

## **Grampian Valuation Joint Board**

### **Annual Race Equality Report 2009**

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2001 and introduced both general and specific duties for the Grampian Valuation Joint Board in relation to Race Equality. The Board subsequently published a Race Equality Scheme the purpose of which is to:-

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good race relations between members of different groups

There are varied ethnic groups and languages dispersed throughout the overall population of Grampian. This makes addressing race equality difficult but nonetheless important within our area. Many migrants experience problems, such as linguistic barriers and knowing their rights. It is our duty to ensure that all parts of our community are represented, everyone has equality of opportunity, and the Grampian Valuation Joint Board promotes good race relations in all its working practices.

In Aberdeenshire, there are currently 68 languages other than English spoken (including British Sign Language), the most common being Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and Latvian. It is estimated that over 5,000 EU nationals have migrated to Aberdeenshire since May 2004. The 2001 census highlighted that almost 3% of Aberdeen's population and less than 1% of Moray's population was from an ethnic minority group. However there has been a significant increase since the collation of the census. The General Register for Scotland highlighted that a net figure of 2,900 migrants (from UK and abroad) entered Moray between July 2001 and June 2006. This amounted to approximately 3.3% of Moray's population.

The Electoral Registration Officer was approached by the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO) and asked to deliver a presentation. This was to help eliminate any problems reaching ethnic groups and to clarify their rights to vote and to ensure they knew the procedure. The ERO presented information regarding the Board and registration to the attending representatives of various local organisations. The outcome of the presentation highlighted that all but two of the attendees knew how to register to vote. The two attendees who did not know how to register did so at that time.

Citizens of EU member states resident in the UK can vote in local government elections but cannot vote in UK Parliamentary elections. The Electoral Registration Form is available in alternative languages via the About My Vote website ([www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)). These languages include Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (traditional), French, Gujarati, Hindi, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi and Urdu. Other languages are available on request.

EU citizens who want to vote in European Parliamentary elections, must fill in a separate form in order to do so. These forms are available in alternative languages via the Grampian Valuation Joint Board website ([www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk](http://www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk)). The languages that are available are French, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. To date only one of these forms has been returned (in Polish, but from a prisoner in Peterhead who is not entitled to be registered to vote). It is therefore a working assumption that people either know how to register to vote or do not want to vote. Advertising in Polish however did see an increase in the growth of Polish applicants during the annual canvass in 2008.

Consultation with minority groups is being carried out at the moment through Moray Council's Equalities Officer to highlight any problems these groups are experiencing whilst accessing services provided by the Board. The results of these consultations will be highlighted within the revised Race Equality Scheme which will be published by April 2010.

It has been recognised however that the Board needs to be more pro-active in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. It is proposed that a system for accessing interpretation and translation services in an easy and effective manner should be established for staff.

An easily accessible leaflet should be produced to highlight procedures to follow for those who do not read/speak English but want to register to vote or access information regarding council tax banding or valuation of non-domestic rates. This should be made available from the equalities link on the Board's homepage.

Discussions are also underway with Moray Council to establish options of accessing local authority equal opportunities training for staff. It will be the responsibility of the Assessor to identify staff to attend such training. In addition a number of Board staff will be trained to carry out equality impact assessments.

## Summary

Some action has been taken to eliminate discrimination with regard to people from differing racial groups. A presentation was delivered to the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations to raise awareness of the Board and the functions of the Board. Registration forms required by the Board with regard to voting are available in different languages, however there seems to be very little use of such forms. Consultations are underway at the moment to highlight problems certain groups may experience when trying to access the services of the Board. Further discussions are also underway with the Moray Council to enhance knowledge within the Board of the requirements to meet equalities legislation.