

Women's Career Development in The London Borough of Southwark

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Foreword

Gender Equality

The London Borough of Southwark has worked in close partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, and eleven other local authorities over the last three years to take part in this national research study, the Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets Project (GELLM).

In participating in this project the organisation has made a commitment to disseminate and consider the research findings by engaging with key stakeholders. The philosophy for implementing change in relation to gender equality has been based on the commitment that each service area will continue to be instrumental in taking forward the responsibility for aligning their service priorities for gender equality in their business plans.

Through active participation in this research project Southwark Council is well prepared for its new legal responsibility for implementing the 'Gender Duty' requirements of the Equality Act 2006 in all key service areas and to effectively address gender inequality in the borough.



Bob Coomber

Chief Executive of Southwark Council
June 2006



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We would like to thank those in Southwark Council who guided and assisted us in carrying out this research: Lisa-Marie Bowles, European Manager, and Doris Amoah, Administrator, in the Regeneration Department. There were also a number of senior managers who, as key informants, gave us an organisational perspective on women's career development, and women from across the authority who contributed their experiences and views to discussions in four focus groups.

Members of the GELLM Team contributed as follows

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Key Findings

This study is about women's employment and career progression in Southwark Council. It is one of 4 parallel studies of women employed in local authorities conducted within the GELLM research programme. The findings in this report relate to Southwark Council only. They are drawn from an e-survey and focus group discussions with women employees, interviews with managers, and policy and strategy documents produced by Southwark Council.

Analysis of the e-survey showed:

- Low take up of work life balance policies
- Dissatisfaction among middle ranking women with training opportunities to advance their careers
- Evidence of working beyond contracted hours

Drawing on our qualitative data from the focus group discussions and managerial interviews, we also found that:

The large majority of women who are in jobs which are, or could be, part of a career, value their employment highly. They are committed to their work because it serves local communities, improving the lives and circumstances of local people.

Women manage their work-life balance differently according to their age, personal circumstances and stage in life. They appreciate the options offered by Southwark Council to work flexibly.

Managerial styles were identified as crucial for the effective implementation of work life balance policies. Some women were concerned that policies were inconsistently implemented and that it had been hard to find out what they were entitled to request.

The overwhelming majority of women in the e-survey (89%) had received some training during their time at the authority. 46% said they believed this training had enabled them to progress at work. This was particularly true of women earning between £14,000 and £17,000 per annum, and of those in the higher salary bands.

A significant minority of survey respondents were women working more hours than they were contracted to deliver on a regular basis. Senior women in the focus groups

acknowledged that the pace and length of the working day was demanding and often exhausting. For some women

- Intensity / volume of work
- Long hours of work

are factors they consider when applying for a more senior position in the authority.

Women also described organisational processes and cultures as significant barriers. It was *'never clear whether things apply to everyone or not.'* These related to:

- Promotion procedures and opportunities
- Organisational cultures

Women's concerns about the availability of training and progression opportunities and their access to them may be shared by their male colleagues. However, in many cases it was clear that relationships with managers had a gendered dimension. Many women reported that they were operating in a culture which favoured men.

Some women felt that, among their male colleagues, some held sexist attitudes. Women in male-dominated departments commented on being patronised by male colleagues, and some women had been deterred from seeking promotion because of the need to join a 'men's club'.

Women of all ages said there was a lack of appropriate female role models. Some felt that some women in senior positions adopted the work behaviour of male colleagues, and could be the least supportive line managers. Black women felt the lack of black role models more acutely than a lack of women at senior level.

Factors enabling women to progress at work and in which good managers played a key role were:

- exposure to new experiences and a wider network of work contacts
- line management which nurtured their belief in their own ability
- training targeted on a promotion opportunity rather than their current post
- acting-up and secondment opportunities (internal & external)

Introduction

This study is about the career development and progression of women working within Southwark Council. The research has identified factors which are important in women's decisions about career progression, both within the organisation and outside in the wider labour market, and explores how these factors relate to women's family situations and personal aspirations.

Conducted in 2006, the research used a variety of methods including: documentary and statistical analysis; interviews with senior managers; a new e-survey of all female employees¹; and follow up focus groups with women of different ages, employed in different departments.

This report relates to Southwark Council only. The full study was conducted in three other local authorities; a comparative analysis of this data is published separately (Bennett et al 2006). The *Gender Profile of Southwark's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2005) provides the district-wide statistical evidence and context for the study.

Women's career development

Through this study we hope to make a different contribution to the debate about women's career progression and commitment to paid employment, by acknowledging the impact of the local labour market context and the workplace culture, as well as the relationship between internal and external constraints which women have encountered in developing their careers. Taking the view that these constraints are not static but change throughout women's lives, the study has tried to highlight differences between women at different stages in the life course. Our aims were:

- To examine women's experiences of employment and career development in the local authority sector.
- To explore the factors and conditions which impede, or support, the career development of women employees in LB Southwark.
- To identify policies and practices which encourage and support women's career progression.

¹ A link to the e-survey was sent in an email to all employees, male and female, with direct access to the internal email system. Only data relating to female respondents has been analysed here.

- To make relevant recommendations to promote effective workforce development and efficient career management in local authorities.

Women are known to find it more difficult than men to gain promotion and enter higher level occupations. This 'glass ceiling', the artificial barriers preventing qualified individuals from progressing at work and reaching their full potential (Miller and Neathy 2004), has previously been explained in a number of ways:

- hierarchical organisation of the workplace
- hours and working arrangements
- the dominance, in some occupations and sectors, of men and male attitudes.

Other explanations suggest women's lack of progress to senior levels arises from their own preferences and lifestyle choices (Hakim 2000). These claim that many women are not career-focused, and either prioritise family above work or have unplanned careers to accommodate other opportunities that may arise in their lives outside work. Understanding women's choices about their career development in the context of internal preferences and external factors has important implications for Southwark Council in making effective human resources decisions to develop the potential of every employee, and in evaluating and implementing options for enhancing work-life balance to become an 'employer of choice'.

The public policy context

The issue of women's productivity in the labour market has been actively addressed by the New Labour government since it came to power in 1997. To support and encourage women with children to make a greater commitment to employment, a variety of measures have been put in place. The *National Childcare Strategy* was introduced in 1998 to extend the quantity of childcare provision and to improve its quality to give mothers more options and more peace of mind. A package of tax credits and benefits for parents was introduced in 2001 to make employment more financially attractive for parents and lone parents. In a parallel move, the government tried to encourage employers to change the way work is structured to better suit individuals' diverse needs. The *Employment Relations Act 1999* provided for employees to take leave to deal with family emergencies and

the *Employment Act 2002* gave parents of children aged under 6, and of disabled children, the right to request flexible working arrangements. In partnership with employers, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) launched its *Work-Life Balance Campaign* in 2000, offering Challenge funding to selected organisations which identified relevant issues to help them introduce more flexible working and better leave arrangements.

Celebrating 30 years of the *Equal Pay Act 1975* in 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) again called on employers to address the underlying causes of the gender pay gap. The EOC has promoted positive action to break down occupational segregation (Fuller et al 2005), and has promoted pay audits as a way of driving out discriminatory pay differentials. It has also promoted the business benefits of making the connection between effective human resources management and equal opportunities (Humphries and Rubery 1995). *The Women and Work Commission*, which reported to the Prime Minister in February 2006, endorsed these approaches, and emphasised the importance of extending flexible working arrangements to positions at all levels in workplace hierarchies (Women and Work Commission 2006).

Following the lead of the European Union in calling for action to bring about greater inclusivity and a share in economic benefits for all of Europe's citizens, the UK Government has also undertaken a reform of equality legislation. The *Equality Act* received the royal assent in March 2006. This sets up a single *Commission for Equality and Human Rights* (CEHR) and will harmonise the legislative approach to equalities in line with advances made in the area of race through the *Race Relations Amendment Act 2000*. A new duty to promote gender equality will come into force in April 2007, requiring all public bodies to promote gender equality in their provision of services, and as employers. Public bodies will, for the first time in England, have to demonstrate that their employment practices meet the needs of women and men, and that any inequalities of opportunity and of treatment are addressed.

Employment in the local authority sector

Over a quarter of people employed in the UK work in the public sector, two thirds of them women. Nationally local government employs about 1.2 million women, three quarters of the sector's total workforce², and in most districts the local authority is one of the major employers. Previous research has shown that local government employees have comparatively stable patterns of employment, often remaining with their employer for long periods (Yeandle et al 2002). Employees with long lengths of service pass through many 'life stages' in the course of their employment, and the workforce profile is more likely to be skewed towards older age groups. This presents certain challenges for human resources management in the sector.

