

West Wiltshire District Council's Gender Equality Scheme

Foreword

Welcome to West Wiltshire District Council's first Gender Equality Scheme. The scheme is part of an overarching corporate equality and diversity policy which sets out our vision to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equal opportunities for all.

The purpose of this scheme is to take forward our statutory duties under the Equalities Act 2006 to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women. This scheme covers the services and facilities provided by the Council as well as our role as community leader, purchaser, policy advisor, planner, regulator and equal opportunity employer.

The main content of this scheme is a three-year action plan. The Council will assess the implementation of this plan through established performance monitoring systems. In developing the scheme and action plan we have consulted relevant stakeholders, employees, service users and others, including trade unions.

West Wiltshire District Council has already been responding to the diversity of its local communities. As a District we have an ambitious vision for the future and want to further promote the area as a great place to live and work. When delivering services for our customers we will ensure that our services and facilities are developed from the beginning with the aim of meeting the different needs of men and women. In this way we will ensure our policies and practices redress the historical discrimination experienced especially, but not exclusively by women and transsexual people.

We hope that you will take the opportunity to read through our scheme and provide us with your comments. It is important that employees, residents and our statutory, voluntary and private sector partners are involved in the development, delivery and review of the scheme as this will ensure that it really has a positive impact on people's lives.

To provide your views, please use the comment form that is available on our website: www.westwiltshire.gov.uk, or e-mail lhayes@westwiltshire.gov.uk
We look forward to reading your comments.

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Leader

Cllr Andrew Davis
Policy & Communications

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Contents

Introduction

- i. An outline of the gender equality duty**
- ii. What is a gender equality scheme?**
- iii. How is the duty enforced?**
- iv. The purpose of our gender equality scheme**

Part 1 – Consultation and Involvement

- 1.1 Who have we involved in developing our gender equality objectives and scheme?**
- 1.2 What did the consultation tell us?**

Part 2 – Information collection

- 2.1 Gender equality – the national context**
- 2.2 Gender equality – the local context**
- 2.3 Gender equality – working for West Wiltshire District Council**
- 2.4 Delivering services at West Wiltshire District Council**

Part 3 – Gender Equality Objectives

Part 4 – The Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan

Part 5 – Assessing the impact of policies and activities

- 5.1 Performance monitoring and review process – gender equality**
- 5.2 Impact assessment process**

Introduction

The Council has an equalities framework in place covering all equalities and diversity issues. This scheme should be read in conjunction with the Council's corporate equalities strategy.

i. An outline of the gender equality duty

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, (SDA) to place a statutory duty on all public authorities in carrying out their functions to have due regard to promote gender equality. The authority's functions include policy making, service provision, employment matters, statutory discretion and decision making. The gender equality duty is a legal requirement and is made up of two elements, the 'general' duty and the 'specific' duties.

General duty

The general duty will apply from 6 April 2007 and requires all public authorities to:

- eliminate discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex
- promote equality of opportunity between women and men

Specific duties

The specific duties require each organisation to:

- prepare and publish a gender equality scheme that demonstrates how it will meet the duties and sets out its gender equality objectives
- consider the need to include objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap
- collect and use information on how the authority's policies and practices affect gender equality in the workforce and in the delivery of services
- consult key stakeholders, e.g. employees and service users and to use relevant information to determine its gender equality objectives
- assess the impact of current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality
- implement the actions set out in its scheme within three years

Definitions:

It is important to understand the terminology used in this scheme.

'The term 'sex' is used to describe biological differences between women and men. The term 'gender' refers to the wider social roles and relationships which structure men's and women's lives. Gender inequality exists in all aspects of

society and refers to lasting and embedded patterns of advantage and disadvantage.’ (EOC draft code of practice)

ii. What is a gender equality scheme?

A gender equality scheme sets out our plans for ensuring that we understand and address the different needs of women, men and those who have or are undergoing gender reassignment in West Wiltshire. It places a responsibility on us as a service provider to think about gender equality so that our services are more customer friendly. It also means that as an employer we must make full use of the talents of women and men in the workplace. The scheme will help us to identify and respond to stereotyping, sex discrimination and sexism, resulting in improvements for all.

iii. How is the duty enforced?

