



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

Gender Equality Scheme

2007 - 2010

Gender Equality Scheme

Foreword

The Gender Equality Duty is a new legal requirement on all public authorities and provides an opportunity for Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board (the Board) to reaffirm its commitment to gender equality.

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

The promotion of equal opportunities generally, and gender 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.

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Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer
Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board

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1.0 Introduction

This document outlines Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board's Gender 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 Gender Equality Duty has placed for the first time, a positive duty on public bodies to promote gender equality and is in addition to the Government's commitment to equality in gender, race 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 Gender General Duty imposed, when we carry out our functions we will have due regard to the need to: -

Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment of people on the grounds of their gender

Promote equality of opportunity between women and men

The Board therefore aims to make gender 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 gender, including existing employees, leavers and applicants for employment, promotion and training.

The Board will develop Equalities Targets. Setting targets, in all of the relevant equality areas, not only helps the Valuation Joint Board to fulfil its duties under the Equalities legislation but it also:

- Encourages the development of diversity and equalities practices
- Provides a basis for tackling all forms of discrimination
- Sends out a clear message that the VJB is taking diversity seriously
- Shows that there is proactive implementation of the equalities agenda
- Clarifies the aims and objectives of the VJB in relation to monitoring and diversity.

The Act also places Specific Duties on public authorities in Scotland to enable them to meet the general duty and, in accordance with this, the Board will.

Collect and use information at a local and national level which is specific to gender

Consult stakeholders specifically on gender equality

Assess the different impact of policies and practices on gender and use this information to inform the work

Identify priorities and set gender equality objectives

Publish a Gender Equality Scheme, report on progress annually, and review the scheme as necessary but certainly within three years

Establish an Action Plan

2.0 Discrimination Defined

Case law has shown that discrimination can take various forms, including direct, indirect and through victimisation and harassment.

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 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 cannot 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 the 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.

The Valuation Joint Board will not accept any instances of discrimination against or harassment of any gender groups and will deal with any reported instance through existing Disciplinary and Grievance procedures.

Staff are encouraged to report any instance of discrimination or harassment through the existing Grievance and/or Confidential Reporting (“Whistle blowing”) Procedures.

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 Gender Equality strategy impacts on nearly all of the above commitments.

The services and functions of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are statutory in nature and are, in effect, gender neutral.

4.0 Impact Assessment

The Management Team of the Valuation Joint Board will use its established Risk Management approach to identify the effects of changes of policy and legislation on the various gender streams. Negative effects will either be avoided, mitigated or accepted as appropriate and, where the risk is deemed to be high, a full Impact Assessment will be carried out. The Impact Assessment will identify where the Joint Board can promote equality of opportunity and any gaps in policy or adverse effects will be addressed.

The requirements of Impact Assessments will vary depending upon the nature of the change and its likely effect but each will include the following general steps:

- (a) Consider all available data and research findings
- (b) Assess the effect on people of different gender (as above)
- (c) Consider mitigating action
- (d) Consider alternative approaches and opportunities to promote equalities
- (e) Decide on the most appropriate actions
- (f) Establish arrangements for monitoring outcomes
- (g) Publish the Impact Assessment

5.0 Action Plans

Making sure the Gender Equality Scheme works to ensure compliance with our duty to promote equality of opportunity for all

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
To implement the Gender Equality Scheme	Valuation Joint Board to approve	Increased awareness of gender equality and eradication of discrimination	Ongoing from June 2007
To identify managers' responsibilities regarding implementation of the Gender Equality Scheme	Promote gender equality as part of managers' generic competencies	Increased awareness of gender equality within all decision making	Ongoing from June 2007
Raise the standard of gender equality across the Joint Board	Monitor annually and review the scheme every three years	Revised scheme	Annual assessment with full review in 2010

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
Raise public awareness of the scheme	Make Scheme available via the Joint Board's website and in all required formats	Increased awareness of the VJB's commitment to eliminate discrimination	Ongoing from June 2007
To monitor the implementation of the Scheme	Annual monitoring and reporting	Satisfaction that progress is made under the scheme. Revise the Scheme as necessary	Annual reporting to the Management Team
Improve accessibility, availability and appropriateness of our services to stakeholders	Involve and consult with all appropriate forums Consider results of consultation and report on them	To help us work towards ensuring that all our services are accessible, appropriate and available for all our stakeholders	Ongoing from June 2007
Encourage the participation and involvement of our stakeholders	Develop and disseminate guidance and advice to staff. Reinforce the importance of consultation as part of the impact assessment process	To ensure that we have robust mechanisms for involvement in place	Ongoing from June 2007

Identifying relevant functions and policies to give appropriate priority to the promotion of gender equality when carrying out functions and policies

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
To meet the requirements of the Gender Equality legislation by promoting a positive attitude towards gender equality	To review all functions and policies according to our duty to promote gender equality	All functions and policies are reviewed as per the Scheme. Application of the scheme across the functions and policies	Ongoing from June 2007 with full review to be complete by 2010

Assessing and consulting on the likely impact of functions and policies on people of different gender and whether they are having an adverse impact either on individuals or groups.

