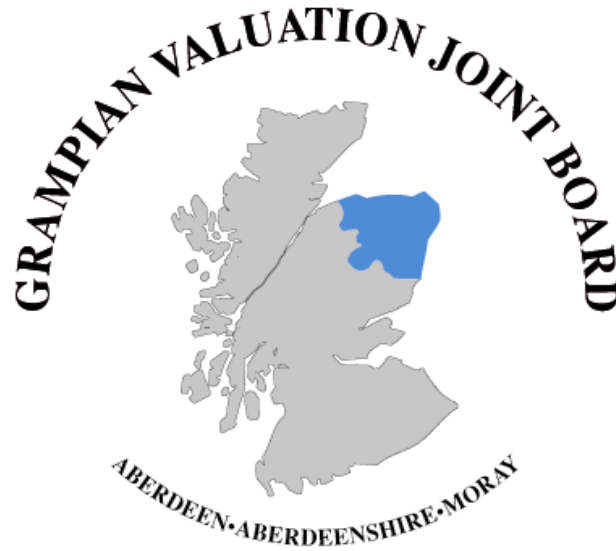


Grampian Valuation Joint Board



Gender Equality Scheme 2009-2012

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Preamble

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board (the Board) is an organisation of modest size providing limited public services in relation to Lands Valuation, Council Tax Banding and Electoral Registration but it recognises the duty it has to promote gender equality.

The Board is not a local authority. It exists to provide the local taxation service to the three local authorities within the Grampian area (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray councils). It employs the Assessor and his staff in terms of the Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995. The Assessor compiles the Valuation Roll for Non-Domestic Rating in terms of the Lands Valuation (Scotland) Acts and the Council Tax Valuation List in terms of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Through local arrangements the Assessor is appointed as Electoral Registration Officer to each council and compiles the Electoral Register in terms of the Representation of the People Acts.

Members of the Board are appointed by the three councils of which there are elected members with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire each appointing six members and Moray appointing three.

Background

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 has been amended by the Equality Act 2006 so that it now places a general duty on all public bodies, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women

'Due regard' means that due weight should be given to the need to promote gender equality in proportion to its relevance. The greater the relevance of a function to gender equality, the greater regard should be paid to it.

As part of the duty, public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment in employment and vocational training for people who intend to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone gender reassignment.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 give an individual a right to the same contractual pay and benefits as a person of the opposite sex in the same employment, where the man and woman are doing:

- Like work; or
- Work rated as equivalent under an analytical job evaluation study;
or
- Work that is proved to be of equal value

The employer will not be required to provide the same pay and benefits if it can prove that the difference in pay or benefits is genuinely due to a reason other than one related to sex.

The Board has specific duties under the Act to:-

- Prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme showing how it intends to fulfil the general and specific duties and setting out its gender equality objectives.

In preparing a scheme:-

- Consult staff, service users and others
- Take into account any information it has gathered or considers relevant as to how its policies and practices affect gender equality in the workplace and in the delivery of its services.
- In formulating its overall gender equality objectives, consider the need to have objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap.

Ensure that the scheme sets out the actions the Board has taken or intends to take to:-

- Gather information on the effect of its policies and practices on men and women, in employment, services and performance of its functions.
- Use the information to review the implementation of the scheme objectives.

- Assess the impact of its current and future policies and practices on gender equality, and have due regard to the results of impact assessments.
- Consult relevant staff, service users and others.
- Ensure implementation of the scheme objectives.
- Implement the scheme and their actions for gathering and using information within three years of publication of the scheme, unless it is unreasonable or impracticable to do so.
- Review and revise the scheme at least every three years.
- Report on progress annually.

Unlawful discrimination in the Sex Discrimination Act and the gender duty means:-

- Discrimination against women and men, in employment and education; in goods, facilities and services and in the exercise of public functions;
- Harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity leave;
- Discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment in employment and vocational training;
- Discrimination in the employment field on the grounds that a person is married or a civil partner;
- Victimisation

This Gender Equality Scheme sets out how the Board intends to address the strands contained in the new Gender Equality Duty which must be supported by an action plan.

The Duty came into force on 6 April 2007, however this is the first publication submitted by the Board.

Introduction

The Board provides services to the Grampian area. This covers Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray. According to the General Register Office for Scotland the population of Aberdeen is 210,400, Aberdeenshire 241,460 and Moray 87,770. There are more females than males throughout Scotland in all Council areas other than Shetland and Moray. The higher than average proportion of males in Moray is due primarily to the presence of two Royal Air Force bases.

Ultimately, the Gender Equality Duty can be seen as recognition that despite thirty years of sex equality legislation too little has been achieved in eradicating sex discrimination and sexual harassment, unequal pay, pregnancy discrimination, occupational segregation and other gender inequalities.

This Gender Equality Scheme will highlight how the Board intends to meet its duties to promote gender equality.

The Board has 84 members of staff in total. This includes 37 males and 41 females with 6 vacancies as at 1st April 2009. All work full-time apart from 11 female employees who work on a part-time basis. This includes 37 full-time male employees and 30 full-time female employees.

Aims / Objectives

The Board must meet the duties to:-

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women

The objectives will be to:-

- Ensure that the promotion of equal opportunities are included in all policies, plans and working practice
- Publish our equal pay policy
- Carry out equality impact assessments on our policies and activities
- Consult on our working practice with staff and customers
- Gather, use and publish information

Equal Pay Statement

The Board is committed to the principle of equal opportunities in employment and believes as part of that principle that male and female employees should receive equal pay for the same or broadly similar work, for work rated as equivalent and for work of equal value.

We understand that a right to equal pay between males and females free of sex bias is enshrined within both European Community law and United Kingdom legislation.