Labour and skills shortages in local labour markets have added further incentives for some local authorities, who now compete to be 'employers of choice'. Flexible working and equality of opportunity are important in attracting high quality applicants and in promoting and retaining able female employees. The DTI and the EOC have both drawn attention to the importance of ensuring that women are able to reach their full potential at work, for example in the Kingsmill Report (DTI 2001) which argued that:

Businesses and organisations in the UK are mismanaging their human capital. The clustering of women in lower status and lower paid jobs... suggests that they are failing to properly develop and utilise the skills and talents of women.

The Equality Standard for Local Government, Best Value and the broader modernisation agenda in public services already require local authorities to offer equality of opportunity to all their employees. The new duty to promote gender equality will strengthen this, and oblige local authorities to take proactive steps to improve the status and experiences of women within their workforces.

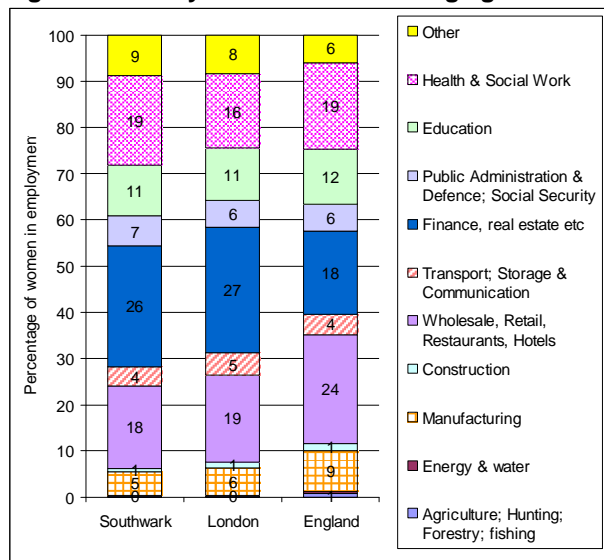
² Source: Local Government Workforce In England: Trends and Projections, Employers' Organisation 2004, excludes teachers.

Women's employment in Southwark

Southwark's local labour market

Between 1991 and 2003 employment in LB Southwark grew by 15.8% an increase of 19,442 jobs, of which 11,451 jobs were part-time positions. This growth was nevertheless lower than both regional (20%) and national (20%) trends. As shown in the *Gender Profile of Southwark's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2005:26), behind these figures lay important structural changes in the local labour market. These included the decline in the share of employment in the manufacturing sector, and a significant increase in banking, finance and insurance jobs in the borough. As the figures above show, there was a large increase in part-time work (for both women and men), partly related to the growing importance of the service sector. The public administration, education and health sector remained a stable employment sector for women over the decade, employing a third of all Southwark women in 2003. These developments underscore the importance of Southwark Council as a key source of employment for local women. In 2004, women held 45% of all jobs located in the borough of Southwark, a total of some 64,000 jobs³. The local authority itself provides about 1 in 5 of all female jobs in the borough, and is a very important source of local employment.

Figure 1 Industry of women of working age

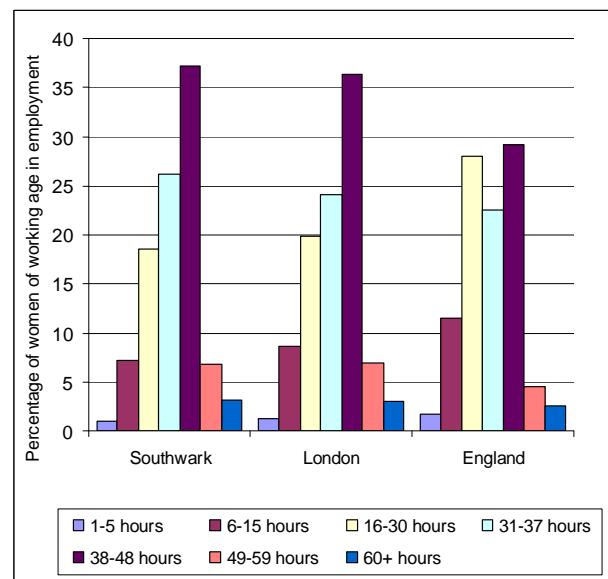


Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

The *Gender Profile of Southwark's Labour Market* (2005:32) showed that a high proportion of female (47%) and male employees (53%) who live in Southwark work in higher level jobs - as managers, senior officials, professionals or associate professionals or in technical occupations. Over the last decade, the proportion of women working in these kinds of higher level jobs in Southwark increased by 9 percentage points, mirroring the rise in London as a whole, and rising faster than in England as a whole (6%).

Female employees in Southwark (as in London as a whole) have very different working patterns compared with women in the rest of England (Figure 2). Only 27% of female employees in Southwark work part-time (30 hours or less per week), compared with over 40% across England. A high proportion of women in Southwark work above the threshold of 48 hours per week - 10% in Southwark, compared with 7% across England.

Figure 2 Women of working age in employment by hours worked

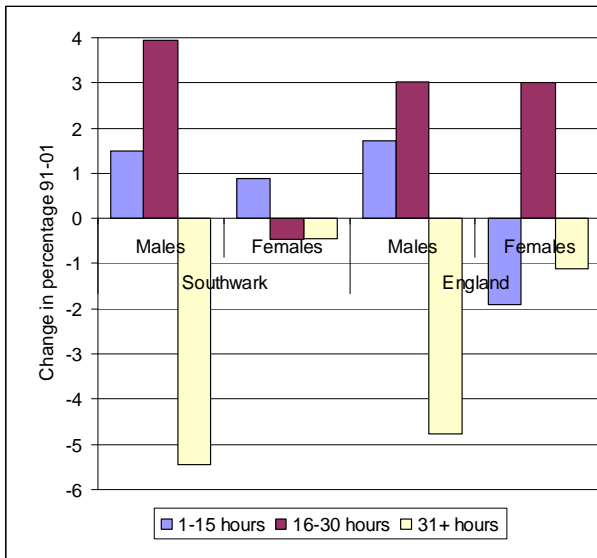


Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

By comparing data from the 1991 and 2001 Censuses it is possible to identify changes in working hours over that period. This is shown in Figure 3. In Southwark, as in London, there was very little change in the working hours of women over this period, in contrast to the picture nationally. The figures for England as a whole show a stable trend in the proportion of women working part time, but more of them working 'longer' part-time hours.

³ Source: Annual Business Survey 2004

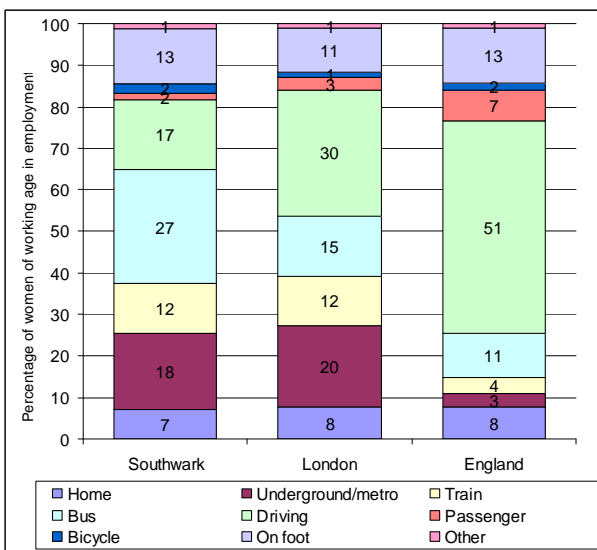
Figure 3 Change in women's weekly working hours between 1991 and 2001



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

There are also differences in the way women in Southwark travel to work, which has implications for the length of their working day. More women in Southwark live within 5km of their workplace (58%) than in London as a whole in (48%). In this they are closer to the English average (56%) (Buckner et al 2005:31). However, data on their mode of travel to work reveals that in Southwark a high proportion of working women are dependent on public transport, in particular using buses to get to and from work (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Women's travel to work by method of travel.



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003.

Employment policies at Southwark Council

Southwark Council's Corporate Strategy 2006-2007 recognises the need to invest in its staff, in order to retain high quality people at a time of internal change and recruitment challenge within public services in London. In January 2006, the authority gained *Investors in People* accreditation. There is a well established approach to promoting equality of opportunity for employees through the adoption of work-life balance policies and the development of training opportunities linked to the performance management system. The authority has developed targeted initiatives for under-represented staff, including female employees.

Its policies under the heading of 'work-life balance' are numerous, and at the forefront of good employment practice. Employees can assess them via the staff intranet. Policies cover emergency caring situations, planned caring situations such as adoption and parental leave, flexi-time, changes to working hours (such as term-time working), and options to apply for employment breaks to deal with major family changes or to fulfil lifetime ambitions. The organisation's rationale for promoting work-life balance is that by offering a wide range of working options the authority will raise the competitiveness and quality of its business. At a practical level, managers implementing the policies are advised that the needs of the service and its users must come first when considering employees' requests⁴.

