



# Women's Resource Centre

## Response to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Inspection Reform: The future of local services inspection

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **About the Women's Resource Centre**

Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a membership based second-tier, umbrella body providing infrastructure support, information and capacity building to voluntary and community organisations working to improve the status of women. The WRC is the only pan-London organisation providing infrastructure services specifically for the women's voluntary and community sector (VCS).

We currently have 250 members. The majority of members operate in Greater London, often working with some of the most marginalised communities in the capital. WRC members work within and across many fields including anti-racism, arts, sport, employment, health, violence against women, education, justice and human rights. Our members and the women they work with are diverse, spanning large to very small groups; disabled people; Turkish, Iranian, Latin American, African and Caribbean women; lesbians and bisexuals; survivors of rape, incest and domestic violence; women entrepreneurs, and many more. All our member groups are working to improve gender equality.

#### **Comments on these proposals:**

We support a more streamlined approach to inspecting bodies, as part of their monitoring and evaluation. However, there needs to be a consistent, overarching equalities framework built into all inspectorate bodies' work, in order to truly be measuring performance, and meeting the needs of all.

## **KEY PROPOSALS**

The government wants to develop a performance (evaluation) framework for public bodies that is more risk-based, proportionate and effective. An effective evaluation framework must address and embed equalities monitoring and evaluation. Alongside the current drive to devolve and decentralise power to local councils, there must be a standardised equalities framework – otherwise you run the risk that local councils will only highlight and prioritise the local issues they hear about, which may not be a reflection of all the local needs. There is also the danger that some local councils may (and do) ignore the voices of women, if they do not believe that women continue to be systematically discriminated against. Some agreed upon and overarching framework would address these issues.

We agree that inspection is just one way of measuring outcomes and performance, alongside many others. Again, the most important thing there is some consistent, overarching equalities framework that ensures that different equalities groups are being monitored and measured throughout, whatever actual process is being used.

This consultation highlights the importance of service user input, as levels of service user satisfaction with public bodies have decreased, and expectations rise. We would agree that measuring service user satisfaction is absolutely vital, as part of measuring public bodies' performance. Creative ways of tapping into this valuable resource need to be explored, to ensure that those groups most likely to not be getting their needs met have access to expressing their opinions.

One of the reasons listed for inspecting public bodies is to "provide assurance about the impact and accessibility of public services for particular groups, such as those who are at risk or, or experiencing, social exclusion." While we are very happy that this reason is included, equalities is about much more than social exclusion – it is about acknowledging that different equalities groups will have different equality of opportunity to access services, and get their needs met. This means that a focus on equalities is essential across the board.

In order to fully ascertain evidence of need and how well public bodies are meeting need, all inspectorate bodies (such as the Audit Commission) need to be:

- collecting all equalities data. This includes gender, age, disability, race, faith/belief, sexual orientation, and income, etc.
- be able to disaggregate this data. This means they can break it down, so you can see, for example, how many black women, or older women, use a service.
- be able to do a gendered analysis of data, so they can use the data to assess how well needs are being met.

Inspectorate bodies do not currently have good practice in collecting equalities data, or disaggregating data.

The consultation highlights the importance of being able to analysis evidence. Under the new gender duty, public bodies will need to do gendered analysis on policies and practices,

to determine the differential impact on women and men. They will also need to collect disaggregated data. It would be very good practice to start now, as it will be in place in early 2007.

This consultation highlights the increasing trend to inspect public bodies from the service users point of view. Many women's groups tell us that when they are evaluated, they are not asked the right questions, as inspectorate bodies have no knowledge of the expertise held by women's groups on particular issues, or in working with marginalised groups of women, or why women choose to access women-only services. Inspectorate bodies need to be doing a better job, in order to effectively be monitoring and evaluating equalities based work. In order to make sure they are asking the right questions, they should be consulting with the experts – women's organisations, who have decades of experience and expertise in meeting women's needs.

The consultation asks what outcomes it should focus on, when inspecting. Inspectorate bodies must take on board how well public bodies are working to meet the needs of different equalities groups, including all women. Again, this would not only help them meet their requirements under the new gender duty, it would ensure that the needs of the most marginalised and excluded communities are being assessed and evaluated.

**For more information about this response, please contact:**

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