



Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board

GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

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FOREWORD

The Gender Equality Duty is a new legal requirement on all public authorities which builds on and extends our existing commitment to equal opportunities.

The Gender Equality Scheme, along with its associated action plan, is part of the overall development of equal opportunities within the Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board area.

The promotion of equal opportunities generally and gender equality in particular, are matters to which I am personally committed. Equality is an intrinsic part of Best Value in any organisation. In order to provide a high quality of service to all, the organisation must be flexible and adapt to the needs of different groups of people. As in other aspects of Best Value our performance in relation to the proposals in the gender equality scheme will be monitored and audited and progress will be publicly reported.

Brian Byrne
Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer

ABOUT THE ASSESSOR & ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board was established by The Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995 arising from the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. It covers the local authority areas of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk & Stirling

The Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer is appointed by the Valuation Joint Board and is responsible for the efficient delivery of three core functions and services to the local authorities within the VJB area. These are:

- The compilation and maintenance of the Electoral Register
- The maintenance and annual publication of the Council Tax Valuation List
- The five yearly Revaluation and ongoing maintenance of the non-domestic Valuation Roll.

There are around 216,000 registered electors in the area, residing mainly in the 135,000 or so domestic subjects shown in the Council Tax Valuation List. The Valuation Roll has about 11,000 entries with a total rateable value in the region of £260m. The Assessor's service operates from one central location employing approximately sixty personnel.

Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board serves an area with a population of 279,480 (Source 2001 Census)

Although the Equality Act 2006 places new obligations the service has always been conscious of avoiding discrimination and already has in place Race and Disability Equality Schemes and an Equal Opportunities Policy

The aim of the VJB as an employer and as a service provider is to ensure that all our stake holders and employees are treated equally and fairly and that discrimination and harassment are avoided. We wish to actively promote equality of opportunity and to ensure that our service delivery meets the needs of all the sectors of the population that we serve.

In particular we will have due regard to the need to: -

Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender

Promote equality of opportunity between women and men

A copy of the Joint Board's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement which sets out these aims is attached in Appendix 1. A definition of discrimination is set out in Appendix 3

GENERAL DUTY

Through the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 as amended by the Equality Act 2006, the Government has placed a general duty on all public bodies, including Valuation Joint Boards, to adopt a proactive approach to promoting equality between women and men into all activities and decisions - taking action to prevent acts of gender discrimination before they occur. In practice this translates into a requirement to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender
- Promote equality of opportunity between women and men

The duty makes the promotion of gender equality central to the way that the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer's service operates, improving our services to everyone and helping to mainstream gender equality.

The Valuation Joint Board recognises and endorses that the general duty also extends to those individuals who intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment. It will therefore take steps to ensure that there is no discrimination or harassment of transsexual people. It also recognises and welcomes that from 21 December 2007 transsexual people will be legally protected against discrimination and harassment in the provision of goods and services. Its aim will be to ensure that its service delivery is free from any such discrimination prior to that date.

As a service deliverer we will collect and use information at a local and national level, which is specific to gender. This will allow us to ensure that our services are meeting the needs of all stakeholders irrespective of their gender. It will also facilitate the review and amendment of service delivery where current practice may favour one gender over another.

To help us identify any possible examples of gender discrimination or harassment we will, as an employer, monitor the gender balance of existing employees, leavers and applicants for employment, promotion and training. The Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer will then be able to use this information to strive to eliminate discrimination by auditing all employment policies and procedures, whether old or new, to ensure that they do not discriminate and by making any necessary amendments .

The Valuation Joint Board believes that in order to promote equality of opportunity it is important to ensure that all employees are trained in the promotion of gender equality and our responsibilities under the Gender Equality Scheme. This should help them to identify any areas where action needs to be taken to promote equality. It should also encourage them to make a positive contribution to the promotion of equality

Good communication strategies will also assist in the positive promotion of gender equality. This will ensure active involvement by the Valuation Joint Board and its employees as well as positive initiatives to involve the wider community as consumers of our services.

SPECIFIC DUTIES

Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) (Scotland) Order 2007 we are required to formally prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme which sets out our functions and services relevant to the General Duty. This is due by the 29th June 2007 and requires us to consult with both staff and stakeholders when preparing the Scheme.

In addition, the Valuation Joint Board has to:-

- Revise the Scheme regularly at least every 3 years
- Monitor the impact of its policies on the promotion of gender equality
- Formulate an Action Plan to ensure the General Duty is fulfilled
- Publish the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring
- Ensure public access to information and to services
- Train staff in issues relevant to the duty
- Assess the gender impact of all its policies, whether old or new
- Report annually on the progress that has been made

In order to meet both the General Duty and the Specific Duties, Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board has published this Gender Equality Scheme. The Scheme is a timetabled and realistic plan, setting out our arrangements for meeting the General and Specific Duties in terms of gender equality. Its aim is to help us eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment as the result of a person's gender and also promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

Gender equality will be more relevant to some of our services and functions than others, but, in this context, relevance is about how our actions affect people rather than the number of people they affect.