37.3% of Southwark Council's top 5% of earners are women⁵. To help narrow the gender pay gap, Southwark Council has an Equal Pay Statement. This sets out arrangements for training those involved in job evaluation, the design of pay structures performance management, and gives guidance to managers on pay settlements. To tackle the under representation at senior level of women, black and minority ethnic (BME) people and people with disabilities, the authority has recently launched a three year 'Fast Forward Leadership Programme' supporting a small number of successful applicants. A mentoring programme has also been introduced for all employees. The mentoring scheme pairs women and men with senior colleagues in different departments, aiming to increase their skills, and offering exposure to and understanding of the

⁴ Source: LB Southwark Business Manager's Guide to Work Life Balance

⁵ Source: Gender Equality Consultation Paper Nov 05

organisation. Another recent development has been the launch of a Women's Forum to provide an opportunity for mutual support and networking among female employees. There are similar structures for staff from black and minority ethnic groups and staff with disabilities. The Black Workers' Group has been successful in raising issues about career progression at the corporate level. Equalities training programmes for all staff, managers and councillors started in 2006, delivered by an independent provider, Equality Works⁶.

In common with the sector as a whole, Southwark Council has undergone considerable structural reorganisation in the last few years, partly driven by new statutory requirements. Whilst some participants reported internal debates about this as 'acrimonious', structural safeguards for equality are in place and have continued to function. There is a Cabinet Portfolio for Equalities, Culture and Sport, which has been held by Councillor Columba Blango for the last two years. The Chief Executive chairs an Interdepartmental Equalities Sub Group on a bi-monthly basis. Strategic planning for equalities sits in the Strategic Services Department, Social Inclusion Division. At a strategic level, the authority has adopted an Equalities Scheme covering six areas of equality, including gender. Equalities Impact Assessments are carried out on all new policies across all departments to predict their likely benefits for the diversity of service users, and action plans are developed to address any inequalities that are identified⁷.

The study of women's employment at Southwark Council

Our analysis for the study reported here draws on a mix of qualitative and quantitative information including:

- A new e-survey of women employees completed by 346 women
- Data available from Southwark Council
- Analysis of Southwark Council's policy documents
- Interviews with 2 senior managers
- 4 focus groups with 24 women employees

The e-survey intentionally over-sampled women who had experienced some degree of 'success' in

their careers⁸. 52% of responses were from women from ethnic minorities, higher than the proportion of ethnic minority staff in Southwark's workforce as a whole (48% in 2001⁹). The focus groups provided the main evidence about women's experiences, values, aspirations and needs, and of barriers to their progression. Women of different ages were selected and grouped together to try to capture experiences and attitudes at different points in the life course. With each group we explored how far the women's working lives were meeting their current expectations, and the extent to which their views were common to the group. The groups were:

- women in more senior positions¹⁰ aged approximately 45-59, including some women who had been at the top of their grade for a number of years (who were in a position to look back with hindsight).
- women aged 25-34 (focusing on their career aspirations and longer term goals).
- women aged 35-44 with and without children (focusing on the impact of childcare responsibilities on women's careers)

These groups gave us the opportunity to examine the impact of age, generation and motherhood. Appendix 2 gives a more detailed description of our research methods.

Women employees at Southwark Council

Southwark LB employs 2,766 (Dec 05) women (52% of the total workforce in 2005¹¹) in 6 departments across various sites, in across the borough of Southwark. All employees contactable by email¹² were invited to participate in our e-survey about women's careers and employment, conducted in January 2006. A total of 346 women responded, and their characteristics are described below.

⁸ 94% of women respondents to the e-survey were in salary bands £18,000 and above, whose posts had progression opportunities to more senior roles.

⁹ Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, 2001 Commissioned Tables, Crown Copyright 2003.

¹⁰ Women earning over £35,000 pro rata p/a

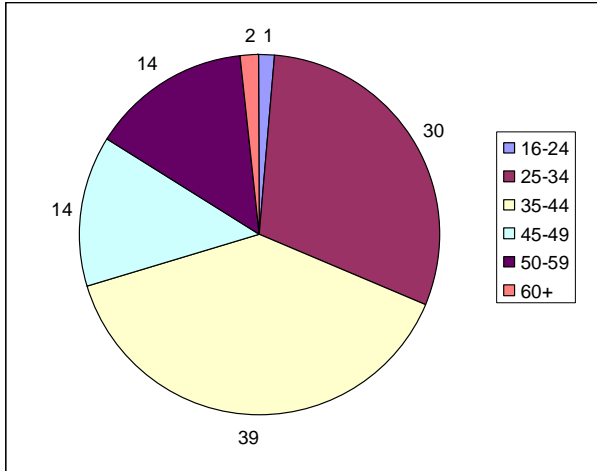
¹¹ Source: Gender Equality Consultation Paper Nov 05

¹² Except those in schools.

⁶ Sources Equalities Bulletin March 2006, Corporate Plan 2005-2008

⁷ Source: Gender Equality Consultation Paper Nov 05

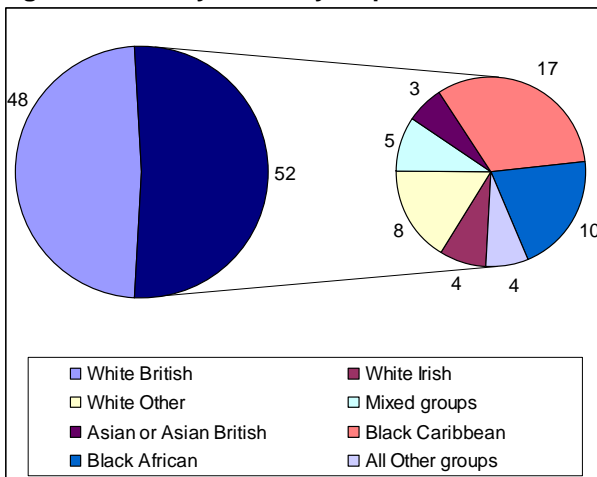
Figure 5 Age of survey respondents



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

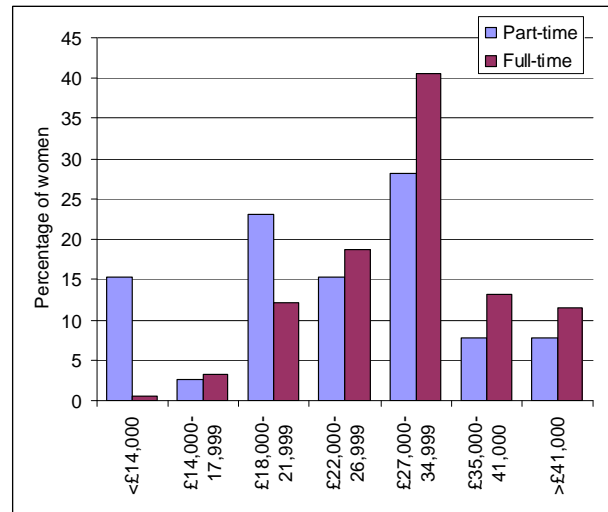
4% of e-survey respondents were disabled women, 61% were qualified to degree level or above, and 27% had worked at Southwark LB for 10 years or more. Almost all had received some training during their period of service (89%) and just under half (46%) reported that they had received training which enabled them to progress to a higher grade.

Figure 6 Ethnicity of survey respondents



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

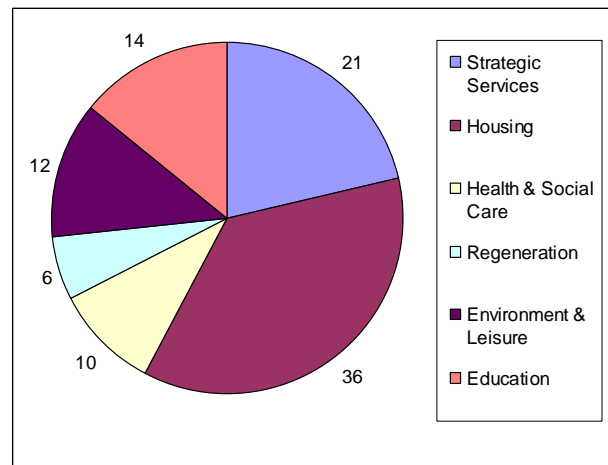
Figure 7 Annual salary (full-time equivalent) of survey respondents



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

Although our respondents are not fully representative of Southwark Council's female workforce¹³, they include a good representation of the groups we were especially keen to include in the research: mature women in well-established careers within the local authority; women aged 35-44, in mid-career, both with and without children; and younger women potentially at the outset of a career in public sector employment.

Figure 8 Distribution of survey respondents across Southwark Council service areas



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

¹³ It has not been possible to contextualise fully the e-survey data, as data for the whole workforce at Southwark Council was not available in an appropriate comparative format at the time of the research.

