

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Gender Audit of Local Plans: RTPI Commissioned Research**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the research was to investigate the current use of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) and GA (Gender Auditing) within the planning profession and to produce a practical Toolkit that would help local planning authorities (LPAs) integrate gender issues into plan-making processes.

### **Definitions**

GM is the process by which gender issues are taken into account at all stages of the plan-making process, whereas GA may be defined as the process by which this is achieved and tested (by establishing indicators and standards, and checking all outputs and policies against these criteria). For the purposes of this summary GM refers to both GM and the accompanying GA process.

### **Brief**

The RTPI requested that a full literature review and survey were undertaken to establish the current situation with international, national and local planning authority (LPA) manifestations of GM. This was followed by the development LPA case studies where some form of GM was already taking place. The purpose of this background work was not only to establish the current state of play and provide information on the subject, but to provide the basis for producing an RTPI Toolkit that might be used by LPAs in undertaking GM activities. The RTPI also required guidance as to its future role in supporting and furthering progress in this field.

### **Findings of Literature Review**

GM is now a requirement within all EU member states under Articles 2 and 3 of the Amsterdam Treaty 1997, meaning that 'the elimination of inequalities and the promotion of equality between women and men' should be a compulsory element of all public policy making at local authority level. In other words all programmes, policies and processes should be subject to 'gender-proofing'. Whilst this requirement is already recognised in respect of specific EU funded programmes, Objective 1 and 2 etc, and in respect of regional and urban regeneration programmes, the full significance of these requirements do not appear, as yet, to have impacted upon UK LPA policy and practice.

Whilst GM is not a widely recognised activity in the UK, the wider EU has a substantial body of literature in respect of methodologies, principles, stages, evaluative indicators and a wide range of practical examples that are applicable to the British town planning situation. In the UK there is a growing body of knowledge that has been developed in respect of urban regeneration, regional development and a range of smaller scale projects, rather than mainstream LPA forward planning. A full literature review is given in the main document, with the work of C Booth in the UK being particularly prominent.

### **The Overall Survey**

A survey was undertaken of the overall situation and of specific significant examples within UK LPAs. In summary GM is not at all widely known of, or practised within LPAs per se. But, in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, where national assemblies or a more centralised form of planning exists, we were to find that GM was a far more important component of strategic high-level planning policy. In addition, all LAs (Local Authorities) are required to show that their activities conform to generic (as against just gendered) nationwide local government EO standards. This requirement was to prove a double-edged sword. On the one hand some LPAs argued as a result of this, there was no need for a specific emphasis either upon 'gender' or for that matter 'planning' when undertaking mainstreaming and auditing of LPA policy. Others saw this as a positive factor that incorporated an acknowledgement of diversity issues, adding strength to their attempts to undertake dis-aggregated GM activities. So, with three types of key situation: (i) national level; (ii) generic la level; (iii) gendered LPA level, the LPA case studies sought to include both generic and gendered examples to show the relative value of each approach.

## **The Case Studies**

Examples where generic mainstreaming has taken place included Bristol, Lewisham, Hackney and Haringey. The advantage of a generic approach was that there was high-level LA support and resources, so the planners were not on their own. But the potential disadvantage was that in seeking to do all the minority issues at once, namely ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality, and in some cases religion, locality and class too, the specific emphasis upon gender was somewhat lost. Also, since a generic approach frequently derives from a 'personnel' EO perspective, it was found that there was an overemphasis upon process and procedures, and less understanding of specific 'spatial' policy-orientated town planning issues. In some such cases the enormity of the task, being imposed from above rather than being directly managed and 'owned' within the LPA, led to an overload. This was often associated with a 'checkbox' Audit, Best Value mentality in checking whether all the issues had been taken into account, with little time for qualitative planning policy development.