The duty will be actively enforced by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and then by the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) from October 2007. Compliance is likely to be measured against the extent to which the public authority has covered the following elements in its scheme; information collection, consultation, transparency, proportionality and effectiveness.

If an authority fails to meet either the general or the specific duties the EOC and then the CEHR will be able to issue compliance notices that are enforceable in the courts.

iv. The purpose of our gender equality scheme is to:

- Show how women and men from all groups feel effectively engaged in our decisions and policy making that have a direct affect on them.
- Show that we understand the needs of service users.
- Ensure that women and men are represented at all levels of our workforce and in all areas of work.
- Make sure we meet our legal duties and positively promote gender equality.
- Tell people what our responsibilities are. This includes elected members (or councillors), managers, employees, unions, our partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors, as well as residents.
- Ensure that employees who are carers, male or female, receive equal support for caring responsibilities, including the same access to flexible working patterns.
- Demonstrate a commitment to narrowing any pay gaps that may exist between women and men’s pay.

- Act on any reports of harassment regarding staff or customers promptly and systematically following agreed procedures with the aim of preventing future occurrences.
- Show how the scheme links to other equalities objectives and priorities.
- Provide information about our involvement, assessments and training arrangements.
- Find out what barriers are faced by transsexual people in recruitment and the workplace, take steps if necessary to remove them to ensure that transsexual applicants and staff feel valued and supported.
- Increase employees awareness of the gender equality duty so that they understand how it will affect their work and that they have the skills to implement the duty in their work.
- Show what has changed as a result of involvement and set out our three-year gender equality action plan on how we will put the scheme into practice.
- Monitor and check what we are doing and report each year.

Part 1 – Consultation and Involvement

1.1 Who have we involved in developing our gender equality objectives and scheme?

We have involved and consulted key stakeholders to identify the main gender equality objectives and to shape our scheme. These different groups will continue to be involved through ongoing reviews of the scheme.

We have established formal consultation systems and they have been followed throughout the development of this scheme. The Local Joint Consultative Committee (LJCC), Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Council's elected Cabinet have been engaged throughout.

To enable the prioritisation of gender equality objectives and outcomes it was necessary to gain the viewpoints of different groups of people at the Council. Service managers, employees and trade union representatives shared their views and experience of gender inequality through meetings, questionnaires and focus groups.

We have consulted our customers through West Wilts Matters, Peoples Voice, and the Council's website.

In compiling the gender equality scheme it was apparent that transsexual people are not a visible community in West Wiltshire and our understanding of their needs as an employer and service provider was limited. In developing the scheme we have contacted a number of transgender support groups, including the FTM Network, the Gemini Group, the Gender Trust and the

Gendy's Network to obtain information and to seek their advice to increase our awareness in this area.

1.2 What did we find out from our consultation?

Consultation and the collection of information regarding gender equality will continue to be collected during the life time of the scheme. We have collected some feedback from key stakeholders and this is presented below.

Customers:

Visiting the offices

The Council has an allocated car parking bay for child and carer to use and customers have access to a number of dedicated car spaces. There are also good bus links to the offices enabling carer's easy access to the Bradley Road site.

Our customers have told us that they do appreciate the provision of a small play area in our front reception. The play area is designed so that the children and toys stay in one safe place whilst their carer attends to their Council business. In terms of gender equality this contributes to assisting carers of small children and in particular female carers as they are disproportionately female.

Responding to complaints

If our customers feel that they are unhappy about one of our services they have the right to complain. They can make a formal complaint to the Council using a standard complaints form. All complaints submitted are managed through a formal process and standard equalities data is collected, including gender. This will enable the Council to ensure that we are dealing with complaints consistently and fairly for all of our customers. All complaints are monitored and reviewed as part of the Council's performance management framework.

Employees:

Our employees have told us that they are aware of the policies and procedures that are in place that are available for them to raise formal concerns relating to their treatment and dignity at work, these include the grievance and harassment policies.

