



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

Race Equality Scheme

2008 - 2011

Race Equality Scheme

Foreword

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 provides an opportunity for Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board (the Board) to reaffirm its commitment to racial equality.

This Race Equality Scheme, together with its associated action plan, represents part of a positive equal opportunities agenda which includes the promotion of race equality by the Board within Argyll & Bute, and East and West Dunbartonshire

The promotion of equal opportunities generally, and racial equality in particular, are matters to which I am personally committed. This scheme forms part of that commitment and part of Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's wider equal opportunities policy.

Our performance in relation to the proposals contained in this scheme will be monitored and audited, and progress reported to elected members of the Board and to the citizens of Argyll & Bute and East and West Dunbartonshire.

David C. Thomson
Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board

November 2008

1.0 Introduction

This document outlines Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's Race Equality Scheme which forms one specific element of our general commitment to equal opportunities. Equality is not a minority issue as it is important for everyone. As the population becomes increasingly diverse, the need to address diversity and equality will become greater.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, has placed for the first time, a positive duty on public bodies to promote racial equality and the Government has announced its commitment to extend this positive duty to promote equality to both gender and disability. The principle of equality is also crucial to the Government's agenda to modernise Local Government.

The Board strives to put diversity and inclusion at the heart of its work. Our challenge is to ensure that equality considerations are central to all that we do.

In accordance with the General Duty imposed by the Race Relations Act, when we carry out our functions we will have due regard to the need to: -

Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination

Promote equality of opportunity

Promote good relations between people of different racial groups

The Board therefore aims to make race equality a central part of the way it works by putting it at the centre of policymaking, service delivery, regulation and enforcement and employment practice.

As an employer, the Board will also make arrangements to monitor areas of its employment policies by ethnic groups, including existing employees, leavers and applicants for employment, promotion and training.

The Act also places Specific Duties on public authorities to enable them to meet the general duty. In accordance with these duties, the Board has prepared this Race Equality Scheme. As such it specifies:

How we will make sure that the public has access to the information and services we provide

How we will assess our functions and policies in terms of their relevance to race equality

How we will assess and consult on any policies we are proposing to introduce

Our arrangements for training our employees on the new duties.

The arrangements for publishing the results of our consultations, monitoring and assessments

2.0 Discrimination Defined

Case law has shown that racial discrimination can take various forms, including direct, indirect and institutional racism.

Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when a person (including local authorities, trade unions, employment agencies, vocational training bodies etc) treats another person less favourably than another on racial grounds.

Indirect Discrimination

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

Institutional racism or systemic racism describes forms of racism, which are structured into political and social institutions. It occurs when organisations, institutions or governments discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights.

The Macpherson Report 1999, which followed the inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, defined a new type of racial discrimination – "institutional racism". This can be defined as follows:

"...the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes or behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people"

This form of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform. It regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and cultural groups and disadvantages and marginalises others. Institutional racism is often the most difficult to recognise and counter, particularly when it is perpetrated by institutions and governments who do not view themselves as racist. When present in a range of social contexts, this form of racism reinforces the disadvantage already experienced by some members of the community.

Victimisation

It should be emphasised that victimisation is also unlawful in terms of the legislation. For example, it is unlawful to treat someone less favourably because they have brought a complaint of racial discrimination, have supported such a complaint or are believed to have done so.

3.0 Service Mission and Vision

“WHO WE ARE”

Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board is an independent local authority which was established by The Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995

“WHAT WE DO”

We professionally compile and maintain the Valuation Rolls, Council Tax Valuation Lists and Registers of Electors for the Argyll & Bute, East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire Council areas

“OUR AIMS”

Building on our established professionalism, we aim to provide high quality, effective and responsive services to all of our stakeholders

COMMITMENTS

We are committed to:

- Listening and responding to stakeholders needs
- Valuing staff and providing them with opportunities to develop and contribute
- Reacting innovatively to change
- Treating all stakeholders in a fair, consistent manner and in accordance with equal opportunities requirements
- Striving for continuous improvement in all aspects of service delivery
- Ensuring that we are accessible and accountable to stakeholders
- Pro-actively planning workloads and deploying resources
- Using ‘plain English’

A Race Equality strategy impacts on nearly all of the above commitments.