HOW WE WILL MEET THE GENERAL DUTY

We will make measured progress in achieving gender equality by

- Making sure policies are properly targeted
- Improving our systems to deliver suitable and accessible services to meet the needs of the community
- Increasing confidence in our service
- encouraging us to be more aware of possible problems
- Assess each function for relevance to the General Duty
- Comply with Specific Duties
- Develop anti harassment policies
- Promote a positive image of gender equality

HOW WE WILL MEET THE SPECIFIC DUTIES

The Valuation Joint Board will consult with its employees and stakeholders over its Gender Equality Scheme. It will assess its policies & public services for their impact on gender equality and will develop its action plan for the next three years.

Timetables for action can be found within the Action Plans in Appendix 2.

MONITORING THE GENDER IMPACT OF SERVICES AND POLICIES

Services provided by the Valuation Joint Board will be monitored on an ongoing basis to see if the policies promote equality and avoid discrimination both direct and indirect. If changes are required these will be carried out over the three years of the Gender Equality Scheme and timescales will be outlined in the Action Plans.

All policies whether old or new will be subject to Gender Impact Assessments based on the following procedure

1. Identify all the aims of the policy
2. Consider all available data and research findings relating to the policy
3. Assess the likely impact on people of different genders based on the available evidence
4. Consider the options to mitigate any adverse gender impact
5. Consult on the policy and possible options
6. Decide whether to adopt or modify the policy
7. Once adopted make arrangements to monitor the actual impact of the policy
8. Publish the results of the impact assessment

CONSULTATION

Consultation is a priority within the Gender Equality Scheme. A copy of the proposed scheme has been circulated to all employees for their comments

As the Assessor & ERO service is too small to attempt to undertake external consultation on its own we have used Clackmannanshire Council – our Joint Board service provider to assist in completing our Scheme.

TRAINING

Existing staff will be required to attend a training session on our Gender Equality scheme and the achievement of equality targets as set out in the Action Plan.

Diversity training will form part of all induction packages to ensure that all new staff are aware of the Valuation Joint Board's commitment to equality of opportunity and the existence and importance of the Gender Equality Scheme.

Training will be reviewed and updated on an on going basis

The training will be co-ordinated and delivered primarily by Clackmannanshire Council.

Training for Valuation Joint Board members themselves will be provided by their relevant constituent authorities as will training for the Clerk and Treasurer to the Board

MEETING THE SPECIFIC DUTIES IN TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

The Valuation Joint Board is required to monitor the gender balance of employees in the following categories;

- Staff currently in post and applicants for employment or promotion
- Staff who are promoted within the organisation
- Staff who are involved in disciplinary proceedings
- Staff who leave employment.

Existing monitoring of applicants and the workforce will be extended to cover the new duties. We will use the information to help assess the effect of our functions and policies on ensuring a gender balance throughout the organisation.

Our new employee application packs identify, by means of a separate form the gender of any applicant. This form is not available to anyone involved in the selection process. Recruitment applications will be monitored and statistics kept.

Analysis of the results will provide information to inform for any future amendments to existing policies.

Staff will be encouraged to make use of existing grievance procedures to report any cases of harassment & discrimination

COMMUNICATION

Employees of the Valuation Joint Board will be informed about our progress on Gender Equality through in-house communication and through Service Plans and Best Value reviews. The public will be kept informed through focus groups, consultative forums, involvement in local voluntary sector organisations and through the press and our website. The annual progress report will be an important tool to communicate the action that has been taken by the Valuation Joint Board to promote gender equality

Appendix 1

Equal Opportunities Statement

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY STATEMENT

The Valuation Joint Board believes that equality of opportunity should be a guiding principle in all of its activities. The Board is actively working towards the elimination of Policies and Practices which discriminate. It is opposed to any form of discriminatory practices on grounds including:-

- gender
- marital status
- religious belief
- disability
- race
- ethnic origin
- colour
- nationality
- political belief
- sexual orientation
- socio-economic status
- age

We are actively working towards the elimination of all discriminatory practices.

