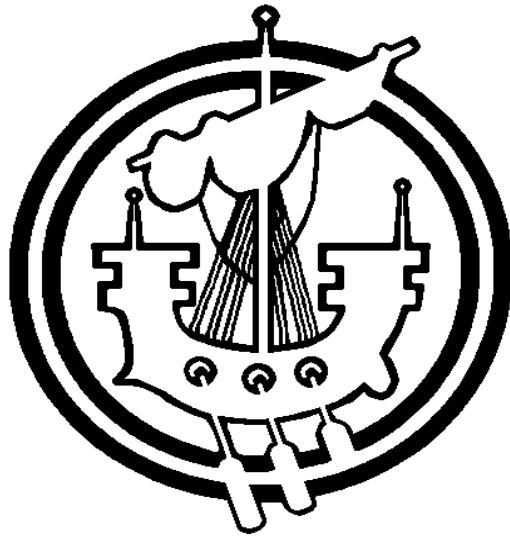


Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

**Gender Equality Scheme
Annual Report 2009**



Introduction

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a duty to publish an annual progress report for each year of the Gender Equality Scheme. This Gender Equality Scheme is written to ensure that the Comhairle complies with its duties under the Equality Act 2006, which amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. A Gender Equality Scheme must set out the arrangements put in place to fulfill the duty to promote gender equality, which must have due regard to the need to:

- take suitable action to eliminate illegal discrimination and harassment;
- promote equal opportunities for both men and women.

Like most public authorities, the Comhairle must also meet specific duties which set out a framework to comply with the general duty and must:

- prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme (GES) setting out gender equality objectives;
- consider whether there is a need to include actions to address the causes of the gender pay gap;
- gather and use information on how policies and practices affect gender equality in the workforce and in the delivery of services;
- consult with stakeholders (i.e. employees, service users and others, including trade unions);
- assess the impact of current and proposed policies and practice on gender equality;
- implement the actions outlined in the GES within three years;
- report annually on the progress of the scheme and review the GES at least every three years.

The Comhairle has a duty to publish an annual progress report for each year of the Gender Equality Scheme; the report should provide a summary of the following:

- Progress made against the Comhairle Gender Equality Scheme action plan, including any progress made on eliminating discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and meeting targets.
- Any results of the year's information gathering detailing what information has been obtained and any indications this provides.
- Describe how the information gathered will be used to address actions identified.
- An indication of how the Gender Equality Scheme will continue to develop.

Action Plan: Progress to date

The action plan is not static, it is an evolving process, and has been updated to reflect this. Appendix one details the revised action plan in full. The remainder of this section outlines the progress/work to done on the revised action plan.

Employees Aware of Equality legislation and Comhairle policy

The Equalities training has been updated to reflect the recent changes in legislation. Equality and Diversity training is also anticipated to be included as part of a wider induction training programme.

Employees treat all customers and colleagues with dignity and respect

Equality and Diversity training is being included in the new core values and as part of the management standards. The Corporate Improvement Plan, which was based on the employee survey 2008, includes a number of action points in regard to dignity and respect at work.

The employee survey found that in terms of gender, women working in the organisation are happier than men. The exception to this is in terms of the benefits package, which may be affected by the fact that more women work part-time and may have had career breaks to raise family.

Men appear to be less comfortable with change in the organisation, feel less supported by line management and are less satisfied in their current role.

The survey showed that 9% of employees felt disadvantaged on account of their gender. The breakdown of this is 4% of men felt disadvantaged because of their gender and 13% of women. A quarter of employees have said they face disadvantage on account of their demographic (age, gender, disability, race etc).

Employees trained and using Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) are underway. All policies by the end of 2009 will require an impact assessment prior to going before Committee. The Comhairle has updated its equalities impact assessment training and this is being rolled out for June 2009.

All existing policies will be put through an Impact Assessment; it is also the aim that EIA's will be integral to the policy development process.

Comprehensive monitoring systems in place for all employees

The Resourcelink system will be up and running with monitoring report data accessible. The system is expected to become fully operational by early 2010.

Employees have access to training development and support at work

New Performance Appraisals and Management Standards have been developed, with the number of completed appraisals being reported to Committee. New management training is being rolled out, internal communications are being developed and there is a requirement for all departments to have a training plan in place.