Our employees have also told us that they are aware of the work life balance options that are available to them.

To ensure that new employees are advised of the relevant policies they attend an induction programme that includes modules on equalities and diversity and Human Resources. Our new staff have told us that they find the induction modules useful and informative.

For our annual staff satisfaction survey in May 2007 we have asked employees to detail their gender on the survey so that we can analyse the feedback by gender for the first time.

Part 2 – Information collection

A further feature of the duty is for local authorities to have an idea of how they are currently performing in terms of gender equality to inform the development of their scheme. In this section we have indicated the key information relating to the national and local context of gender equality in the UK. We have then looked at the Council for information to identify areas where we are doing well on promoting gender equality as an employer and service provider.

2.1 Gender equality - the national context

Employment and Gender

Information taken from the Office for National Statistics (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk> www.statistics.gov.uk) shows that, as at Spring 2005, 79% of men and 70% of women of working age were in some type of employment.

The ONS Labour Force Survey, Spring 2005 showed that whilst almost half of women worked part time to some extent, only one in six men worked in a part time role.

Gender and Pay

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earning 2005 / 2006, conducted by the ONS, found that the gender pay gap (i.e. median hourly pay excluding overtime of full time employees) had narrowed to 12.6% - the lowest value since records began. However the median rate for men was still £11.71 per hour compared to £10.24 for women.

However this figure cannot indicate differences in rates of pay for comparable jobs.

Sexual Orientation

According to the Stonewall website (www.stonewall.org.uk) there is “no hard data on the number of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the UK as no national census has ever asked people to define their sexuality”. However Stonewall agrees with the government estimate of 5-7% of the population.

2.2 Gender equality - the local context

Census data from 2001 showed West Wiltshire to have a total population of 118,150 (www.wiltshire.gov.uk). This has undoubtedly increased in the past 5 years. In 2001 the population was 48.8% male and 51.2% female.

West Wiltshire falls under “South West England” for the purposes of the Office for National Statistics.

The annual survey of ‘hours and earnings 2006’ found that, in the South West under the category “managers and senior officials” there were 161,000 male jobs and 88,000 female jobs.

For men in this category the median salary was £35,350 per annum and for women it was £23,334 per annum.

The report “State of the South West 2007” at www.swo.org.uk reports that this region has the highest proportion of women working with 76% of females of working age in employment. Overall 81% of the working age population in this region are in employment.

In the South West 28% of those in employment work part time, with women four times more likely to work part time than men.

2.3 Gender equality – working for West Wiltshire District Council

Our workforce profile as at 1 April 2007 (excludes casual workers)

	Total	Male	Female
Full time employees	246	119	127
Part time employees	51	7	44
Corporate Management Team	6	4	2
Elected Members	46	33	13
Total	349	163	186

Break down by grade (excludes Elected Members):

Grade	Male full time	Male part time	Female full time	Female part time
1-3 / SP4-17 (up to £15,825)	43	5	47	22
4-6 / SP 18 - 28 (up to £22,293)	29	1	40	11
SO1 and above / SP 29 and above	47	1	40	11
CMT	4	0	2	0

Proportions of male to female in each grade

1-3 / SP4-17 (up to £15,825)	41% male	59% female
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4-6 / SP 18 – 28 (up to £22,293)	37.5% male	62.5% female
SO1 and above / SP 29 and above	48.5% male	51.5% female
CMT	66.6% male	33.3% female

Overall 42.9% of staff are male, 57.1 % of staff are female

This does show that a higher percentage of male employees work in the more senior roles but, apart from at CMT level women still account for over half the roles at each level.

Our best value performance indicator (BVPI) informs us that for 2006/07 of the top 5% of earners for the authority 18.75% were women.

Maternity and Paternity leave

We know that during the last 3 years 82% (9 staff) of the women who took maternity leave returned to work and that 66% of those staff (6 staff) returned to work on different working patterns as a result of a request for flexible working. We also know that 5 male employees took paternity leave.