Legal Framework:

The Joint Board is committed to adhering to the principles of domestic legislation as presented in the following Acts:

Equal Pay Act	1970
Sex Discrimination Act	1975
Race Relations Act	1976
Disability Discrimination Act	1995
The Race Relations Amendment Act	2000
The Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations	2003
Equal Pay Act 1970 (Amendment) Regulations	2003
Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations	2003
Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations	2003
Disability Discrimination Act	2005
The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations	2006
Equality Act	2006
The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations	2007

In addition the Joint Board will adhere to European Directives, information on which will be made available on a regular basis.

Updated by Central Scotland
Valuation Joint Board
22nd June, 2007

Applicable to all staff.

Appendix 2

Three Year Action Plan

THREE YEAR ACTION PLAN

Objective	Action	Timescale	Priority
Increase Flexible Working Opportunities	Investigate what options are available and what staff are looking for	By June 2009	Medium
Collect Information on staff & stakeholders gender issues	Review biennial staff questionnaire to identify any staff gender issues. Consult stakeholders by means of surveys, focus groups, and questionnaires	By June 2008	High
Ensure Line Managers are aware of implications of Gender Equality	Provide relevant Training on Equalities and in particular the CSVJB Gender Equality Scheme	By Sept 2007	High
Ensure that the Public are aware of our commitment to Gender Equality	Publish Scheme on Web Portal. Ensure copies are also available in alternative formats for those that need them	By June 2007	High
Ensure Gender equality is mainstreamed into the functioning of the office	Make progress reporting and monitoring part of the regular Management Team Meeting	By August 2007	High
Ensure that Action Plan is followed	Establish audit procedures and performance indicators to ensure that the duty is embedded in the working of the office	From June 2008 onwards	Medium
Ensure Gender Impact Assessment Occurs	Train all policy making staff in how to carry out Gender Impact Assessments	By June 2008	High
Encourage staff to get involved in promoting & achieving equality	Regular staff consultations. Creation of Working Groups where necessary. Feedback on results of consultations	Ongoing to June 2010	High
Increase awareness amongst staff of Gender Equality Issues	Make full use of the staff intranet to promote new material & policies, provide training for all staff	By June 2009	Medium

Monitor Gender balance within Office	Produce an annual report showing current position and general trends based on existing personnel records Review gender pay gap annually	June 2008 and annually thereafter	High
Identify areas for improvement	Review results of annual monitoring to identify areas of weakness in the gender balance in the office	June 2008 and annually thereafter	Medium
Develop strategies to overcome gender imbalances within the office	Management Team in consultation with staff, stake holders and relevant professional bodies e.g. RICS to review why imbalances are occurring and to take action to counteract the imbalance	June 2007 onwards	High
To attract applications from all genders for any vacant posts	Monitor gender balance of Job applicants. Where there is an imbalance for a certain type of Post then review marketing and recruitment techniques to ensure a positive promotion of the post to the underrepresented gender. Review gender monitoring form with a view to covering transsexuals	June 2007 onwards	High
Ensure recruitment is perceived to be a gender neutral process	All recruitment panels to be gender balanced	June 2007 onwards	High
Review the gender balance within the office against national average	Review data from other Assessors to identify where we are not meeting the national average	June 2008 onwards	Low
Monitor reasons for employees leaving to ensure that gender discrimination is not an issue	All leaving staff to have an exit interview to identify reasons for leaving	June 2007 onwards	High

Identify any acts of discrimination	Any complaints or grievances to be thoroughly investigated and any evidence of gender discrimination to be tackled quickly and effectively	June 2007 onwards	High
Reporting of harassment or discrimination	Review current policies and procedures to ensure that staff & stakeholders are able to report easily and confidentially any alleged instances of harassment & discrimination	By June 2009	Medium

Appendix 3

Definition of Discrimination

DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination can take various forms such as direct, indirect being the main examples and also as a result of victimisation and harassment

Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when a person (including local authorities, trade unions, employment agencies, vocational bodies etc) treats another person less favourably than another on the grounds of his/her gender

Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination occurs when there is a condition or requirement which although applied equally to people of different gender groups, has the effect that the proportion of a gender group that can comply is considerably smaller than that of another gender group that can comply. Such a condition or requirement is unlawful if it cannot be justified on non-gender grounds and if it causes a detriment to the person of the gender group that cannot comply.

Victimisation

It should be emphasised that harassment on grounds of sex and harassment of a sexual nature are unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act and victimisation is also unlawful in terms of legislation. For example, it is unlawful to treat someone less favourably because he/she has brought a complaint of sexual discrimination, has supported such a complaint or is believed to have done so.

In terms of the Sex Discrimination Act

Unlawful discrimination is defined as

- direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex
- discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity leave
- discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment
- direct and indirect discrimination against married persons and civil partners
- victimisation
- harassment and sexual harassment