However, the LPAs that were chosen as case studies, particularly the London Borough of Lewisham, were trying to address these issues, not least the problem of getting EO 'social' issues understood and accepted in predominantly male technical departments such as planning, building control and highways. Examples where gendered mainstreaming was beginning to take place were in Birmingham, Sandwell, Sheffield, Harlow and Plymouth.

Plymouth is particularly noteworthy in having produced a detailed manual on GM that includes a very useful Matrix format on how to check key policies against gender implications. Harlow was interesting as it had been developing its own, independent, GM programme, as part of its rebirth as an ex-New Town which was now dealing with a more diverse social and economic set of challenges. One of the key findings from these examples was that writing a Toolkit or Matrix was only half the battle. A great deal more work needed to be done to address the problem of the process of planning, of getting Gender Mainstreaming accepted by both planning officers and members (councillors). Much depended upon the composition of the local council. This is why in developing the Toolkit we devoted an entire section (1) to establishing the validity, status and legitimacy of undertaking GM. As a result of the case studies we identified a range and enablers to good practice in undertaking GM effectively, most of which boil down to matters of supportive attitude and adequate resource commitment. Although not LPAs as such, we also investigated the situation at national level in Scotland, N.Ireland and particularly Wales.

## **The Problem**

We were to find that many planners simply did not understand the concept of planning, or thought GM was 'just' to do with 'women and planning'. Many needed further guidance on how, if indeed, women's and men's experience of the city (and countryside) and of planning policy was fundamentally different. This became such an issue that, on the advice of a member of the project steering group, we added a section to the main report that addressed this problem and explained the issues affecting various land uses, urban and rural problems, and significantly the nature of the planning system itself.

## **The Pilots**

Pilot authorities were selected for the purposes of testing our Toolkit. These comprised Edinburgh, Southwark, Crawley, Harlow, Birmingham, and Kennet. As can be seen some were used as case studies too, to maintain the continuity of feedback. The need to stress 'gender' as affecting men and women (as against women as victims) was expressed by respondents, along with the need to package the Toolkit in such a way that it had credibility and overcame natural resistance. Overall the feedback on the draft toolkit seemed less concerned with policy issues and more with processes and procedures. LPAs did not want to be dictated to in a prescriptive way, but wanted to take those parts of the toolkit that seemed helpful to them and to use them according to the situation and plan-making stage appropriate to their situation. They wanted a relatively simple document, but also welcomed CPD and further RTPi support. Whilst they wanted a short Toolkit, they wanted a range of other material to be available too. The resulting report document is therefore larger and more comprehensive than originally intended, with a full account of methods, legislation, 'the problem' case study and pilot examples (as LPAs like to see what other LPAs are doing and thinking, and to get examples of how GM is working elsewhere). Pilot respondents in

particular wanted the material to be available on the RTPI website and requested annual updating of information and GM progress to be shown on the RTPI site. Thus the research report could be built on in subsequent years.

### **The Toolkit**

The toolkit incorporates a range of checklists, indicators, guidance facts, most of which were derived from the literature review or case studies. A summary 'desk-top' toolkit was also developed to help simplify the process. LPAs just need to ask themselves:

- Who are the planners?
- Who forms the policy team?
- Which sorts of people are perceived to be the planned?
- How are statistics gathered and who do they include?
- What are the key values, priorities and objectives of the plan?
- Who is consulted and who is involved in participation?
- How are planning proposals evaluated? By whom?
- How is the policy implemented, monitored and managed?
- Is gender mainstreaming being fully integrated into all policy areas?

### **RTPI's Role**

The original project brief requested guidance on the role of the RTPI in embedding this process into the planning system. It is concluded from the research that it would not be a valuable exercise at this stage to carry out a statistical survey as there is so little GM taking place in LPAs. Rather, that there is a need for CPD, training and guidance.

LPAs want information and this should be provided on the RTPI web page and in the RTPI journal *Planning*.

Professor Clara Greed, Project Leader, UWE, Bristol [www.uwe.ac.uk](http://www.uwe.ac.uk)