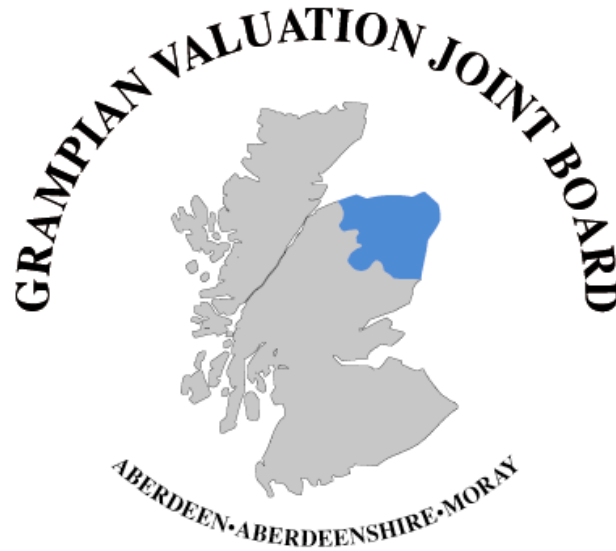


Grampian Valuation Joint Board



RACE EQUALITY SCHEME 2009-2012

This document is printed in 14pt Arial, using 1.5 line spacing and left aligned to improve readability in terms of the Board's Disability Equality Scheme.

Contents

	Page
1. Preamble	4
2. Background	5
3. Introduction	6
4. Rationale	8
5. Aims / Objectives	9
6. Implementation Procedures	10
7. Providing Access to Information	13
8. Action Plan	14

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 believes it can make a significant contribution towards removing any barriers (both environmental and attitudinal) to equal opportunities for disabled people in relation to these services. GVJB can do this by addressing the way in which we run our services and employ people.

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.

Contact with the public is limited. There are few personal callers to any of the Board's offices, a greater number by telephone, some by e-mail and more by written correspondence. The greatest contact, however, is through Electoral Registration, particularly the annual canvass which involves contacting some 250,000 households each year.

BACKGROUND

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 placed a duty on public bodies to use their resources not only to avoid discrimination but also to promote equality of opportunity – to provide appropriate and professional services to all people.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force on 2nd April 2001. It amended the Race Relations Act 1976 and introduced new duties for public authorities, including the Board.

By the 30th November 2002 there were a number of requirements placed on public bodies. These requirements included:-

- Public bodies had to publish a Race Equality Scheme and to review the scheme every three years.
- Public bodies had to make arrangements for ethnic monitoring of their workforce.

This is the second publication of our Race Equality Scheme.

INTRODUCTION

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act makes it the general duty of the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful race discrimination and to promote equal opportunities and good race relations between people from different racial groups.

This followed from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry which defined institutional racism as “the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin”.

Racial grounds are defined as being grounds of colour, race, and nationality or ethnic or national origin.

The Race Relations Act 1976 defines direct and indirect racial discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Direct racial discrimination means treating a person less favourably than you would treat other persons in the same or similar circumstances on racial grounds.

Indirect racial discrimination now has two meanings, depending on the racial group concerned and/or the activity in which the discrimination takes place:-

- a) In relation to a racial group defined by race or ethnic or national origins, and in relation to employment, education, housing, health, provision of goods, facilities or services, indirect racial discrimination means applying a race-neutral provision, criterion or practice which

disadvantages people from a particular racial group compared to others and which cannot be shown to be appropriate and necessary way to achieve a legitimate aim.

- b) In relation to a racial group defined by colour or nationality and in relation to regulation and law enforcement activities of public authorities or their contractors, indirect discrimination means applying a requirement or condition equally to all persons, which a considerably smaller proportion of one racial group can comply with, and which the requirement cannot be justified on non-racial grounds.

Harassment which occurs in employment, education, housing, health, provision of goods, facilities or services and on ground of race or ethnic or national origins means unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating the person's dignity or creating a hostile, degrading or offensive environment. In other cases harassment is treated as a form of direct racial discrimination.

