



Finance Committee

Welsh Government Draft Budget Proposals 2016–17

WGDB_16–17 07 Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales

Women and the Economy Subgroup

5th January 2016

To the National Assembly Finance Committee

From the WEN Wales Women and the Economy Subgroup

Response to the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016/17

The Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales is a membership organisation that aims to support the women's sector and advance equality for women in Wales. The Women and the Economy Subgroup of WEN Wales (WESG) is made up of members who have a particular interest in the economy. The group aims to encourage and support the economic empowerment of women in Wales. The members of the Women and the Economy Subgroup would like to submit the following comments in response to the National Assembly Finance Committee's Call for Evidence on the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2016/17.

The Women and the Economy Subgroup welcomes the Welsh Government announcement in respect of the Draft Budget 2016/17 and the associated documents outlining its policy and spending intent.

In particular, the group welcomes the Welsh Government's Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment and the attempts to mitigate the most negative outcomes from the Westminster Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. We are also pleased to see that the BAGE group has been consulted during the impact assessment process and the group's priorities and concerns taken into account. We would be interested to know how Welsh Government proposes to ensure that the impact assessment process is implemented in relation to policy development/design, policy implementation and policy evaluation. It is important that impact assessments are an integral part of the process.

The Women and the Economy Subgroup thinks that the Welsh Government could further strengthen their work in this area by considering taking a gender budget approach to budget decisions. In particular we would like to see:

- An overall gender budget analysis explaining what the budget lines and overall impact is for women and men. This would include demonstrating how Welsh Government has taken differences between women and men into account

Key to gender budgeting is understanding the nature of the unpaid care economy and how it interacts with the paid economy and the experience of women and men of each. It is well understood that women and men do not respond in the same way to economic incentives and sanctions and it is particularly important therefore that this understanding is integrated into the approach to 'Growth and Jobs'. Gender budgeting also assists in understanding how sex

stereotyping impacts on outcomes for women and men, girls and boys and to close gaps between them. This is particularly important in respect of addressing economic independence for women, closing the pay gap and in increasing the prosperity of Wales. We believe that tackling poverty and in particular child poverty can be greatly enhanced by taking a gender budget approach.

At a time of reducing budgets it is more important than ever that resources are targeted to maximum effect and we believe that understanding gender, gender inequalities and taking a gender budgeted approach can greatly assist the Welsh Government in achieving this.

Specific examples of the current draft budget where gender budgeting could assist Welsh Government in prioritising its spending to address inequality whilst achieving economic ambitions include:

- Understanding the growth in GVA by sex
- Infrastructure - investing in capital expenditure
- Supporting Business – Extend Small Business Rates Relief Scheme for 12 months
- Apprenticeships spending
- Young Persons' Discounted Bus Travel Scheme

Our members at Welsh Women's Aid have also raised concerns about the potential impact of local authority cuts on refuge services. Welsh Women's Aid have informed us that over half of refuge services in Wales say they are facing proposed cuts to their services next year. 284 women were turned away from refuge services in Wales last year because of a lack of space. Again, we would argue that this highlights the need to raise awareness about the importance of gender responsive budgeting in relation to the commissioning of services by local authorities to ensure that women are not being unfairly disadvantaged by spending decisions.

Finally the Welsh Government's acknowledgement of the impacts of the Westminster Government's decisions in respect of Social Security Spending and the roll out of Universal Credit is welcomed, particularly the acknowledgement of the disproportionate impact on single parents the majority of whom will be women. It is recognised that the Welsh Government's ability to mitigate negative impacts is limited by the budget allocation. We would encourage the Welsh Government to conduct further work on their understanding of these cuts through adopting gender budgeting techniques.

For example:

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- The tax-credit reversal will have positive impacts on women, particularly those on low incomes and single parents who would have been hardest-hit by those changes but universal credit changes are to go ahead so effectively families and women in poverty will still lose out when those changes are implemented.
- Child tax credits will be restricted to the first two children, with a negative impact on larger families and those in poverty. We know that a larger proportion of women's income whether from benefits or paid employment goes towards lifting children and families out of poverty
- Understanding the extra conditionality for job-centre where there is a risk that women with caring responsibilities will be disproportionately negatively impacted on

Gender budgeting will present opportunities to set appropriate, evidence based targets such as 50/50 apprenticeship targets particularly in STEM subjects. It will also highlight appropriate opportunities for the early engagement and representation of women in decision making in respect of budget allocation and design. For example in housing where there is evidence that women's decisions in design and allocation of resources differs greatly from those of men.

These are only a few examples of where gender budgeting can enhance and strengthen budgeting at a government level and only illustrates some issues in respect of some budget lines in your 2016/7 budget documents.

WEN Wales is currently producing a training package and briefing paper on the topic of Gender Responsive Budgeting. We would be delighted to assist in any further evidence gathering exercises conducted by the Finance Committee and provide expertise in this area.

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