Women's experiences at Southwark Council

Attitudes to paid work

The large majority of women who are in jobs which are, or could be, part of a career, value their employment highly. For them, it is an important source of satisfaction and income security, and provides a context for enacting their personal values. Women in the focus groups told us that:

- They are committed to their work because it serves local communities, improving the lives and circumstances of local people
- Paid work represents important 'personal' time; they have autonomy to make decisions about how to deliver their work, and can enjoy the stimulation of working with colleagues to achieve a goal
- A meaningful working life, in which they enjoy what they do, and in some cases can leave 'a legacy', is important to them.

Hopefully we're making a difference to people, to the environment, to places where people live and work and for future generations because we do lots of work with schools. (aged 25-34)

The private sector just ends up lining the pockets of somebody who doesn't care about anybody ... whereas somewhere like Southwark, if you save £250 that could be an adult literacy course. It's one of these places where even a small saving can result in something worthwhile to the community, and that's why I joined. (aged 45-59)

I actually like the people I work with and I like my managers and I feel like I can do something interesting. (aged 35-44)

For these women, being 'work-oriented' does not preclude being committed to family or having interests outside work. These other commitments stand alongside work, and are of equal importance.

The commitment they make to their work is suggested by the hours they work. A high proportion of respondents to our e-survey are contracted to work full time hours (89%) while at the same time a substantial minority (11%) report having unpaid caring responsibilities for sick, disabled or frail dependents, occupying up to 19 hours a week.

Part-time workers in our survey, as shown in Figure 7 above, were more concentrated in the lower paid grades of employment than were full-

time employees. 67% of full-time respondents earned £29,000 per annum or above, whereas only 40% of part-time respondents were earning at this (full-time equivalent) level. Only 7% of respondents working part-time were among the most highly paid grades.

How women manage their work-life balance varies according to their age, personal circumstances and stage in life. While at times they may alter the level or amount of their input to paid employment to cope with other demands, they emphasised that they remain committed to work outside the home.

The life course: motherhood

For those with children, their age and circumstances at the time of the birth of their first child had affected their attitudes to paid employment. Some tried to reduce the demands of paid employment to fulfil their new family role. Most emphasised that this did not involve a reduction in the value they attached to their employment, or their commitment to it.

After two years I'm really ready for that next move. In a previous job I did a management role but I deliberately took a slight step down because of becoming a mum for the first time - but now I'm ready, and the opportunities are there in terms of people are moving on (and vacancies arising). (aged 25-34)

Changes in their family and personal lives had reinforced some women's commitment to their career:

As a single parent I have to go out to work, but I would prefer to have a career that I'm planning and actually developing. But since I've been at Southwark that's not happened and I've had to take charge of my career development. I've had to take responsibility for it fully. (aged 45-59)

My last job prior to this was on a temporary contract ... I went on maternity leave without maternity pay, and just as I'm ready to come back to work I get a letter saying that your temporary contract will end on 10th August good luck with parenthood. I just thought, 'Oh my god, I've just got a new baby I've got no money. (aged 35-44)

Caring for older relatives

In addition to their paid jobs, 11% of the e-survey respondents had unpaid caring responsibilities for a sick, elderly, frail or disabled relative or friend. A few women were providing more than 20 hours of unpaid care each week. These commitments

affected them for varying lengths of time, and in some cases had arisen without warning. Such unpaid caring is a common experience of employees: the 2001 Census showed that 9% of all employed women living in Southwark were carers.

I still work for Southwark because I live 5 minutes drive away and my husband is disabled and it enables me, if he locks himself out or something silly, I can go rushing off home. (aged 45-59)

Retirement

For women aged 45+ their pension entitlement was an added motivation to advance their career. But even younger women were not indifferent to what they considered to be a valuable perk.

Well, the biggest reason is the pension, I would have left Southwark two years ago I think if I'd not been locked into a pension. (aged 45-59)

With the pay it's also you've got the pension, the sick pay, your holidays and things like that. And again, when you're working with the private sector, you don't get as much. (aged 25-34)

Women who took part in the focus groups indicated that their efforts to remain 'work orientated' across the different stages and demands of family life had influenced their choice of employment in the local authority sector.

Employer of choice

The features they emphasised, in describing what made the local authority their 'employer of choice', included the opportunity to work flexibly, the satisfaction they gained from serving the interests of the local community and pay that was commensurate with the size of their workloads.

- **Flexible working**

Women in all our focus groups gave examples of how they were able to manage their hours of work. In some cases it was what had attracted them to apply for their jobs. To them, 'flexible working' meant an employer that allowed them to alter their contracted hours and to control their daily starting and finishing times. 18% of the e-survey respondents had altered their contracted hours during their service with Southwark Council, and 33% had used or were using the flexi time system.

Managerial styles were identified as crucial for the effective implementation of these policies. Some women were concerned that policies were inconsistently implemented and that it had been

hard to find out what they were entitled to request.

There's a lot of support from managers for all these sort of flexible arrangements and once you're permanent staff there's a lot of support there. (aged 25-34)

I'm pretty fortunate, I can have flexi time. I can have home life balance, but I'm fully aware that right next to me they don't get all that, because the manager is different. And it's the same organisation. Because it's at the manager's discretion. I think they need to standardise more. (aged 45-59)

For some women with family commitments, the ability to work flexibly outweighed pay considerations when they compared Southwark LB with other local employers.

I needed a job and a temping job came up with Southwark and I thought – 'Ok flexible working hours', it works around me and my child. (aged 35-44)

- **Public service**

Some women pointed out that the local authority was the major local employer in their vocational field. Women working in these areas (for example, education, libraries, environment) expressed satisfaction that they were at the forefront of service delivery, addressing new and changing agendas.

Over the last year the whole service has been restructured, so there's been a lot of change both in the image of the service and the role of the staff...I think it now feels like we're all heading in the right direction, it feels very positive. (aged 35-44)

For others, working for the local authority related to their own political and personal ideals. Working in a public service role made their employment meaningful as it had social value.

Prior to the reshuffle, I loved my job and I felt really lucky to be in the position where I got paid to help and empower people, train them, educate them. (aged 35-44)

I remember being 20 years old and I made a very conscious kind of ethical, political decision that I wanted to work for public service, and a lot of that still remains in me after all these years...I was quite clear that this will mean I won't be earning the same money as people in the private sector. (aged 35-44)

When I left my previous company one of the reasons was that I wanted to go somewhere where I felt there were organisational values more

aligned with my own, and that was quite important to me. And I feel that it's more there in Southwark, it's certainly not perfect, but it's much better than I'd come across before, and that's quite important.
(aged 45-59)

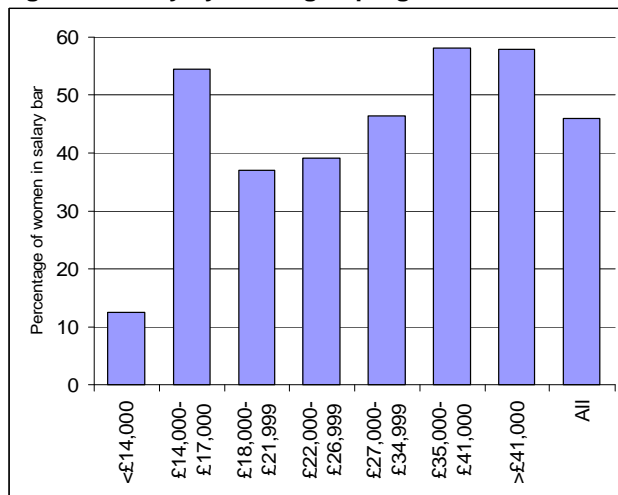
Some older women in more senior roles expressed their dismay that these principles of public service did not seem to permeate all parts of their department. They felt that poor financial management in some parts of the organisation undermined their own efforts to do their best to benefit the people of Southwark.

Some felt their attempts to innovate and add value in their roles went unrecognised by senior management, who did not have an understanding of the complexities of needs which were faced by staff working with clients 'on the ground'.

Training and staff development

The overwhelming majority of women in the e-survey (89%) had received some training during their time at the authority. 46% said they believed this training had enabled them to progress at work. This was particularly true of women earning between £14,000 and £17,000 per annum, and of those in the higher salary bands.

Figure 9 Salary by training to progress at work



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

Pay

Women in the focus group for those aged 25-34 were generally satisfied with their pay, and appreciated the opportunity to increase it through the appraisal process.

I really like Southwark because you've got your grades so you know what everyone's earning and you have got a chance to move up - you do your work and you get a benefit, you don't have to look

kindly at the right person, or do somebody a favour, which you do get in the private sector.
(aged 25-34)

I'm not 100% sure, but it seems like sometimes in private companies you're stuck in that same job and you've got that salary and you don't go up. We have our appraisals and work plans, but you've got to do pretty badly not to get your increments.
(aged 25-34)

I found that if I want to improve my salary in a dramatic way, I would have to change jobs. But this is my first job in the public sector, so it's probably going to be the longest job that I have, because I don't have to leap to get any increase at all.
(aged 25-34)

However, regarding incremental pay, some women who had reached the top of their grade were not aware of the non-consolidated increment, which aims to allow all employees to have stretching targets and so attain an increment irrespective of their position. Women felt that there was inconsistent treatment of applications for increments between teams and departments; some women had been told that there would be no increments, due to budget cuts, whereas others expected to get an increment each year quite easily. Women considered that a manager's sponsorship was essential to obtain an increment, so if no support from the manager was forthcoming they felt that they were unlikely to succeed with the application.