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
Management to be aware that monitoring information required	Monitoring form produced and adopted	Data monitored in a consistent manner	Ongoing from June 2007
Make arrangements to monitor adverse impact or the promotion of gender equality	Ongoing appropriate evaluation of functions and policies. Impact Assessments to be implemented	Basic statistics established. Published Impact Assessments	Ongoing from June 2007
To ensure consistent use of monitoring procedure	Use forms to monitor all as at 6.1 below	Improved service delivery	Ongoing from June 2007

Communicating the results of monitoring to make sure that the results are clear

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
Identification of information required	Management team provided with details of information required in suitable format	Information made available	Ongoing from June 2007
Make arrangements to publish results	Results to be published in various required formats and on VJB website	Public availability of information	Now
User satisfaction monitoring	Encourage representations to be made	Allows for actions/Scheme to be reviewed	Annual
Develop the VJB intranet to be informative on diversity and equality	Review content of pages, identify changes required and implement those changes	To ensure that staff have easy access to the most up to date and comprehensive information on diversity and equality	Ongoing from June 2007

Employment requirements to create a workforce that better represents the profile of the community

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
Employment monitoring	Report annually	Production of annual trends and action plan amendments	Annual
To eliminate possible discrimination in the workforce	Ensure continued monitoring of: Training applications Grievance (harassment) complaints Disciplinary proceedings Exit interviews Promotions	Publication of statistics Data will inform the policy and decision making processes	Ongoing from June 2007
To identify barriers to employment	Continue to consider all possible methods to achieve a more balanced workforce profile	Improved gender balance of the workforce profile	Ongoing from June 2007
To eliminate possible discrimination in the recruitment process	Improve monitoring practices. Adopt best practice in recruitment process	Equality of opportunity in the recruitment process	Ongoing from June 2007

Training Staff to ensure that members of staff are aware of the obligation and have the information required to promote gender equality

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
To effectively train staff on the requirements of the Gender Equality Scheme	Carry out appropriate training	Staff are confident in meeting the needs of diverse stakeholders	Roll out from June 2007

Objective	Action	Outcome	Timescale
To ensure appropriate staff know their responsibilities	Managers to cascade information	Rising awareness of the Gender Equality legislation	To follow on from roll out of main training
To ensure ongoing training as appropriate	Keep up to date with changes in legislation	A workforce kept up to date with legislative requirements	To follow on from roll out of main training

6.0 Employment Monitoring

6.1 The Board has put in place arrangements for monitoring, by reference to the gender 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 either through redundancy or retirement**

6.2 The results of the monitoring detailed in 6.1 will be made available to the public annually.

6.3 The Assessor will report the information detailed above annually to the Valuation Joint Board.

6.4 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 are reviewed accordingly. The Board will monitor and analyse by gender group, grievances, disciplinary matters and appeals.

6.5 The Board recognises that it is important to analyse the information obtained from the monitoring in order to identify different impacts and effects on the gender groups. The Assessor will investigate processes that have resulted in any differences and take the necessary action to address barriers or failings.

6.6 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.

7.0 The Board's Role

7.1 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.

7.2 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.

7.3 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.

7.4 The Board has considered which of its functions are relevant to the general duty to promote gender 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.

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 6 above.

Complaints

The Board 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 gender in his analysis of comments and complaints made under this procedure and identify any negative impact of its policies and practices on the different gender groups.

8.0 The Board's Policies

8.1 The Board will review its Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Policies and Procedures in line with the action plan to include a consideration of the way they might be amended to promote equality of opportunity

8.2 The Board will identify and put in place arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of its proposed policies on the promotion of gender 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 gender equality include details of: -

an assessment of the impact of the proposed policy on gender 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.

8.3 Customer Consultation

Customer care questionnaires will include a question on gender to allow analysis of customer satisfaction for gender groups. An assessment will be made of any barriers faced by these gender groups through consultation with community based groups.

8.4 In relation to employment, the Board will:

- Promote and manage flexible working
- Facilitate access to part time working at all appropriate levels and support part time workers
- Manage leave for parents and carers
- Eliminate any discrimination towards pregnant women and manage pregnancy and return from maternity and paternity leave
- Eliminate any discrimination against, and harassment of, transsexual staff and potential staff

9.0 Training

9.1 The Board will identify and put in place arrangements for training its staff in relation to its duties to promote gender 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 6.1 above.

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

9.3 A statement of commitment to Gender Equality will be included in staff Induction packs

10.0 Publicity

10.1 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 gender 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.

10.2 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 across the genders 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.

10.3 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, G81 4XJ or Kilbrannan House, Bolgam Street, Campbeltown, PA28 6HZ. 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.

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.

11.0 Functions

11.1 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.

11.2 Valuation - This service is responsible for the compilation and maintenance of the Valuation Roll. The Valuation Roll forms the basis of the Assessment Roll, 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.

11.3 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 occupiers of new dwellings, and certain altered dwellings. This service therefore reaches all Council Taxpayers in Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute.

12.0 Duration and Review

This scheme is intended to cover the period from 29th June 2007 to 29th June 2010 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.