

Women's Policy Group

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose and Ethos

- 1.1 The Women's Policy Group (WPG) aims to ensure that the voices, concerns and experiences of women and girls are integrated into policy design and content; women's and girl's rights are protected and advanced; gendered perspectives are mainstreamed into policy debate, policy documents and legislation; and women's participation and gender equality outcomes are sustained in and through decision making structures and practices.
- 1.2 The starting point for the WPG is that policy choices and policies are not gender neutral. The WPG seeks to link gender equality policy more effectively with all policy arenas, analyse the impact of policy and policy decisions on women and girls, identify specific special measures needed to rebalance equality and advocate policy choices that should be made.
- 1.3 The goal is a gender-sensitive approach to all aspects of policy so that gender is mainstreamed effectively to achieve beneficial outcomes and equality for all.
- 1.4 While the WPG focuses primarily on public policy, it takes an interest in policies that emanate from private and business organisations, the voluntary and community sector, trade unions and political parties.

2. Membership

- 2.1 The Women's Policy Group is an open-membership organisation. It welcomes women's organisations, civil society organisations and women from across sectors with a keen interest in women's rights and equality and statutory bodies with a focus on women.
- 2.2 The WPG seeks to reflect the diversity of women's organisations and perspectives, and draws on an expansive range of organisations and expertise. It is a channel for the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, which deepens the democratic process.
- 2.3 WPG members support the principles of inclusion, democracy, pluralism, diversity, human rights, women's rights, equality and social and economic justice.
- 2.4 The WPG has an ethos of intersectional feminism and advocating for policy change to support women who face additional levels of marginalisation due to systemic discrimination. The WPG firmly supports pro-choice, trans-inclusive and anti-racist feminism and members of the WPG must align with this.

3. Role: Functions

- 3.1 Act as an independent sounding board and source of expertise for Policy Group members raising policy matters for consideration.

- 3.2 Share information and expertise and represent women's perspectives on political, social, economic and cultural policy matters.
- 3.3 Maintain a watching brief and visionary thinking across issues of concern for women, identify and evidence barriers and promote solutions.
- 3.4 Prepare a Women's Manifesto for each election in Northern Ireland, where resources permit.
- 3.5 Influence the Programme for Government and Budget and key public policies including gender equality strategies.
- 3.6 Maximise women's sector policy advocacy with politicians, decision-makers and civic society leaders.
- 3.7 Build policy capacity in the women's sector along with capacity on strategic positioning and operating tactically.
- 3.8 Brief officials and decision makers on the impact of policies on women and girls and provide background materials as appropriate.
- 3.9 Promote important policy matters for women that are not on the public agenda.
- 3.10 Conduct gender analysis of public policies and review policies and documents to ensure they express maximum gender responsiveness and inclusivity and reflect international norms, principles and instruments on women's human rights and gender equality.
- 3.11 Advise on the design of processes and arrangements to maximise the inclusion of women and gender expertise in the development of policy and maintain a watching brief on the gender-responsiveness of the Assembly, Councils, various bodies and committees, working groups and technical teams.
- 3.12 Engage and consult with the women's and civil society sector more broadly to draw on their views, expertise and support and work in partnership with expert organisations and key networks such as the Women's Budget Group.

4. Working Practices

- 4.1 WPG members commit to sharing information, expertise and practice and working collectively and collaboratively together to bring about positive change.
- 4.2 The WPG will facilitate peer support, as is possible and relevant, in the development of policy ideas and papers.
- 4.3 The WPG actively promotes equality and diversity and women's human rights and challenges discrimination.
- 4.4 The WPG is committed to working in partnership with the Policy Group members and other organisations and agencies as appropriate.
- 4.5 The WPG is informed by consultation with stakeholders and committed to quality standards, best practice and continuous improvement.

5. Meetings and Decisions

- 5.1 The Women's Policy Group will meet at least eight times per year.
- 5.2 Meetings will be convened by the Women's Resource and Development Agency, which provides the major support function for the WPG and may seek specific resources to support the WPG.
- 5.3 Meetings will take place in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the WRDA or other location inside or outside Belfast. Meetings may also be held by suitable electronic means.
- 5.4 The chair of the meeting may be appointed from meeting to meeting, and members may propose items for the agenda to the WRDA in advance or through the chair at the start of the meeting.
- 5.5 The WPG may set up sub-fora or working groups which will report back to the WPG.
- 5.6 The WPG works primarily by consensus and will strive to attain consensus through ongoing dialogue and framing issues for the widest possible agreement. Where a matter is unresolvable by consensus a vote may be taken by agreement. Where a vote is taken, members may record dissent.
- 5.7 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed on an annual basis.