For others, particularly those working at a more senior level, the performance related pay structure was motivational.

I do believe I'm being paid well for the work I do and it's good to have a performance related pay structure because that does encourage you to work harder and rewards do go to those who go the extra mile.
(aged 35-44)

Some older women felt undervalued, however. They thought that, far from working in their favour, at a certain level (or within particular non-professional functions) the grading structure became a barrier.

I've got my performance appraisal this afternoon and I'm at the top of my grade so I won't get any more money. But I've noticed that it doesn't seem to happen to qualified social work staff. I think admin and finance is [disadvantaged].
(aged 44-59)

You get stuck at the top of your grade and then they want you to have stretch targets and do extra

work. But you're not going to get any more money for it, and it's just the whole way that is done, that undervalues you. (aged 44-59)

You've really got to work hard to get that extra pay - and that's when you get really low, because you think - I'm trying hard. I have moved up and down acting so many times. I'm acting-up now, I've been acting up for two years - the money is good and it's interesting. But then when I apply permanently I haven't got it for whatever reason. (aged 35-44)

Some women believed that their commitment to delivering services to the public was used as a reason by managers to keep pay down.

I once said to him [my manager], 'You should give me another raise because I'm doing additional tasks.' And he said, 'Yeah - you know you could get a really good job with BT and get paid a lot of money - but would you be happy?' (aged 45-59)

The point though is not to undervalue somebody because you think - 'Well, you're in social care, you're doing something for the community and therefore you ought to be happy'. (aged 45-59)

As we demonstrated in the *Gender Profile of Southwark's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2005:36) average full-time pay in Southwark is above the average at regional and national levels, whilst average part-time pay falls below the regional average but is higher the national average. In Southwark, the average annual salary of women working full-time is £25,027 compared with £19,700 for women across England and £26,000 for women working in London¹⁴.

Transport and travel to work

For a few women in the focus groups, travel-to-work was a positive part of working for Southwark LB as they lived in or on the boundary of the borough. For those without the use of a car, their journeys were difficult because of the unpredictability of public transport and the dispersed nature of Southwark's offices.

It was a consideration for me [when choosing an employer] definitely - but positively - in that I only live a 20 minute bus ride away, I'm just over the border of Southwark and Lambeth.. (aged 25-34)

To me I'm lucky in that respect as well because my job has 'essential car user', so I get a lease car with my job. (aged 25-34)

I personally think Southwark is really poorly catered for in terms of public transport, but that's probably because I live in North London... and it's hideous, the worst thing about the job. (age 25-34)

After two years [commuting] you just start to get massively fatigued because you're doing 3-4 hours travelling a day in London. It's not even like you're getting on a train and sitting down with a book. Each section of the journey has its various frustrations and challenges. (aged 25-34)

Approaches to career

Women of all ages emphasised the importance of taking personal responsibility for advancing their careers. This could involve a high degree of personal effort, and some pay sacrifices.

I went for a part time job once rather than be stuck at the bottom of admin, and because I'd got a good reputation I got given extra hours which helped - but you have to make it happen yourself nobody is going to come and offer it to you. (aged 45-59)

I think that its down to us as individuals to show people around us what we're worth... for them to pass stuff to us, to delegate work, to offer us training. It's up to us as well to approach our management for learning courses we want to go on. I don't think we can sit here and say it's down to the organisation to give us these. (aged 25-34)

From the e-survey data it is clear that there is a significant minority of women who are working more hours than they are contracted to deliver on a regular basis. Senior women we spoke to acknowledged that the pace and length of the working day was demanding and often exhausting. For some women

- Intensity / volume of work
- Long hours of work

are factors they consider when applying for a more senior position in the authority. Women in the focus groups also described organisational processes and cultures as barriers. These related to

- Promotion procedures and opportunities
- Organisational culture and conduct of male staff at senior levels within the organisation

The next section of the report discusses each of these areas in turn.

¹⁴ Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2005, ONS Crown Copyright reserved. These data are for women who work in Southwark some of who may be resident outside the borough.

Intensity of work

Intensity of work describes increased workloads to meet performance targets, and can be exacerbated by tight staffing or organisational restructuring. Women considered that middle management positions were worst affected. Women in these roles described their 'balancing act' - undertaking strategic planning, delivering on operational targets and managing a team of people.

The business managers are dumped on very often. Everything is thrown down from the top and everything is thrown up from the bottom and they're sitting there like flies in the middle being squashed ...so what's the top layer doing then and the personnel people? (aged 45-59)

Women pointed out that appearing to cope well with high workloads had worked against them.

Very often what happens is that if you're good at something they just pile the work on you. And then when you say, 'Well I think my job needs to be re-graded,' then it's, 'Go away' and it's not giving you any kind of real support to help you. (aged 45-59)

I don't mind working hard and I don't mind having conflicting workloads, but what I detest is having them put upon you without any discussion. (aged 45-59)

Others described situations where, as female managers stereotyped as 'good at cleaning up', they had been given additional work to resolve staff conflicts which was time consuming and brought no professional benefit.

Some senior women, while admitting that they had large workloads, had developed strategies within their team, or set their own limits, so that these were manageable.

There are eight of us at my level and we are very much a team doing the same work. We share out the work and we swap round and each of us gets involved. (aged 45-59)

I think [the size of the workload] can be self induced to a certain extent, because I do tend to take work home with me. Last week, I was doing a double shift. So that was a long day 8.30 until 10.30pm, but that's not every day and so it's about managing those things, and a lot of that is down to me. (aged 35-44)

Women in the youngest age group, and those below Grade 14¹⁵, were happiest with their workloads and the pace of work. They thought

that the demands made on them at Southwark LB were not as great as those expected of equivalent employees working in the private sector.

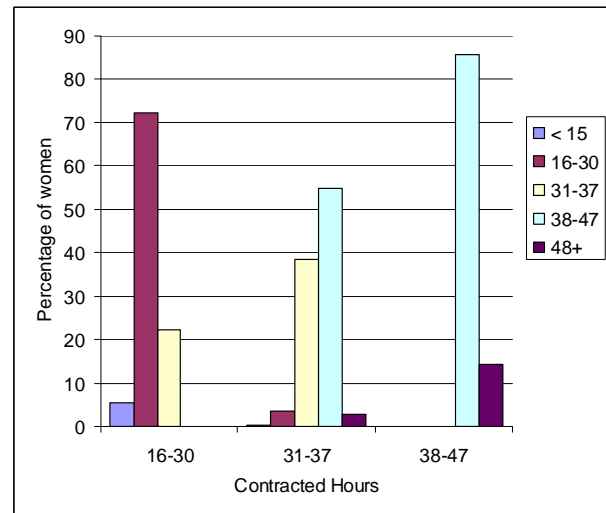
I just feel that to get the same salary in the private sector I'd have to work a lot harder ...and I wouldn't be able to leave at 5.00 if I wanted... even though we all say we don't get paid so well, I think sometimes in comparison to other organisations we do. (aged 25-34)

Long Hours

In a report published this year, the TUC has shown (*Working Time in the Public Sector*) that for the most recent year, summer 2004/05, the percentage of public sector employees working unpaid overtime was 25% - around 300,000 women. The average number of extra hours worked each week was 7.7 hours. 65% of employees working unpaid overtime were women, in line with the share of women in the public sector workforce as a whole (TUC 2006).

Our e-survey showed that 53% of women respondents in LB Southwark were working more than their contracted hours (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Comparison of actual and contracted hours worked in an 'average' week'



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

Women working part-time (16-30 hours each week) were the most likely to be working their contracted hours (71%). Of the women contracted to work 31-37 hours, 55% work said they worked 38 hours or more each week. For women contracted to work 38-47 hours each week, 13% were working 48 or more hours - although the remainder of this group worked their contracted hours.

¹⁵ Grade 14 earns £40,611 - £50,850 p.a. (2005/06)

Why are some women currently working these long hours? Women reported that the need to work at a high pace and for long hours was reinforced by an organisational culture surrounding senior managers.