Complaints of sexual harassment

In the last 3 years the Council has not had any claims of sexual harassment submitted either from staff or customers.

Leaver trends

Of the 71 leavers between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007

- 1 was a TUPE transfer
- 8 were due to normal retirement
- 1 was due to early retirement on ill health grounds
- 11 were due to a temporary contract coming to an end

Of the remaining 50 leavers, leaving for other reasons:

- 29 were female = 58%
- 21 were male = 42%

This is proportional to our number of employees (42.9% male, 57.1% female).

Applying to the Council

All managers involved in the recruitment and selection of staff have received equalities and diversity training. Under the requirements of the Equality Standard for Local Government we have collected and monitored equal opportunities data

in terms of employment for a number of years. During the last year, 2006/07 1153 job applicants were female and 1140 were male. During 2006/07 65% (57) of appointments were filled by women and 35% (31) by men.

The table below presents the number of appointees by gender to broad job categories during 2006/07.

	Male	Female
Professional	6	8
Manual / administration	25	49
Total	31	57

Employment Policies and Procedures

The Council has a number of policies in place that promote equality and create a better work/life balance for all employees. They include; equal opportunities policy, harassment policy, the ability to buy and sell annual leave, work/life balance policy, homeworking, job share, volunteering policy and right to request flexible working for parents and carers.

All of these policies were agreed through formal consultation and have been widely communicated to all staff and managers. Through our corporate induction programme all new employees participate in equalities and diversity module and a Human Resources module whereby they are made aware of all of these policies. Subsequently a number of employees, both male and female have taken up many of the work life balance options available, including working from home or term time working.

Elected Members

The representation of female Councillors stands at 11 (25.6%) and the remaining 32 (74.4%) are male.

Overall the representation of females in the local democracy process is disproportionately lower than the gender profile in the district.

Pay and Benefits

The Council is currently undertaking a pay reform project that involved completing a pay and grading review to deal with potential pay inequalities and to address the gender pay gap. It involved the selection of a new job evaluation scheme that was free from 'gender bias' and non discriminatory. The project also required the completion of an equal pay audit to ascertain the extent of any gender pay gap at the Council.

Job evaluation scheme

The Council has evaluated all jobs using the Greater London Provincial Council (GLPC) job evaluation scheme. This scheme was designed by the Association of Local Government in London who sought advice from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in its design and although no job evaluation scheme can be approved by the EOC, the EOC did comment fully on the scheme. They have also stated that they cannot see any evidence of gender bias in this particular scheme.

All jobs are evaluated by a trained panel that is made up of managers, HR staff and Union representatives. On any panel there will normally be male and female representation to further promote gender equality through this process.

Gender pay audit results

The results of the pay audit carried out using data on current pay and the proposed pay revealed that the Council in comparison with other employers had a narrow gender pay gap of 11.78%. If the proposed arrangements are implemented this gap would reduce to 11.66%. A future audit will be undertaken one year after the proposed pay and grading arrangements are agreed to ensure that the gap is reducing as planned.

2.4 Delivering services at West Wiltshire District Council

The Council delivers a diverse selection of services to the community of West Wiltshire. Some of these services we deliver ourselves, whilst others are provided by external contractors. As a relatively small local authority we have considered proportionality in order to identify which of our functions are most relevant to gender equality.

All service managers attended a presentation regarding gender equality and have subsequently completed a brief gender equality impact assessment to identify the main areas of high risk and action for their service. Service Managers were asked to consider the following questions:-

1. What information do you have about who uses your service? (e.g. log of calls, monitoring forms and application information).
2. Do women and men use your service in different ways? If yes, how?
3. Do women and men have different needs from your service? Do you have any evidence for this?
4. Are there particular groups of women and men (for example, disabled women or men from particular ethnic groups) who do not use or under-use a service or who are less satisfied with it? How do you know?
5. Do your services adequately address the needs of men and women? What proof and evidence do you have to support your assessment?
6. Are there any discrepancies in the service outcomes by sex? To what extent?

7. What action(s) are you going to take to ensure gender equality in your service delivery during the next 3 years? Please complete the action form.

