

London Borough of Waltham Forest - Call for evidence, Commission on a Gender Equal Economy

London Borough of Waltham Forest is absolutely committed to gender equality, and we are keen to offer a local perspective to the work of the Commission on a Gender Equal Economy via this Call for Evidence. Waltham Forest is a diverse borough situated in North East London – two thirds of our residents come from BAME backgrounds and a quarter does not speak English as their main language. We are a young borough, with an average age of 34.5 years compared with the London average of 39.9 years. We are also the 7th most deprived borough in London and over a third of our children are living in poverty.

1. What are the causes of gender inequality in the economy? How does gender inequality interrelate to other forms of inequality in the economy, such as race inequality, disability, and poverty?

In Waltham Forest we know there is inequality but we do not have comprehensive evidence as to why. Residents from BAME backgrounds – women in particular - have a lower employment rate compared with white groups (64% to 88%). The gender pay gap in the borough is 15%, higher than the London average of 12%. We don't know the pay gap for BAME people in the borough, and additionally we recognise the need to drill down into statistics on BAME groups as there are significant differences between black and African- Caribbean groups compared with other BAME groups. This presents a challenge as much of our work is based on ONS data sets which are not disaggregated.

Group	Employment rate
White groups	88%
BAME groups	64%
White women	82%
BAME women	56%
White men	94%
BAME men	72%

There are many factors ongoing in Waltham Forest that may be contributing to gender inequality in the economy. Our biggest employment areas are in female dominated industries (Health and Education), but our Health sector is currently declining. For BAME women, key drivers of inequality may include prohibitive childcare costs, cultural and religious barriers, and a higher proportion of single-parent families.

Proximity to good work may also be a factor driving gender inequality. National evidence suggests that women are more likely to work closer to home, which in the case of Waltham Forest means less well-paid jobs: the gap in median pay between local Waltham Forest jobs and London overall is £10,100. Furthermore, 40% of jobs available in our borough are below the London Living Wage.

2. What issues are important to research and make proposals on in order to create policies for a gender-equal economy?

Self-Employment and the Gig Economy – 79% of our working-age residents are in employment, and 20.2% of those are self-employed. This is an important area for further research. In particular: what sectors are these people working in, how financially secure are they, what gender, what ethnicity? It is likely that gender dynamics are at work here, as lots of women are self-employed on ‘pin-money’ jobs.

Carers and caring responsibilities – We are seeing anecdotally that women tend to be carers for children *and* older parents, and that this work is often unpaid and unrecognised. We would value knowing more about caring responsibilities especially for older parents, and how this is valued within an economic model. We would like to know more about models, for example, where carers are paid even if they’re looking after relatives, and how this creates the potential for individual entrepreneurship.

Skills and education – our social mobility in the borough is high throughout education (school and college) but declines dramatically post-25. According to the government’s Social Mobility Commission our borough ranks in the top 20 authorities nationally for social mobility in early years, school and youth, but ranks in the bottom 10 nationally for social mobility in working lives . This suggests we have BAME women who are intelligent and qualified but are falling into unemployment at 26. We have commissioned research into the barriers to employment for BAME women in the borough, which will conclude in the coming months.

Data on the BAME pay gap – We do not know the BAME pay gap in our borough and would welcome finer grain knowledge on the economic status of BAME groups. This would allow us to drill down into statistics for different BAME groups, recognising significant differences between groups as well as within-in group differences by gender and other aspects. Much of our evidence is based on data from the ONS, which is not disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

3. Other comments

LBWF seeks to address gender inequality in the economy through a range of programmes:

- **LBWF Gender Pay Gap Strategy** – this strategy will be published early summer and aims to reduce the gender pay gap internally within our organisation. As the largest employer in the borough this will have impact on the borough gender pay gap.
- **Think Work Programme** – this programme is about boosting good jobs and skills locally. It has a particular focus on ‘Good Work’ and ‘Careers for All’.
- **Connecting Communities Programme** – This programme is funded by the MHCLG as part of its Integrated Communities pilot, and is about harnessing the assets of the community, and building an integrated, supportive, active and connected community. As part of this programme we have commissioned bespoke research into the barriers to employment faced by BAME women.

LBWF contact: Karissa Singh, Policy Officer (karissa.singh@walthamforest.gov.uk)