

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

**Gender Equality Scheme  
Annual Report 2010**



## **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 Comhairle's induction programme for new employees has been updated and includes a section on Equality and Diversity to brief all new employees. Equality and diversity training is still available for all existing employees on request and employees in customer facing roles are particularly encourage to attend. Councillors have also undertaken Equality training including Equality Impact Assessment training which will enable them to be more aware of the equality impact of the decisions which they are required to make as part of their role and actively look at ways to minimise this impact.

### **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 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 disadvantage on account of their gender. The breakdown of this is 4% of men felt disadvantage 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).

The Corporate Improvement Plan also has action points to improve dignity and respect at work.

### **Employees trained and using Equality Impact Assessment**

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) training is available to all employees and is particularly directed at Officers involved in policy and service delivery. In addition, Councillors attended a training session regarding Equality Impact Assessments which will enable them to make better informed decisions regarding issues that put before them concerning the impact that Comhairle policies and services will have on Western Isles communities. All new policies which have an impact on people require an Equality Impact Assessment to be completed before they go before Committee. The Democratic Services Manager has the right to refuse a report if this has not been completed before the Agenda deadline.

All existing policies will have an Equality Impact Assessment completed at the time of the policy/service renewal. It is also the aim that EQIA'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 operational by Autumn 2010.

### **Employees have access to information, training, development and support at work**

New Performance Appraisals, Personal Development Plans and Standards have been developed and implemented. Employees have gone through the appraisal process in 2009, with the number of appraisals completed reported to committee. Six monthly reviews are now being conducted with the opportunity to review progress against agreed actions and identify any training needs to enable employees to acquire all the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out the full duties required of the post.

Internal communications have been developed and improved with a Personnel Update being published on a quarterly basis which aims to improve internal communication amongst the 2,200 employees in relation to workforce changes within the Comhairle. It also provides information regarding a section or department of the Comhairle which raises awareness of the work of others and can create opportunities for sharing information and resource for mutual benefit.

In addition to this, an employee newsletter will also be published on a quarterly basis which provides information regarding employee benefits and new incentives which all employees may not be aware of. It also provides an update from one of the elected Councillors and a message from the Chief Executive.

All departments are now required to have an active training plan in place.

### **Reduce the pay gap**

In July 2008, the 'single status' agreement was implemented. Significant work was undertaken on the design of a new pay and grading model which demonstrates compliance with the Equal Pay Act. The end result of the Single Status project was to assimilate all employees covered by the agreement to a new pay and grading structure which was based on the nationally agreed spinal column points of hourly rates. Having undertaken a comprehensive and robust job evaluation process prior to implementation has ensured that Comhairle employees receive equal pay for like work, work rated as equivalent and work of equal value by eliminating discrimination in pay systems.

The Comhairle has also recently agreed a procedure for the re-evaluation of jobs where changes have been made to an existing post or where the duties of the post have been revised. This will ensure that employees will always receive equal pay for like work.

The Equal Opportunities statutory performance indicators for 2009/10 evidence that there has been a further increase of women earners in the top 2% and 5% of the Comhairle. Whilst the Comhairle recognise that there is work still to be done, it is positive to observe these figures improving on an annual basis.

## **Equal Opportunities Statutory Performance Indicator:**

	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
<b>Top 2%</b>	18.8%	20.0%	19.7%	22.5%	25.6%
<b>Top 5%</b>	23.5%	23.6%	24.7%	31.5%	33.0%

### **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.

In addition to local arrangements, in accordance with the Employment Act 2002 employees of the Comhairle have a statutory right to request a "contract variation" in respect of working hours, working time or working from home. From April 2007 the right to request flexible working was extended to employees who are carers of certain individuals and from April 2009 the right to request flexible working extended to parents of children under 17 years of age or under 18 years of age where the child is disabled. The flexible working policy is accessible in the Comhairle Employment handbook which is available to all employees.

Also as part of the Comhairle's Human Resources Strategy the Comhairle has sought interest of employee's who would wish to reduce their working hours on a permanent basis. All expressions of interest will be considered in line with service delivery requirements.

With both local policies and national legislation there is now more opportunities for employees to work a pattern that meets their work/life balance and personal responsibilities. The Comhairle will continue to support employees to find a balance that meets both the needs of the employee and Comhairle.