This exercise has enabled us to focus our efforts so that we can meet the duty. The following services are those which have been identified as 'higher' risk than others in respect of gender equality actions over the next three years.

Customer Services

This is a new service area for the Council, and all Customer Service Advisors have received introductory training in equalities and diversity. The newly established team is also evenly balanced regarding representation of males and females. Customer services has identified that we need a greater awareness of the customers who contact us, this can be achieved through collecting data. A system that will enable this is the Customer Relationship Management system. It allows the Council to record contacts made from customers in person, by e-mail, together with recording the reason for the contact. With the installation of new telephony equipment in July it will be possible to collect meaningful data for analysis.

Housing services

Women and men access housing services for similar reasons and their needs are relatively the same. The service area does highlight a trend in that more women than men require assistance following domestic violence and more men than women suffer from mental health problems. Housing services has assessed that the Council provides the same service to all customers, however when looking at the support provided externally there is evidence to suggest that more support is given to females. For example in the district there are female only hostels, but few hostels that will accept men at all, this is a gap in provision on a regional and national level.

Sustainable Communities

One area of this diverse service is dedicated to Arts development. This service supports groups and projects such as participatory arts projects, community arts training and others through partnership/service agreement arrangements such as the Wiltshire Youth Arts Partnership. The service supports some targeted projects through its partnership work e.g. working with young fathers or teenage pregnancy projects.

A further aspect of this service area is the management of the Council's leisure services. A number of gaps in information regarding user groups have been identified where gender may contribute to future service provision.

Building Control

The service area has assessed that there is a need to encourage more females to follow a career in building services as there are no female Building Control

Officers at West Wiltshire District Council and this is fairly typical within other local authorities.

Human Resources

This service area has highlighted some gender equality gaps in relation to policy development, awareness of work life balance options and training. Specifically further work is required regarding the development of guidelines regarding transsexualism and gender reassignment and some promotion of work life balance options to our male employees is necessary. Within the corporate training plan equalities training including gender equality is already featured for delivery during 2007/08.

Policy and Communications

As the service area responsible for the publication of many of the corporate documents and the Council's performance monitoring framework there is a necessity to ensure that equalities is embedded in key strategy documents. Additionally a robust mechanism of carrying out impact assessments and systematically reviewing performance through our current procedures is required to meet the requirements of the scheme.

Part 3 – Gender Equality Objectives

The specific purpose of our scheme is set out in the introduction. Further to the impact assessments and research that we have carried out it has been possible to identify our specific priorities for the next three years. These objectives are summarised below, with the further detail set out in the action plan.

1. To ensure gender equality in employment through policy development and promotion of work life balance options.
2. To increase the awareness of gender equality and to prevent harassment through the delivery of further training for staff and elected members.
3. To increase the number of female applicants who apply to traditional male occupational roles through work placements and promotional activity in local schools.
4. To enable equal access to housing accommodation and leisure services.
5. To collect monitoring data to inform the Council's action plan for recreational facilities so that future provision meets the needs of the community.
6. To include gender equality in service level agreements and partnership arrangements so that our partners and contractors fulfil their obligations
7. To ensure the equal treatment of customers who submit formal complaints to the Council by monitoring the outcomes of complaints submitted by gender.
8. To deliver the gender equality scheme by fulfilling the action plan and reporting on progress.

9. To encourage increased inclusion and representation in local democracy from female participants through focus groups and information sessions.
10. To carry out equalities impact assessments and publish the results on the Council's website.
11. To aim to narrow the gender pay gap through our pay and grading arrangements

