

Title: Gender Equality Scheme

Portfolio holders: Cllr Graham Payne and Cllr Andrew Davis

Reporting officer: Lisa Hayes, Principal Human Resources Officer

Key decision: No

Purpose

This report presents a proposed Gender Equality Scheme for the Council, which is attached at appendix 1, and seeks approval from the Cabinet to implement the Scheme.

Background

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act and places a statutory duty on all public authorities to pay due regard to:

- the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment that is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act and discrimination that is unlawful under the Equal Pay Act
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

The legislation gives all public authorities 'general' and 'specific' duties to promote gender equality. West Wiltshire District Council, is required to fulfil the following specific duties which assist in meeting the general duty:-

- Publish a Gender Equality Scheme, including an action plan to show how we intend to fulfil the general and specific duties and to set out our gender equality objectives.
- To consider the necessity to have objectives that address the causes of any gender pay gap that may exist.
- To gather and use information on how policies and practices affect gender equality.
- To consult employees, service users and others (including trade unions).
- To assess the impact of current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality.
- To implement the actions set out in the scheme.
- To report against the scheme each year and review the scheme at least every three years.

The process of producing a Gender Equality Scheme has been undertaken over the last four months. A draft scheme has been available for consultative purposes

for staff and the community on the Council's website since May 2007. Additionally an article on equalities was featured in the July edition of West Wilts Matters, inviting the public to participate in the consultation process. The Local Joint Consultative Committee has also considered and supported the scheme and action plan.

The scheme is presented in five parts; it includes a section defining its purpose, it outlines the consultation that has been completed, where we are in terms of gender equality at the Council, an action plan and the Council's processes of monitoring performance and carrying out impact assessments.

Key issues

It is a requirement that the Gender Equality Scheme and action plan are public documents and it is proposed they are made accessible on the internet for public information.

Further consultation and engagement with staff and service users will be required when the Scheme is reviewed.

Effect on strategies and codes

The Gender Equality Scheme supports the Council's Equalities Strategy. It also supports the Corporate Plan in respect of the spotlight areas of 'putting customers first' and 'valued and well supported staff' by promoting gender equality in the community and within the Council.

Risk management Implications

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) have the ability to take enforcement action against authorities who do not comply with the gender equality duty.

Non-compliance with the gender equality duty would create potential risk to the Council in terms of public criticism and negative press coverage, affecting our reputation as a service provider and an employer. To manage and minimise risk the following must occur:

- The actions in the Scheme are picked up in the priority tasks section in the service plans and progress on equalities is monitored quarterly (on Big Wednesday).
- Monitoring the action plan annually
- Reviewing and updating the Scheme as required

Finance and performance implications

There are no dedicated budgets for equalities and diversity projects and the actions outlined within the plan will need to be picked up and progressed by service managers within current budgetary provision.

Legal and human rights implications

There is a legal requirement for local authorities to develop and publish a Gender Equality Scheme. Additionally there is a possibility of sanctions being imposed for failure to comply, for example coercive orders.

Next Steps

The Gender Equality Scheme will be published externally and communicated internally via the normal channels.

Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- Approve the Gender Equality Scheme, action plan and its implementation
- Agree to the Scheme being reviewed and updated as required
- Authorise the Head of Human Resources and Customer Services having consulted with the Portfolio Holders to make minor alterations or amendments to finalise the Scheme prior to publication

Background papers

Equal Opportunities Commission, Meeting the Gender Equality Duty.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Gender Equality Scheme.