Victimisation means treating a person less favourably than others because they have brought proceedings or made a complaint under the Race Relations Act or supported someone else's complaint, intends to do so or is suspected of doing so.

In relation to, and for the better performance of the general duty, the Board has a specific duty to produce, and review, a Race Equality Scheme. This document is the first tri-annual review of our Race Equality Scheme. It summarises our approach to Race Equality and sets out how the Board plans to meet our duties.

RATIONALE

Every local authority area in Scotland includes people from ethnic minorities. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act applies equally to all public authorities regardless of the size of ethnic minority communities they serve.

Not all ethnic minorities are “non-white”. Many parts of Scotland have Gypsy/Traveller communities and/or asylum seekers and refugees. While they may not have been recorded in the 2001 census, they may also have particular needs which, under the Race Relations Act duty, the Board is expected to take into account.

There are varied ethnic groups and languages dispersed throughout the overall population of Grampian. This makes addressing race equality difficult but 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 Board promotes good race relations in all its working practice.

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 5000 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 were 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.

AIMS / OBJECTIVES

The Board aims to:-

- Eliminate racial discrimination and harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity for all members of our local community
- Promote good race relations between people of different racial groups.

The Board's objectives will be to:-

- Ensure that the promotion of equal opportunities are included in all policies and working practice.
- Be a model employer and equip our workforce, enabling them to promote equal opportunities by using examples of best practice.

The Board believes in, and is committed to, the principle of equality of opportunity. The Board recognises the diversity in the community and that all groups do not have the same resources, situations and needs, therefore the Board must ensure that these issues are reflected in the planning, designing and improving of our services.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

Equality Impact Assessments

The Board is obliged to set out and prioritise for review all policies and functions that are relevant to the general duty. Different policies may affect different racial groups in different ways. It is important to understand the different needs of individuals and groups, making the necessary adjustments to insure they are not disadvantaged.

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, 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.

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

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.

Monitoring

Monitoring is a way of ensuring that the Race Equality Scheme is being implemented and working. It will highlight whether any particular action has been effective and what other action is required. A member of staff has been identified to monitor the implementation of actions from the action plan. In this manner we aim to increase awareness of the Board and reduce issues relating to accessing services.

Reporting

The Board is obliged to publish what impact assessments have been completed, monitoring reports and consultations. We publish information on the Boards <http://www.grampian-vjb.gov.uk/>. The Race Equality Workforce Monitoring Report and the Annual Race Equality Report have been published. In addition the results of consultations will also be published.

Training

The Moray Council has delivered three training courses to staff within the Board at Aberdeen reaching 47 staff altogether. Further training courses have been organised and will be delivered shortly to Banff and Elgin staff. The Board are in discussion with Moray Council to deliver training to canvassers. This follows from recommendations identified within the Equalities Impact Assessment carried out for Recruitment of Canvassers.

Providing Access to Information

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). 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). The languages that are available are French, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. To date there have been no forms returned in any of these alternative languages. It has therefore been assumed that people either know how to register to vote or do not want to vote.

It has been recognised however that the Board needs to be more proactive in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. It is proposed that a system for accessing interpretation and translation services in an easy and efficient manner should be established for staff. An easily accessible leaflet should be produced to highlight procedures 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.

Action Plan

Action	Responsible Officer	Completed by	Outcome
Impact assess policies and procedures against race equality and recommend actions	Assessor	3 years of schemes 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 race equality compliance within all area offices	Assessor / Area Manager	On-going	Staff will be treated in a fair and equal manner.
Develop a system for accessing interpretation and translation services in an easy and effective manner.	Assessor / Equalities Officer, Moray Council	March 2010	Staff can easily access interpretation and translation services.
Produce and publish an accessible leaflet highlighting procedures for non-English speakers.	Assessor / Equalities Officer, Moray Council	March 2010	Non-English speaker understand how to access the Board's services.