Part 4 – The Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan

West Wiltshire District Council – Action Plan 2007 – 2010

Action 1	Gender equality in employment
Issue to address	1a. Currently no dedicated policy / guidelines regarding transsexualism and gender reassignment. 1b. Perception that male employees do not take up work life balance opportunities.
Outcome sought	1a. Equality in the workplace for all staff 1b. Equal access to all work life balance opportunities
Action(s) to be taken	1a. To produce a policy and guidelines regarding transsexualism and gender reassignment and to ensure that all other HR policies reflect gender equality. 2b. To promote work life balance opportunities for all staff through focus groups / special events and management practices.
Timescale	1a. June 2008 1b. April 2008
Responsibility	Principal Human Resources Officer – Human Resources
Link to Corporate Plan	Valued and supported staff and commitment to social inclusion
Action 2	Gender equality awareness and preventing harassment
Issue to address	Increase employees' and elected members' awareness of gender equality issues, preventing harassment at the Council.
Outcome sought	Better customer service, greater inclusion and involvement of all staff.
Action(s) to be taken	To deliver gender awareness training for all staff and elected members.
Timescale	Complete by April 2008
Responsibility	Human Resources and Member Support
Link to Corporate Plan	Valued and supported staff
Action 3	Equal access to careers in LG / narrow job segregation
Issue to address	Low representation of females in some professional fields, e.g. Building Control.
Outcome sought	To increase the number of female candidates applying to 'traditional' male occupational roles, e.g. Building Control

Action(s) to be taken	To carry out some promotional activity in local schools / colleges to raise the profile of narrow job segregation professions so that female students consider them as career choices. To offer work placements to female students in under represented professional areas.
Timescale	Complete by August 2008
Responsibility	Building Control Manager, Environmental Health Manager supported by Human Resources.
Link to Corporate Plan	Valued and supported staff
Action 4	Equal access to services – housing services
Issue to address	Lack of external provisions for males fleeing domestic violence on a national scale. Females have access to hostel facilities in these circumstances, currently there are no provisions for males in this area.
Outcome sought	Provision of appropriate facilities for males who are experience domestic violence.
Action(s) to be taken	To raise the profile of this service provision through the domestic violence forum.
Timescale	April 2009
Responsibility	Housing Services – Housing Options & Homelessness Team Leader.
Link to Corporate Plan	Meeting housing need and putting customers first.
Action 5	Equal Access to Services – Swimming sessions
Issue to address	To enable all members of the community to be able to access swimming sessions.
Outcome sought	Adequate swimming sessions for all members of the community, with a particular focus on ladies from ethnic groups that may require female only sessions (including female staff on duty)
Action(s) to be taken	Implement adequate swimming session time at two of the five swimming pools in the district
Timescale	To be implemented by April 2008
Responsibility	Leisure Manager
Link to Corporate Plan	Better access to recreation
Action 6	Collection of monitoring data to inform action plan for recreational facilities
Issue to address	Lack of information concerning the users of informal recreation facilities such as parks, teenage play facilities and informal open spaces.

Outcome sought	Increased knowledge of users of informal recreation space.
Action(s) to be taken	Implement an action plan to determine how the Council might be able to increase its knowledge of users.
Timescale	Plan to be implemented by April 2009
Responsibility	Leisure Manager
Link to Corporate Plan	Better access to recreation
Action 7	Equality in service level agreements and partnership arrangements
Issue to address	To ensure that all service agreements and partnership arrangements address gender equality in the delivery of services.
Outcome sought	That all new service level agreements and partnership arrangements reflect a commitment to gender equality.
Action(s) to be taken	To negotiate new service level agreements and partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector partners and monitor progress through review meetings
Timescale	To be implemented by April 2008
Responsibility	Stronger Communities Manager and Community Development Officer
Link to Corporate Plan	Delivery in partnership Better access to recreation Improving market towns
Action 8	Customer complaints – equal treatment of customers
Issue to address	Review the monitoring information and address any gender inequalities in terms of complaint handling and satisfaction with complaint outcomes by service area.
Outcome sought	Equal treatment in dealing with complaints irrespective of gender, ethnic group etc.
Action(s) to be taken	To ensure a corporate process for the collection of complaints equalities data.
Timescale	Process of collection to be established by April 2008
Responsibility	Policy and Communications Manager supported by all Service Managers
Link to Corporate Plan	Customer first spotlight area
Action 9	To deliver the gender equality scheme and review progress
Issue to address	To deliver the objectives that have been set and to report back on a regular basis regarding progress.
Outcome sought	Achievement of objectives and regular review of progress against new practices
Action(s) to be taken	To use the service and resource planning framework as an opportunity to report back progress from each service area in

