

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Council: 27 June 2007

Subject: Gender Equality Scheme

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Draft Gender Equality Scheme for approval by Council, following on from the introduction of the Gender duty in April 2007.

2. Background

2.1 As previously reported to the Social Justice Committee, these requirements were introduced in the Equality Act 2006, which placed a general duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity between men and women. There were also specific duties introduced, which are outlined in the Scheme, including publishing a Gender Equality Scheme by 29 June 2007.

2.2 This legislation marked a shift in emphasis requiring local authorities to be more proactive in eliminating discrimination and harassment and promoting equality of opportunity, rather than avoiding discrimination and responding to individuals taking action.

2.3 The full requirements are outlined in the Draft Gender Equality Scheme, which was developed in consultation with staff, service users and trade unions, and also includes a detailed Action Plan for 2007-2010.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The Council must ensure that it meets the General Duty and the specific requirements under the duty. This also includes the production of an Equal Pay Statement by 28th September 2007 and work is currently underway on this in Corporate Personnel.

3.2 A Gender Equality Working Group has been set up and this will continue to work on the implementation of the scheme and Action Plan. Each Directorate will produce a detailed action plan. Mechanisms for consultation with staff and service users have been set up and these will continue to be developed.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** Corporate Personnel are putting systems in place to monitor the workforce, this will cover all equal opportunities monitoring information, including race and disability. This information will eventually be fed on to the HR management system and a member of staff is in post to take this forward.
- 4.2** There has been some interest in attending employee focus groups in this area; this continues to be promoted, particularly following the introduction of staff training in equalities.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** As previously reported, there will be financial implications in relation to meeting fully the requirements of the Equal Pay Act, but much of this is already highlighted in the Pay Modernisation process.
- 5.2** As previously reported, further costs may be incurred if services fail to meet the Gender Equality Duty, which could be highlighted through impact assessment of services.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** If the Council fails to meet the General Duty it may find itself subject to enforcement action, carried out by the Equal Opportunities Commission, or the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, which will replace the three existing Commissions (Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission) in October 2007. There are two methods of enforcement, a judicial review or the serving of a non-compliance notice.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Council is required to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2006, ensuring that it is more proactive about eliminating unlawful sex discrimination and harassment and promoting equality of opportunity between women and men.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1** It is recommended that Members agree:-
- to continue to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men;
 - to approve the Draft Gender Equality Scheme and support the work of the Policy Unit, and all Directorates in implementing the Scheme;
 - to continue to participate in the Equality and Diversity Working Group, membership agreed by the Council on 30 May 2007;

- to ongoing work within departments to implement the scheme and achieve the targets set out in the Action Plan, co-ordinated and monitored via the Gender Equality working group;
- that work continues to involve staff and service users in the operation and further development of the scheme; and
- that an initial report on progress is made to tie in with the timescales for reporting on the Race and Disability Equality Schemes in November 2007 to give an overall update on progress.

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Date: 20 June 2007

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Appendix: Draft Gender Equality Scheme

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All