Reduce the pay gap

Single status has been completed with pay and grading harmonised in line with the requirements of the Equal Pay Act. The Statutory Performance Indicators for 2008-09 show that there is an increase of women earners in the top 2 and 5% of the Comhairle. While there is work still to be done, the figures for the past year show a significant increase in the numbers in the top 2 and 5% of earners.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Top 2%	18.8%	20.0%	19.7%	29.0%
Top 5%	23.5%	23.6%	24.7%	35.4%

Promote flexible working

The flexible working conditions have improved from April 2009, maintaining the Comhairle's family friendly policies. The changes to the working conditions saw the introduction of more flexible working conditions including:

- Extension of the bandwidths so employees can start earlier and finish later.
- Extension to the amount of flexi-leave that may be taken and carried forward.
- Changes to the core time finish in the afternoon to enable employees to finish earlier and also assist parents with picking up children from school.

Increased support and action in the area of domestic violence

The Comhairle will continue to support efforts to reduce the levels of domestic violence in the Western Isles.

A new website may be piloted later in 2009; it is an online reporting system for all types of hate incident including gender related incidents. A similar website has just gone 'live' in the Highlands in a joint collaboration between NHS Highland, Highland Council, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Highland and Islands Enterprise and Northern Constabulary.

Use the procurement function to promote gender equality

The Comhairle already has requirements of its contractors to be compliant with equal opportunities legislation.

The Comhairle includes questions in its tender evaluation criteria pro-formas and Pre Qualifications Questionnaires (PQQ) for a summary of their policy in respect of training, CPD, Race Relations, Equal Opportunity, Health and Safety and Disability Discrimination in some service and consultancy contracts

The Equality Act announced by the Government in April 2009 will further strengthen the legal requirement that public authorities use the procurement function to leverage equality issues.

Single Equality Scheme

The Comhairle intends to adopt a Single Equality Scheme for 2010. This will integrate the three existing schemes: race; gender and disability into one. The scheme will also produce action plans for the other equality strands, which currently do not have a duty i.e. age, religion of belief and sexual orientation. There will be consultation and engagement prior to the scheme being written involving as many interested persons as possible.

Diversity & Equality Steering Group

The Diversity & Equality Steering Group is a local multi-agency group which involves the Comhairle, NHS Western Isles, Lews Castle College, Northern Constabulary, the Voluntary Sector and other groups such as the local Access Panels.

The group is developing actions for the partners to ensure that all members of the community fully participate in the social, economic and political life in the islands and to improve access to services for all.

Summary

The Comhairle has made progress in a number of areas. There is still work to be done and through Impact Assessments, the work of the Diversity and Equality Steering Group and the objectives of the action plan, the Comhairle will continue to focus on mainstreaming equality across all its areas.

More Information

If you have any comments or questions about the scheme, please contact:

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Gender Equality Scheme: Action Plan

Requirement	Action	Cost	Time Frame	Evidence of Actions (measures)
Employees aware of Equality legislation and Comhairle policy	In-house training on Equality & Diversity issues. Briefings given on equality issues.	Employee time.	December 2009	Numbers of employees trained. Number of briefings given. Equality and Diversity training included in induction.
Employees treat all customers and colleagues with dignity and respect	Equality and Diversity included in Customer Services training which will be available to all employees.	Employee time	March 2010	Number of complaints regarding customer service Number of employees trained Management Standards in place.
Management practices adopted by the Comhairle do not discriminate against staff by gender.	Equality and Diversity included in new core values and management competencies.	Employee time	August 2009	No incidences of gender related harassment.
Employees trained and using Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	DESG training for trainers on EIA EIA toolkit and checklist for all new policies	Employee time.	Completed February 2009 April 2010	Number of employees trained. Number of policies having been developed/assessed using EIA. Staff and users able to access jobs and services without discrimination.

Requirement	Action	Cost	Time Frame	Evidence of Actions (measures)
All employees are treated with respect and dignity Employees have access to training, development and support at work	The Comhairle will review the current employee Appraisal and Personal Development systems and introduce a new Management Standards framework.	Employee time.	August 2009	New Performance Appraisals and management standards in place. Management training delivered. Internal communication developed and produced on a regular basis
	The Comhairle will pilot management training to encourage excellence.	Employee time.	April 2009	
	Employees have access to internal communication.	Employee time.	April 2009	
Reduce the pay gap	Review of pay and grading to harmonise pay. The requirements of the Equal Pay Act are met.		Completed 2008	Increase in number of women earners in the top 2 and 5% of earners in the Comhairle.
Promote flexible working	Improved flexible working conditions from April 2009. Maintain family friendly policies.		April 2010	Better work/life balance for employees.
Increased support and action in the area of domestic violence.	Ensure Domestic Abuse policy is relevant and up to date.		Ongoing	Increased awareness amongst employees and managers of support mechanisms in place.
Use the procurement function to promote gender equality	Suppliers must be compliant with equalities legislation. They must disclose breaches of equalities legislation.			Other organisations take account of equalities. Drive equality issues through the authorities' services.