	respect of all equalities and diversity objectives.
Timescale	1 st report October 2007 and then annually thereafter
Responsibility	All service managers led by Policy and Communications through the service and resource planning process
Link to Corporate Plan	Putting customers first but will impact in part on a number of objectives
Action 10	Equal inclusion and representation in local democracy
Issue to address	Perception that there is a gender gap regarding the representation of females standing for election
Outcome sought	To increase female's participation and representation in the democratic process
Action(s) to be taken	To hold seminar(s) / focus groups to involve females and seek their views as to possible barriers.
Timescale	To begin from May 2007 elections. To timetable into member's development programme
Responsibility	Head of legal and democratic services, Principal elections officer and Member support team leader
Link to Corporate Plan	Strong community leadership and commitment to social inclusion

Action 11	Impact assessments
Issue to address	To ensure that a robust impact assessment process is carried out across the authority that covers all equalities strands including gender
Outcome sought	To comply with the requirements of level 2 of the equality standard
Action(s) to be taken	Re-launch of impact assessments and supported guidance to ensure that every service area completes the process and that the results are published on the Council's website
Timescale	By October 2007
Responsibility	Principal Human Resources Officer and Policy and Communications Services Manager
Link to Corporate Plan	

Part 5 – Assessing the impact of policies and activities

This part of the scheme will look at three areas:

1. How we will collect information about our performance on gender equality
2. How we will assess the impact of our activities on gender equality
3. How we will use this information to review the effectiveness of our action plan and preparing subsequent schemes

5.1 Performance monitoring and review process – gender equality

The Council has a well developed performance management system to maintain focus and track progress against our corporate priorities. It works on a cyclical basis and integrates together various corporate, financial and performance processes. Quarterly performance monitoring takes place to rigorously review the performance and achievements made. Equalities monitoring, including progress on gender equality actions, will fall under this corporate process.

Specific actions in the gender equality scheme will be addressed on an annual basis through the Council's equalities and diversity group and reported to the Corporate Management Team. Where actions are not being met to the required level, additional work will be undertaken to support the service(s) to achieve the desired target.

5.2 Impact assessment process

What is it?

An impact assessment is a systematic evaluation of a policy, service or function from an equalities and diversity perspective. It requires a review of available information to work out if there is evidence of a difference in service provision or a negative impact with regard to one or more groups of staff or members of the local community. It is a business tool for ensuring that policies and services achieve their intended outcome and that equality and diversity is integral to all the Council's policies.

The Council will carry out an impact assessment on all new policies and services over the next three years. The outcome will be a number of equality objectives which can then be included in each service's annual service plan. The main question that an assessment seeks to answer is, 'Is the service providing what it should be for all members of the community and the workforce?'

Why do an impact assessment?

Although impact assessments are essentially a legal duty, there are a number of positive business benefits that should not be dismissed as they:

- Act as a structured checklist so that policies and services are developed with full recognition of the needs, circumstances and concerns of the whole community
- Make sure that services do not unintentionally exclude any groups and that they serve everyone equally well, regardless of race, gender or disability
- Increase social inclusion and encourage greater community cohesion
- Support the Council's aspirations regarding all equality and diversity issues and specifically its corporate equality schemes and targets
- Ensure that all members of the community and staff are treated fairly

- Aid in identifying objectives for annual service planning
- Enhance value for money of the Council's services

Work completed on impact assessments?

As part of the annual service and resource planning process, each service area is required to complete an impact assessment and to then identify specific actions that could be included in their service plan. The Council's equalities scheme will be reviewed during 2007 and at this point will include a corporate process for carrying out impact assessments.

In order to deliver our gender equality scheme, it will be necessary to undertake impact assessments of the key services that are deemed as priority areas. This will take place in 2008 and the assessments will be completed by March 2009. The assessment process will be timetabled to occur annually, and the results will be used to build on the actions in this scheme and to inform the next scheme.