Southwark has a very strong culture in long hours, it's because you're doing evening meetings but you're still expected to be in [the office] in the morning and carry on... You're just expected to be at a lot of different things. (aged 45-59)

The pub [team gathering] started at 6.30pm. I had been in work since 7.30am that day. It's not like I just wandered in at 12.00 - but the issue is the approach that, as a manager, I should be there because there is nothing else in my life. (aged 45-59)

This aspect of the culture means, in practice, that work-life balance policies stop operating above a certain level. Evidence from the e-survey shows that fewer than half the women in each salary band used the flexi-time scheme. Overall this averages at 33%. The lowest rate is reported by women in the most senior roles. Overall 48% of respondents with at least one child under 10 have used Parental Leave, and around 4% of women with unpaid caring responsibilities have taken Carers Leave. 2% of respondents had taken Extended Leave.

The main frustration for me is that senior managers don't benefit from work life balance, we don't do flexi, we're expected to go to evening meetings in our own time - and we go to a lot of them - and I find that exhausting. I understand that at a senior level you need to be flexible, but they are long hours and we could benefit from a little bit of work life balance and they'd probably end up with a healthier lot. (aged 45-59)

For some women the loss of flexibility was more of a disincentive than the extra hours they were required to work. They felt that part of the deal in accepting a senior job was agreeing to sign up to any hours, without dissent. In other words, that there was no longer any flexibility; work would always come first over their personal preferences.

I had been working from home in my previous role and when I got this job they said, 'You can't work from home in this job.' and I said 'Well why not?' and they just said 'Well you just can't - we don't do that here.' It's almost like you get to a certain level at the council and you're not permitted to do the things that they talk about...Southwark has got a very good equality and diversity policy, but it stops at a certain point. (aged 45-59)

Consequently, some women who have chosen to work flexible full-time hours, were aware that they have affected their chances of further progression:

I do full time over four days and it works very well and my manager's been very supportive. I don't know if it's in payback, but certainly in terms of general career opportunities, there are actually disparities between grades. There are other people who have the same job description but are on a different grade and that can be quite frustrating. (aged 25-34)

The effort and process involved in acquiring the relevant experience needed to work at the next level was another important factor in women's decisions about progression.

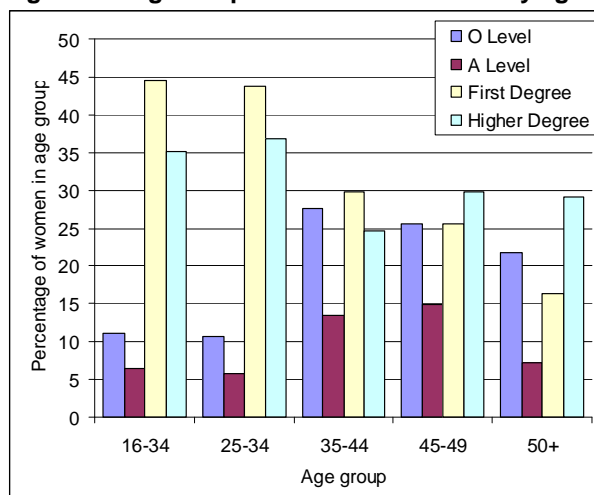
Promotion procedures and opportunities

Our e-survey data show that women aged 25-34 are among the highest qualified in Southwark Council. This is likely to reflect both younger women's greater access to higher education, and the tendency for highly qualified women to remain in paid employment when raising children (EOC 2005b).

They noted that having a degree was an essential criterion in many job descriptions for senior positions in the London labour market.

For quite a lot of jobs a degree is essential... Certainly some jobs - central government or Home Office, etc., quite like to see that you've got these qualifications because it shows that you've got more of a business knowledge. I suppose it just gives you that edge over other people. (aged 25-34)

Figure 11 Highest qualifications achieved by age



Source: E-survey of female employees in Southwark 2006

Older women non-graduates sometimes felt putting a degree qualification above relevant experience was unfair and inappropriate.

As an older woman, (I feel) we may not necessarily have had the opportunity to get the type of qualification Southwark is now stipulating we need to have, in order to have an advancement in your career. They negate the years and wealth of experience that we have - they don't recognise that. (aged 45-59)

Women expressed frustration about:

- the appraisal and promotion process,
- the dependence on agency staff to fill unforeseen vacancies,
- an emphasis in job descriptions on relevant experience rather than proven ability, and
- a lack of appropriate training for those wanting to step up into management.

Many felt that the appraisal and work planning processes restricted their opportunities to develop new skills by being overly prescriptive. Performance related pay linked to work plan targets acted as a disincentive to being innovative in their role.

It's the work plan culture - when I first came to Southwark there was no such thing as the work plan. You came to work and you had a job description, but you'd also pick and choose what you did. You'd make your job....say you're a housing officer but you really wanted to do contract work, then maybe you'd be allowed to shadow the contracts manager, and be allowed to do some of their work. Whereas now everything has to be written into your work plan, and if you haven't done it by the end of the year it will impact on your increment. (aged 35-44)

You have to decide to take a risk - whether or not I'm just going to work to my work plan or whether or not you seek other things and stretch yourself. (aged 35-44)

A number of senior women identified problems with the implementation of performance management. They were concerned that their individual work plans did not link coherently to unit, team or departmental strategies, making work planning and appraisals feel meaningless:

You work with lots of different people from the customer service perspective across the whole council and they have got wildly differing objectives and there's no common place [understanding]. There's nothing that sort of pulls us all together. (aged 45-59)

We've just gone through a whole business planning exercise and my team had to try and somehow align our work on this list of 'priorities'. You go through this 37 page document that doesn't necessarily include you in it. (aged 45-59)

Some felt that career development was not seen by all managers as an important part of the appraisal process.

The appraisals are meant to work for the employees as well as the employer. If you have a good manager then they will - but if you have a bad manager, and somebody from above says, 'You've got to have it done by Friday.' They'll just fit you in when they want to, and it's just a paper exercise. (aged 35-44)

My manager said to me that appraisals don't have to be positive. (aged 45-59)

Many women were frustrated that their appraisal tended to focus on improving performance in their current job, rather than offering the scope to discuss ways in which they could prepare for the next step up.

It's harder to get creative solutions to moving forward, because if you work plan doesn't say you manage anything - you can't ask for management training. (aged 35-44)

How do I get the relevant training to take me to the next grade? There's nothing structured there [in the performance appraisal] and you can be in the same post - and we have got quite a number of [colleagues] that have been in the same post for 20/30 years - and that's stagnation. (aged 45-59)

Women expressed some dissatisfaction with the internal training courses they were able to access. They considered that those in middle ranking positions were being overlooked.

It's almost like lower end and top end [are catered for] but not much for the middle. That's how I feel. (aged 35-44)

The first year I had lots of opportunities for different workshops within Southwark and outside. It all added up - it did help. But then I'm feeling more barriers now for things like the leadership course - the more expensive four or five day course. (aged 25-34)

A line manager's support for accessing training and new opportunities was seen as critical.

She was a person who encouraged her staff to train and develop and move on, and would encourage you to apply for positions if they became vacant and give you the support to do that. It wasn't just 'Here, why don't you go for that.'

It was more like 'I think you've got the skills to do that job let's just go through the criteria.'
(aged 35-44)

The training I've asked my manager for, they've always said 'Yes', and at the same time I've been approached by my manager saying, 'Do you think you'd be interested in doing this training?' So it's been a two way thing.
(aged 25-34)

Other women in different departments had not had a positive experience. They felt that managerial support was conditional.

I think there definitely is an element of - does your face fit or not? - and underneath all this equality stuff and fairness of recruitment, basically if you get on with your manager and you deliver, then people could possibly pull strings more than they might do otherwise.
(aged 25-34)

Women considered that a lack of transparent decision-making extended to advertising job vacancies and promotion opportunities.

What I'm finding really frustrating is that a couple of people are now suddenly acting-up in roles. I appreciate that for maybe an acting-up position, if you really do have the intention to recruit permanently, you don't necessarily want to go through a very elaborate process. But where there is a clear pool of people at a particular grade, why does only one person get the whisper in the ear?
(aged 24-34)

The equal opportunities policy is meant to say that every single job gets advertised, so that everybody has the opportunity to apply for that job. I've seen it time and time again, where people have been given the opportunity to act-up on an informal basis for six months, and then the job gets advertised, and they just happen to have that experience.
(aged 35-44)

It's about grooming. It makes a huge difference and people are chosen and are groomed to go on - but if you're not chosen, then there are walls there and barriers.
(aged 35-44)

Restrictive or ambiguous job descriptions were seen by some women as a way in which managers ring-fenced vacancies and opportunities.

I did recently go for an [internal] interview myself. I felt the qualification I had was suitable for what was advertised - and it was argued black and blue with me that this was not the case. The job description was so ambiguous.
(aged 45-59)

We see these jobs getting invented and usually it gets invented with a particular candidate in mind.
(aged 35-44)

Younger women were particularly frustrated by a managerial dependency on agency staff as a 'stop-gap' measure. These temporary appointments effectively reduced openings for permanent staff. They believed that time-consuming recruitment processes encouraged managers to use agency appointments to side-step the bureaucracy involved in finding a permanent replacement. In their view, pressure to deliver services reinforced managers' preference for quick solutions.