4.0 Employment Monitoring

4.1 The Board is required to have in place arrangements for monitoring, by reference to the racial groups to which they belong, the number of applicants for employment, training and promotion and the number of staff:

- (a) in post,**
- (b) receiving training,**
- (c) benefiting or suffering detriment as a result of performance assessment,**
- (d) involved in grievance procedures,**
- (e) subject to disciplinary procedures, and**
- (f) ceasing employment with the Board**

4.2 The results of the monitoring detailed in 4.1 will be published annually.

4.3 The Assessor will, on behalf of the Board, make adequate arrangements to provide and report the information detailed above. The format, content and frequency of reporting will be agreed between the Board and the Assessor.

4.4 Although the Board takes no direct part in the employment of staff, other than Chief Officials, it may consider appeals made by employees against the actions of the Assessor on questions of discipline and grievance. It is important that procedures for dealing with appeals are drafted and applied in a way that avoids unlawful discrimination and they will be reviewed accordingly. The Board will monitor and analyse by racial group, grievances, disciplinary matters and appeals.

4.5 The Board recognises that it is important to analyse the information obtained from the monitoring in order to identify any differences between racial groups. The Assessor will investigate the processes that have resulted in any differences and take the necessary action to address barriers or failings.

4.6 The Clerk, the Treasurer to the Board and their respective staffs are employees of West Dunbartonshire Council and will be subject to its monitoring processes.

5.0 The Board's Functions

5.1 General - The principal function of the Board is to provide electoral registration, council tax valuation and non-domestic rating valuation services to its constituent authorities and the public.

5.2 Appointment and Conduct of Senior Officers - The Board, in conjunction with the Scottish Ministers, is responsible for the appointment of the Assessor and for his/her conduct. It is also responsible for the appointment of the Depute Assessor. The Assessor is responsible for the operational management of the Board's employees.

5.3 Scrutiny - In its scrutiny role, the Board is required to keep itself informed as to the manner in which the Assessor deals with operational matters and to this end it receives periodic reports from the Assessor on matters relating to the policies and operations of the organisation and its performance, including any complaints received.

5.4 The Board has considered which of its functions are relevant to the general duty to promote race equality and how relevant they are to it. These functions, along with the action, which the Board in conjunction with the Assessor intends to take, are detailed below.

Functions and Actions

Appointments

The Board is subject to Scottish Executive guidance governing the recruitment and selection of senior officers. The Board will, however, consult with its personnel advisers in an effort to identify any measures it can take with a view to further promoting equality of opportunity in its recruitment and selection process.

Employment of Staff

The Board is committed to the development of positive action to promote equal opportunities. Through the implementation of this policy the Board will focus on the eradication of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, in its own structures, employment practices and the provision of services. The Board will establish a monitoring regime as set out in Part 4 above.

Complaints

The Assessor has developed a Complaints Procedure. It will draw on the expertise of its constituent authorities on this matter and will consider any steps it can take to address the issues.

The assessor will collate and report information relating to ethnicity in his analysis of complaints made under this procedure.

Customer Consultation

Customer care questionnaires will include a question on ethnicity to allow analysis of customer satisfaction for ethnic minority groups. An assessment will be made of any barriers faced by the ethnic minority community through offering consultation with ethnic minority groups.

6.0 The Board's Policies

6.1 The Board will review its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Policies and Procedures to include a consideration of the way they might be amended to promote equality of opportunity

6.2 The Board is required to identify and put in place arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of its proposed policies on the promotion of race equality. The Board recognises that the steps required in respect of each policy will vary depending on the nature of the policy and the surrounding circumstances. From the introduction of this Scheme, the Board will require that all reports presented to it proposing policies that have any significant relevance to race equality include details of: -

an assessment of the impact of the proposed policy on race equality

any consultation carried out in conjunction with that assessment and

any action (including monitoring, where appropriate) proposed in consequence of that assessment and consultation

The Board will consider these matters in reaching its decision on the proposed policy.