### **Increased support and action in the area of domestic violence**

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

The Department of Social and Community Services provide core funding to the Western Isles Woman's Aid and a Service Level Agreement is in place which describes the service; objectives of the service; responsibilities of both parties.

The objectives of the service are as follows:-

1. To provide enabling support for women, children and young people whose lives have been affected by domestic abuse.

2. To provide a temporary place of safety for those who have experienced domestic violence within a current or part relationship.
3. Aim to empower women to make their own decisions and not make decisions for them. Western Isles Women's Aid encourages self determination and help women to regain the respect which they may have lost through abuse.
4. Western Isles Women's Aid philosophy is that we believe that all women, children and young people should have the right to safety from abuse, therefore Western Isles Women's Aid does not condone physical abuse, threats or verbal abuse and we seek a non abusive environment within our refuge and resource centre.

The Comhairle also chair, and facilitate the Outer Hebrides Domestic Abuse Forum (OHDAF) which is a multi agency forum whose purpose is to reduce and prevent incidents of domestic abuse through effective co-operation between the private, public and voluntary sectors in the provision of high quality appropriate services and the protection of adults and children experiencing, affected by or at risk of suffering domestic abuse. The constitution of the forum specifically identifies that violence against women as a key function of the forum.

Membership of the Outer Hebrides Domestic Abuse Forum is made up of the following:-

- Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership
- Children's Hearing Reporter
- Community Care and Criminal Justice Service
- NHS Western Isles
- Housing Services – CnES
- Education and Children's Services CnES
- Child Protection Committee
- Northern Constabulary
- Western Isles Women's Aid
- Action for Children
- Counselling and Family Mediation
- Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre
- Western Isles Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP)

The Comhairle remain focused on highlighting the issues residents within the Western Isles face regarding domestic abuse and are working closer with partnership agencies to ensure suitable training programme specifically for violence against women is delivered to personnel to ensure personnel are equipped and confident in dealing with incidents they face. The Comhairle will also be working more closely with Western Isles Women's Aid to discuss how the SLA is working and to agree priorities and the way forward.

The OHDAF has also secured Scottish Government funding and has entered into a formal agreement with The Women's Support Network to deliver a range of training & development work throughout the Western Isles.

## **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 new Single Equality Bill which was introduced in April 2010 and is expected to come into force by October 2010 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 in preparation for the new Equality Bill, brought in to strengthen the existing law and introduce new measures to protect against potential discrimination. The new bill will streamline the law by replacing numerous pieces of legislation with a single Act which will provide straightforward practical guidance for employers, services providers and public bodies and will take further steps to ensure everyone has the right to be treated fairly and equally.

The single equality scheme will integrate the three existing schemes: race; gender and disability into one and also cover the new protected characteristics which are now covered by the legislation. The protected characteristics are as follows:

**Age;**  
**Disability;**  
**Gender reassignment;**  
**Marriage and civil partnership;**  
**Pregnancy and maternity;**  
**Race;**  
**Religion or belief;**  
**Sex; 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 (DESG)**

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 meets on a bi-monthly basis and is involved in 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.

Minutes of the DESG meetings are published on the Comhairle website.

### **Summary**

The Comhairle remain committed to improving gender equality in our service provision and delivery and our responsibilities as an employer. The Comhairle recognizes that promoting equality will improve public services and employment opportunities for all residents in the Western Isles. With the introduction of Equality Impact Assessments all service areas are more aware that Equal Opportunities is a central part of service delivery and that equality objectives are considered, and where necessary, included in the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy and Service Business Plans.

In the current economic climate it is more important than ever that services are required to integrate equality into the service planning process at the earliest possible stage. A planned approach to equality and diversity will result in the delivery of quality services that meet the needs of the communities and individuals we serve.

### **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  Management practices adopted by the Comhairle do not discriminate against staff by gender.	Equality and Diversity included in Customer Services training which will be available to all employees.  Equality and Diversity included in new core values and management competencies.	Employee time  Employee time	March 2010  August 2009	Number of complaints regarding customer service  Number of employees trained Management Competencies in place.  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 competencies framework.	Employee time.	August 2009	New Performance Appraisals, Personal Development Plans and competencies 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.		Ongoing	Other organisations take account of equalities. Drives equality issues through the authorities' services.