There's a council policy whereby if a member of staff leaves a job, it shouldn't necessarily just be filled. You should look at the job and ask, 'Is it still what we need?' I think the managers probably have so much on their plates they just think, 'Oh, I'll do that after I've got the agency person in.' That's a stop-gap measure, but the stop gap measure never becomes anything other.
(aged 25-34)

Basically it's a management thing, because if you feel the members of staff you've got within your team are not able to progress, then it should be an ongoing communication with that member of staff as to what gaps they might need to fill and what can the department do to support them... rather than just recruit temps.
(aged 25-34)

Women's concerns about the availability and access to training and progression opportunities may be shared by their male colleagues. However, in many cases it was clear that relationships with managers had a gendered dimension. Many women reported that they were operating in a culture which favoured men.

Organisational culture

The women did not all experience organisational culture in the same way. However, many women in the focus groups felt the prevailing culture placed them at a disadvantage as women.

In some departments, women commented that sexist attitudes were blatant. Women working in male dominated service areas described incidents when they had felt patronised by male colleagues whose intention was to attribute their achievements to their sexuality rather than their professional ability. The following are comments from senior managers.

I mean yesterday we were coming back from a meeting with a particular department. It went well,

and as we were walking back, one of my colleagues patted me on the shoulder and said, 'Good girl, you shone the socks off them.'
(aged 45-59)

I had an incident where somebody sent me an extremely sexist e-mail, and he sent it out to the department including me, and I complained to my boss, who just laughed. He basically said, 'Well you can take it to personnel if you want.' It's more the fact that by not doing anything he was showing that he was supporting it.
(aged 45-59)

For others, discriminatory attitudes were likely to be hidden, since the department's culture did not support them being openly expressed. There were a few women whose experience was so different, they found it difficult to believe that they worked in the same organisation.

I'm sure there are plenty issues within the department that need to be addressed with regards to diversity and equality, but what I would say is different, is that there's the confidence to raise them and the confidence to challenge. It's years since I've thought, 'Well, no, I mustn't say anything.' I'm really shocked that that sort of [sexist] behaviour is acceptable and endorsed, because even if people may think it, they certainly wouldn't do it openly, because they know they would get into a lot of trouble.
(aged 45-59)

Women with children described how their managers and colleagues assumed that they were 'family orientated' rather than 'work orientated' and questioned their commitment to their job.

If they've got children it's almost like it's perceived that their work is a job, and not a career because they've got something more important in their lives. I do feel that for a lot of women who have children, it's perceived that they are not taking this seriously. It's always assumed that they're not ambitious, and I find it really offensive.
(aged 45-59)

Women had different ways of coping with these attitudes, some challenged them openly, others down played or even hid their family responsibilities.

They know that I'm a single parent and that I haven't got a partner, and one guy turns around to me and says, 'So who's looking after your child tonight then?' and I said, 'Don't worry, I'll make my arrangements. Who's looking after your kids anyway?'
(aged 45-59)

I've got a child and there were certain sort of comments from quite senior members of staff. I'm now pregnant again, and I just don't want to tell

my managers at all, because there are opportunities over the next few months [in the department] and I just think as soon as I say something [I'll be ruled out].
(aged 25-34)

A few senior women considered that patriarchal attitudes that existed in the wider local community and among elected members reinforced this culture within the authority.

Women of all ages said there was a lack of female role models. They felt that some women in senior positions modelled themselves on their male colleagues and could be the least supportive line managers.

People who have reached high levels, director level or business manager level, most of them have been in the council a long time and are a certain type of female, hippyified... There is a lack of female role models in higher places who have come in because they're dynamic and excellent at their job.
(aged 25-34)

I have found that I've been more successful with the male managers than I have with the female managers, because there's not some challenge or competition that they feel - that you're after their job. That's the sort of vibes that I used to get from female managers.
(aged 45-59)

Women in senior positions, some of them seem to be figureheads, and others have discovered that to get ahead in Southwark requires you to act in a certain way. And acting in that certain way tends to be sort of male orientated because 95% of the meetings that I go into are full of middle aged men.
(aged 45-59)

Black women felt the lack of black role models more acutely than a lack of women at senior level.

In the department it's all white... There's this meeting that they have every single week and I'm the black woman there. It makes you think, 'Well, where is the kind of succession planning around getting more representation around the table?' and it is like a little network, and I've never felt part of it.
(aged 35-44)

Others identified the 'male club' as the most significant barrier to their career progression, questioning whether they wanted or would be able to join, were they to advance their career.

If I were to move higher up in the service ... there are a number of people who are part, or who appear to be part of a club, like a network. They pat each other on the back. It's mostly male as well, so I would be expected to become part of thatI can take that or leave it really. I don't want to

be a sheep that follows the Director around just to look good, and I know there are a lot of people who do that.
(aged 35-44)

This made guidance from their immediate line manager even more critical and valuable.

Support for career development

The importance of managerial support for women's career development has already been mentioned. The women reported various ways their managers had helped them. These included:

- exposing them to new experiences / networks,
- building their confidence,
- creating opportunities which could fit with childcare, and
- supporting training related to the next job level.

Senior women who questioned the adequacy of the authority's workforce development strategy and approach to succession planning, felt that they had a lot of useful experience they could offer younger colleagues.

But the worrying thing is, we have the sort of experience that they're [Southwark Council] quite happy to throw out of the door, instead of using the knowledge that we've got to help younger colleagues to come on, and I'm sure we would be happy to do.
(aged 45-59)

I'd be happy to have somebody to shadow me for succession planning. I think that would be sensible to the organisation as well.
(aged 45-59)

We could help them not to fall into some of the pitfalls we've fallen into over the years.
(aged 45-59)

Other relationships which assisted women to progress included mentors external to Southwark Council (including professional contacts and colleagues working for different organisations) who shared information and intelligence about vacancies:

For black women - there's just nothing there, but I have cultivated my own network, and that's really important to do internally and externally for your own sanity.
(aged 35-44)

Training opportunities

Women considered that acting-up and secondment opportunities were beneficial in allowing them to build their skills and knowledge

in preparation for a career move, and to profitably mark time waiting for senior vacancies to arise.

As discussed earlier in the report, women's frustration lay in the *ad hoc* way in which these opportunities were filled.

It's not necessarily training you need. Sometimes it's just learning from your own mistakes, or working on a project. But if you're limiting those opportunities, you're also limiting who's going to go forward.
(aged 44-59)

These opportunities provide some of the same benefits as managerial support: exposure to new areas; new challenges and opportunities to build skills; enhanced confidence; create alternative career paths.

It could be really useful if there was some kind of secondment where you find out what happens in other departments in terms of what you can bring from your experience, and from your department - a fresh way of looking at things.
(aged 25-34)

I think that shadowing would be so useful. I work so closely with other departments throughout the council, but we come at it from a different angle. If we could do some sort of job swap for three months, you'd get such a good idea of where people are coming from.
(aged 25-34)

When I worked in Westminster they had like a form of job rotation. I moved in to different positions, all exactly the same grade and I went round in a circle and came back to the original job in the end, and I've got that all tucked up under my belt. I often think if there were more secondments like that.
(aged 35-44)

Some women felt their careers had benefited from networking and training focusing on exchanging professional knowledge. It had given them skills 'to sell' themselves more effectively, and to know their own worth.

In my previous authority the Borough Solicitor would organise fortnightly meetings to pass on strategies, and provide support in the broadest sense.
(aged 35-44)

Conclusion

This study has shown that, irrespective of family situation or age, many women working within Southwark Council are highly committed to their jobs, enthusiastic about training and development, and aspire to have successful careers.

They value the investment the local authority has made in making training available to them, although most also view their own career development as a personal responsibility.

The women in this study appreciate the policies Southwark Council has put in place to support its employees in achieving a good work-life balance, although they considered that communication and implementation was not consistent across the authority – it depended on the approach of individual managers.

Many women noted that there is an organisational culture at Southwark Council which, in their view, can disadvantage them in achieving the career success they would like.

Many women in our study were working hours well beyond those they were contracted to deliver, and there was a feeling that this was expected in higher level jobs. This meant that some women, part-time employees especially, felt excluded from senior level positions, either because they felt they were only available full-time, or the job would require them to be constantly 'on call'.

If experienced and committed women feel unable to apply for senior jobs within their capability, it is likely that Southwark Council is not getting the best it could from its female workforce, and that some women are employed in the local authority in positions below their true potential.

The *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* research programme has already uncovered other important evidence of this problem, which is a key feature of part-time employment in the UK (Grant et al 2005, Darton and Hurrell 2005). It is now beginning to be widely recognised (Kingsmill 2001, EOC 2005a) that organisations wishing to make good use of their investments in human capital must do more to create more flexible and more part-time jobs at senior levels.

