

Paula Sandford  
Clerical Supervisor  
Committee for Finance and Personnel  
Room 419  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3XX

16 February 2009

Dear Paula Sandford

**RE: PUBLIC PROCUREMENT INQUIRY**

CAJ recently read the public notice about this inquiry and considered that it would be useful to provide you with some of our initial thoughts on this matter. Public procurement, and more specifically, the extent to which procurement policies generally can be linked to social objectives such as the promotion of equality is an issue around which CAJ has taken a long-standing interest. CAJ would be of the view for example that the requirement contained in the Equality Impact Assessment process (contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act) that public bodies consider “alternative measures which better promote equality of opportunity” provides the framework within which specific measures linking public procurement to social objectives should be located. Clearly however, there are a wide range of other issues relevant to ensuring an effective and efficient system of procurement for Northern Ireland such as impact on SMEs, openness, etc.

It would be our view however that these issues were largely and indeed adequately addressed by the fairly comprehensive Procurement Review, established by the DFP in 2001. CAJ, along with a number of other organizations made submissions to this review, and largely welcomed the findings of the review team. CAJ has also met with the Central Procurement Directorate to discuss the implementation of the Procurement Review, and sat on the advisory group that was subsequently established to assist with the

production of the guidance on Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement issued in May 2008.

In fact, the CAJ position would be that certainly the key arguments in relation to wider discussions about the value of linkages between procurement and social objectives (particularly in relation to effectiveness, value for money, legality etc) have been adequately addressed and that the focus now should be one of moving towards implementation of the new Guidance. We would also wish for the Committee to exercise caution in order to prevent “reinventing the wheel” and ensure avoidance of ground that has in fact been well covered by others quite recently.

In order to seek to assist the Committee with their deliberations on these matters we have listed below a range of materials which we think shows the extensive workload that has been produced in relation to this area to date, and which you may find useful for your discussions. In particular, we would consider the evaluation of the pilot procurement projects for assisting with recruitment of the unemployed to be useful in that this relates to an assessment of actual projects which have already been carried out. Moreover, it is clear that the success of the pilot projects highlights the potential benefits of such an approach to public procurement being rolled out across the wider public sector more generally.

CAJ would of course be happy to meet with the Committee to provide any assistance possible for this important issue, or indeed to clarify any of the matters that arise here. We hope that you find this useful, and should you have any queries regarding any of these matters or wish to contact us further please do not hesitate to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Cunningham  
Equality Project Worker

## Suggested Materials for the Public Procurement Inquiry by the Committee for Finance and Personnel

1. CAJ submission to the Procurement Review (May 2001) (Attached)
2. Equality of Opportunity and Sustainable Development in Public Sector Procurement: Guidance issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Central Procurement Directorate (May 2008) (Attached)
3. Evaluation of Pilot Project on Utilising the Unemployed in Public Contracts Case Study (Attached)
4. Pilot Project on Utilising the Unemployed in Public Contracts: Final Evaluation Report (September 2005), Professor Andrew Erridge et al, University of Ulster, (Attached)
5. Guardian news feature on success of procurement as tool for achieving social objectives in Scotland (Attached).
6. Buying Social Justice: Equality, Government Procurement, and Legal Change, Oxford University Press, (2007)
7. Regeneration and the Race Equality Duty: Report of a Formal Investigation in England, Scotland and Wales (September 2007) (Attached)
8. Equality and Diversity Strategy, Olympic Delivery Authority (July 2007), (Attached)