We believe that in eliminating sex bias in our pay system we are sending a positive message to our employees and the community in general. It makes good organisational sense to have a fair transparent pay system and avoiding unfair discrimination improves morale and enhances efficiency.

The Board has worked in partnership with the recognised Trade Union to this end and implemented a reviewed pay and grading structure as from 1st October, 2006. The agreement is compliant with equal pay legislation and as such a non-discriminatory pay and grading structure is in place which ensures equal pay for all employees covered by the agreement.

The Boards objectives are to:

- Eliminate any unlawful practices that may impact on pay
- Take appropriate remedial action

The Grampian Valuation Joint Board will:

- Develop and review employment policies ensuring equal pay compliance
- Develop a plan on longer term pay equality
- Respond to grievances and complaints to the Grampian Valuation Joint Board on equal pay
- Review progress every three years

Equal Pay Review

In order to ensure that equal pay for work of equal value is embraced by the Board a Pay and Grading Review using the Scottish Joint Councils Job Evaluation Scheme was carried out for staff below Assessor and Depute Assessor levels within the organisation (these three posts having been reviewed at an earlier date using the same methodology). This was aimed at creating an equal pay compliant pay structure for the Board.

This review resulted in the implementation on 1st October, 2006 of an 8 Grade structure with 5 increments in each grade and a training grade for new employees or for those with less than six months experience. For clarity, the implementation period is the time taken for current employees to reach the top of their salary scale (i.e. to April 2010) and at this point the additional increment will be removed from all grades.

Analysis of the movement of jobholders within the rank order as a result of the Pay and Grading Review showed that 55.5% of jobholders moved up the rank order of which 32.5% were female and 23% were male. 5% of male jobholders moved down the rank order.

Equality Impact Assessments

The Board has adopted the Moray Council guidance and template for carrying out equality impact assessments. The purpose of the equality impact assessment is both to ensure that decisions and activities do not disadvantage equality groups (which includes men and women), and also to identify where they might better promote equality of opportunity.

Equality impact assessments will be carried out on policies and activities that have relevance to any of the equality duties. If evidence suggests that there is likely to be discriminatory practice or otherwise inhibit progress towards equality of opportunity, then the assessment process will enable the Board to consider whether the policy can be modified to reduce any adverse impact or whether an alternative policy that better promotes equality could be adopted.

The Board will require that all reports presented to it proposing policies that have any significant relevance to gender equality include details of:-

- an assessment of the impact of the proposed policy on women and men
- any consultation carried out in conjunction with that assessment and
- any action (including monitoring, where appropriate) proposed in consequence of that assessment and consultation.

The Board will consider these matters in reaching its decision on the proposed policy.

Gathering and Using Information

Information and outcomes from impact assessments will be used for influencing decisions with regard to future creation of policies and activities that are carried out by the Board.

Equalities measures are in place regarding the staffing structure and will continue to be monitored with regard to analysing the gender division and employment position of men and women within the Board.

Information has been gathered from staff and the Moray Equalities Forum to inform this document. Consultation on future schemes will be carried out to ensure any further issues are identified which need to be considered.

Consultation

The Board has consulted with staff and service users on the internal and external workings of the Board. Questionnaires were sent to all staff within the Board and a return of approximately one third was received. The Moray Equalities Forum was also approached with questionnaires. This group has representatives from local and national organisations covering all equality strands.

The questionnaires designed for the employees of the Board examined:-

- access to information by service users
- the equal treatment of staff and customers
- equality awareness amongst staff
- equality working practice

The results of the questionnaires highlighted that the most responses were from front-line staff and almost all staff had experienced difficulties with customers understanding Board documentation. Most difficulties were eliminated by explaining the content to customers. Few members of staff had printed off information in alternative languages. Only one staff member highlighted the benefits of having documents readily available in alternative languages.

The majority of staff agreed that staff and customers were treated in an equal and fair manner. In addition, 50% of the respondents highlighted that they had been affected by the re-evaluation of posts due to the equal pay review. The review showed that 55.5% of jobholders moved up the rank order of which 32.5% were female and 23% were male.

The majority of staff knew that there was an Equal Opportunities Policy in place, however 21 staff members agreed that they knew very little about equalities legislation.

Most staff members highlighted that they knew about benefits that were available within the Board and 7 have accessed the family friendly working practices.

To ensure that the Board's policies on equality meet the needs of both staff and customer, staff believe the main areas to be concentrated on are training and communications.

The questionnaires sent to the equalities forum examined:-

- access to buildings and information
- equal treatment of staff and customers
- equality and diversity awareness of staff
- equal working practice

Only 9 responses were received by the members of the Equalities Forum. The questionnaires returned however highlighted that the equality groups were satisfied with the services that were provided by the Board.

Training

Discussion is underway with the Moray Council to establish options of accessing local authority equal opportunities training for staff. The Assessor has identified staff in order of priority for training. In addition 6 GVJB staff will be trained to carry out equality impact assessments on policies and procedures.

Publicity

Copies of this Scheme will be available from the Assessor at Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GE. The Scheme will also be placed on the Board's web-site at www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk. Translations will be made available on request using the services of locally identified translators or through services accessed outwith the area.

Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Completed by	Outcome
Impact assess policies and procedures against gender equality and recommend actions	Assessor	3 years of scheme's publication	Discriminatory practice is eliminated from working practice.
Ensure recommendations arising from the impact assessments are carried out	Assessor	As per timetable stated within the impact assessment templates	Discriminatory practice is eliminated and the Board is proactive with regard to equalities.
Train staff in equality issues	Assessor	March 2010	Staff are aware of their duties under equalities legislation.
Ensure gender equality compliance within all area offices	Assessor / Deputes/Divisional managers	On-going	Staff will be treated in a fair and equal manner.