7.0 Training

7.1 The Board will identify and put in place arrangements for training its staff in relation to its duties to promote race equality. The Board is committed to ensuring that the Assessor's staff receives adequate training in these areas. It is satisfied that the Assessor has made the necessary arrangements and will monitor their implementation in accordance with 4.3 above.

7.2 The Board considers it important that its own members receive training in its obligations with regard to race equality, and will ensure that current and future members participate in training programmes provided by its constituent authorities.

7.3 A statement of commitment to Race Equality will be included in staff Induction packs

8.0 Publicity

8.1 The Board is required to identify the arrangements it will make to publish the results of any assessments, consultations and monitoring it carries out to establish whether its policies have any impact on race equality. The Board is bound by and complies with the requirements of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 in respect of access to information.

8.2 The Board is also required to identify the arrangements it will make for ensuring public access to the information and services it provides. At present, the Board has no information as to the level of awareness of its role among the various communities in the area. The Board will draw on the expertise of its constituent authorities in this matter and consider what action it requires to take to develop public awareness.

8.3 This Scheme will be published and circulated to all members, officers and employees of the Board. Copies will be available from the Assessor at 235 Dumbarton Road Clydebank or Kilbrannan House, Bolgam Street, Campbeltown. The Scheme will also be placed on the Board's web-site at www.dab-vjb.gov.uk. Translations will be made available on request using the services of locally identified translators or through services accessed outwith the area.

9.0 Duration and Review

This scheme is intended to cover the period from 1st April 2005 to 1st April 2008 and will be subject to review at the end of that period. However the Board may, if considered appropriate, review the Scheme or any part of it at an earlier date in response to comments made from individuals or organisations or consultations with other bodies.

10.0 Action Plan

This section outlines our strategy to ensure compliance with both the general and specific duties required by race equality legislation.

The Board is committed to making Race Equality a central part of the way it works and to achieve this it will, for each of the three functions below:

- (a) provide details of LanguageLine to all contacts,**
- (b) ethnically monitor all staffing issues,**
- (c) integrate ethnicity monitoring within the customer consultation procedures**
- (d) review all Board policies to enhance equality of opportunity,**
- (e) train all staff in racial equality,**
- (f) publish the results of consultations, monitoring and assessments, and**
- (g) evaluate the needs/ views of ethnic minority groups and introduce consultation procedures as required**

It should be noted that meeting these duties forms part of the Board's equality strategy which aims to mainstream equal opportunities into the framework of service planning, monitoring and delivery. It is also our intention that all our services including employment will not simply conform to equal opportunities legal requirements but will be proactive in promoting equality.

Electoral Registration - This service is responsible for the compilation and maintenance of the Electoral Register. The Electoral Register is used at all elections and only persons who appear on the Register can vote. Electoral Registration forms are issued every year to all properties that are residences. This Service therefore reaches every member of the community who is aged 18 years or over. A statement will be added to the forms stating that the form can be made available in other languages or larger print.

Valuation - This service is responsible for the compilation and maintenance of the Valuation Roll. The Valuation Roll is used by the Director of Finance to bill occupiers/owners for non-domestic rates. Owners' Declarations are issued each year requesting information to enable the Roll to be continually updated. This Service therefore reaches all people who own lands or heritages in Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute. A statement will be added to the forms stating that the form can be made available in other languages or larger print.

Council Tax - This service is responsible for the compilation and maintenance of the Council Tax List. The List is used by the Director of Finance to bill occupiers/owners for Council Tax payments. Council Tax Banding Notices are issued to new dwellings, and certain altered dwellings. This Service therefore reaches all Council Taxpayers in Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute. A statement will be added to the Notices stating that the Notice can be made available in other languages or larger print.