finally, this report outlines activity which the Ministers for Women and Equality and Ministerial colleagues intend to make a reality before the end of the current Parliament.

The full report can be viewed at;

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/7783-TSO-ChangeWomensLives\(P\).pdf](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/publications/7783-TSO-ChangeWomensLives(P).pdf)