For many women in our study, Southwark Council is their local 'employer of choice', and we were struck by the commitment to serve the local community which was expressed by those who took part in our discussion groups. The future challenge will be to retain this committed workforce in the context of a shrinking working age population, and expected job growth in other parts of the economy (LSC 2005). We turn in conclusion to some recommendations which may assist Southwark Council in rising to this future challenge.

Recommendations

Implement Southwark Council's work-life balance policies at all levels

1. Further promotion of working arrangements that better achieve a work-life balance could be undertaken and overtly supported at senior executive level.

2. Managers are the key to the successful implementation of work-life balance policies¹⁶. While Southwark Council's policies already offer flexible working arrangements to solve business problems, implementation is sometimes perceived to be inconsistent. We suggest that the application of options, guidance and support to managers is reviewed, to ensure fair and appropriate application.

3. Raise awareness among managers and staff of Southwark's statutory gender equality obligations, particularly with regard to the rights of pregnant women.

Improve the transparency and clarity of pay and promotion procedures

4. Some women in this study had limited knowledge and awareness of pay and promotion procedures within Southwark Council, including the operation of the performance management scheme and its relationship with incremental awards. Further work may be needed to maximise the effectiveness of the appraisal process (by both staff and managers) so that perceptions of consistency are enhanced and it

¹⁶ Where an organisational culture is based on trust between managers and staff, and prioritises outcomes over 'presenteeism', considerable organisational benefits arise from implementing flexible working arrangements (Yeandle et al 2006).

can play its full part in enabling women to advance in their careers.

5. To monitor the progress of initiatives in this area, additional analysis of the data already held by Southwark Council's human resources department (e.g. on changes over time in the grades of male and female employees) could be undertaken. It will be particularly important to explore in more detail the situation of those working part-time.

6. Review arrangements for paid parental leave in line with proposed legislation and the findings of this study.

Provide further support for Black and ethnic minority women employees

7. Southwark Council already has a good range of management training opportunities, but some women employees from ethnic minority groups felt they are difficult to access. Given the importance of enabling this group of women staff to benefit from these opportunities, more work could be developed on management development opportunities and promoting appropriate role models to increase take up by a greater number of ethnic minority women.

8. Some women from ethnic minority groups stressed the benefits they gained from external networks, which had provided them with role models and mentors. Ways of facilitating (and formalising) links to such networks could be considered as a possible way of giving additional support to this group of women employees.

Extend training opportunities to develop and prepare women for promotion

9. Some women reported that secondment opportunities had been important in enabling them to move forward in their careers. They felt secondments had helped them gain skills, experience and confidence. Women in our focus groups suggested that a secondment register (through which departments could exchange staff for mutual gain, sharing information and overcoming staffing shortages) would be useful. They also felt that centralised information about secondments and 'acting up' opportunities was needed and opportunities communicated to staff. It was perceived that this could help to increase the number of female applicants and ensure women are able to benefit from the available opportunities.

10. Expand number of places on the Fast Forward Leadership Programme incorporating short rotational secondments.

11. Older women in the focus groups felt they had a lot to offer younger women, as mentors who could support them in their careers, and as advisers who could help them improve their performance. More opportunities for mentoring, including arrangements for cross-departmental mentoring, could be considered. This might be an effective way of transferring the skills and knowledge which already exist within the female workforce, and of ensuring that the experience and organisational knowledge of senior and older staff is made available to less experienced employees.

12. Many women in the study felt that although they had the potential to perform a more senior role, they were held back by their lack of formal qualifications, with particular reference to degrees. Ways of recognising and valuing relevant experience (as an alternative to formal qualifications), needs to be explored within appointment criteria.

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Appendix 1 Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets

The *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* project was funded, between September 2003 and August 2006, by a core European Social Fund grant to Professor Sue Yeandle and her research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion*, Sheffield Hallam University. The award was made from within ESF Policy Field 5 Measure 2, 'Gender and Discrimination in Employment'. The grant was supplemented with additional funds and resources provided by a range of partner agencies, notably the Equal Opportunities Commission, the TUC, and 12 English local authorities.

The GELLM project output comprises:

- new statistical analysis of district-level labour market data, led by Dr Lisa Buckner, producing separate **Gender Profiles** of the local labour markets of each of the participating local authorities (Buckner, Tang and Yeandle 2004, 2005,2006) - available from the local authorities concerned and at www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi
- 6 **Local Research Studies**, each involving between three and six of the project's local authority partners. Locality and Synthesis reports of these studies, published spring-summer 2006 are available at www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi. Details of other publications and presentations relating to the GELLM programme are also posted on this website.
 1. *Working below potential: women and part-time work*, led by Dr Linda Grant and part-funded by the EOC (first published by the EOC in 2005)
 2. *Connecting women with the labour market*, led by Dr Linda Grant
 3. *Ethnic minority women and access to the labour market*, led by Bernadette Stiehl
 4. *Women's career development in the local authority sector in England* led by Dr Cinnamon Bennett
 5. *Addressing women's poverty: local labour market initiatives* led by Karen Escott
 6. *Local challenges in meeting demand for domiciliary care* led from autumn 2005 by Prof. Sue Yeandle (and prior to this by Anu Suokas).

The GELLM Team

Led by Professor Sue Yeandle, the members of the GELLM research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion* are: Dr Cinnamon Bennett, Dr Lisa Buckner, Ian Chesters (administrator), Karen Escott, Dr Linda Grant, Christopher Price, Lucy Shipton, Bernadette Stiehl, Anu Suokas (until autumn 2005), and Dr Ning Tang. The team is grateful to Dr Pamela Fisher for her contribution to the project in 2004, and for the continuing advice and support of Dr Chris Gardiner.

The GELLM Partnership

The national partners supporting the GELLM project have been the Equal Opportunities Commission and the TUC. The project's 12 local authority partners are: Birmingham City Council, the London Borough of Camden, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Newcastle City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Somerset County Council, the London Borough of Southwark, Thurrock Council, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council and West Sussex County Council. The North East Coalition of Employers has also provided financial resources via Newcastle City Council. The team is grateful for the support of these agencies, without which the project could not have been developed. The GELLM project engaged Professor Damian Grimshaw, Professor Ed Fieldhouse (both of Manchester University) and Professor Irene Hardill (Nottingham Trent University), as external academic advisers to the project team, and thanks them for their valuable advice and support.

Appendix 2 Research methods

This study focused on women with educational qualifications and already in jobs with career development potential. It therefore identified women via the grading structure (rather than the departmental structure) of the local authority. The study methods involved:

- **Documentary analysis** of the local authority context and of local authority HR data, to map women's and men's employment within the authority. This identified *strategies and initiatives* the authority had already launched to support women employees in their career development, the *service areas/departments* and *organisational structures* in which women and men were working, the *level* at which they were employed, their *working time* patterns, records of *leave* for family, caring (etc.) purposes, and any records relating to *training* and *promotion*.
- Distribution of an **e-questionnaire** to women employees to gather information on *age, ethnicity, disability, level of education, training, working hours, pay, caring/childcare responsibilities, use of flexible employment policies*, and to secure agreement to participate in the focus groups. A link to the e-survey was sent in an email to all employees, male and female, with direct access to Groupwise (the internal email system). Only data relating to female respondents has been analysed for this report. Data from male respondents is available to Southwark Council on request.
- **Focus group discussions** were held with women employees identified via the e-questionnaire. The focus groups provided the main evidence about women's experiences, values, aspirations, and needs and about barriers to their career progression. Women of different ages were selected and grouped together to capture the experience and attitudes of women at different stages in their careers:
 - Women in more senior positions, aged approximately 45-59, including some women who have been at the top of their grade for a number of years.
 - Women in the 24-34 age group.
 - Women aged 35-44 with and without children.

With each group we explored how far their working lives were meeting their current expectations, and the extent to which their views were common to the group.

- **Semi-structured interviews** (face to face and by telephone) with managers including senior managers. Some of these interviews included exploring how far the authority has strategies in place for supporting women employees in the development of their careers.

Data analysis

The analysis of the e-survey data focused on women's experiences of working time (both contractual and actual working hours), pay (salary scale and change of pay scale), training (training opportunities and training to promotion), caring/childcare responsibilities and their use of flexible employment policies in relation to age, qualification level and service area.

Qualitative data collected from the interviews and focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed observing data protection regulations. The research questions provided a basis for coding the interview data. The questions to senior managers and covered perceptions of corporate commitment and actions to promote gender equality, changes in policy emphasis over time, and the organisational challenges still to overcome. The focus group discussions explored attitudes to job and sector (e.g. features of 'employer of choices'), promotion and advancement in the authority (e.g. the main concerns in developing a career), training and qualifications (e.g. perception of the authority's provision of training opportunities) and 'blue sky' thinking questions on women's future support needs in their career development.

