

Gender Equality Scheme

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Suffolk Coastal District Council (The Council) is committed to equality of opportunity including equality of access to employment and to the services we provide. One of our core values is “Valuing all People” and our aim is to ensure our services are accessible by all at the right place and at the right time.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that some people may be prevented from participating fully in our community because of a variety of reasons: these may include unfair treatment or exclusion on the basis of their age, race, gender, disability, faith, language, skin colour, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or some other personal characteristic or circumstance. This scheme specifically sets out to address the needs of people of both genders.
- 1.3 The purpose of this Gender Equality Scheme is to assist us to:
 - promote equality of opportunity between men and women
 - help us to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2006
 - outline how we will monitor and improve the ways in which we deliver services as part of our Equality Framework.
- 1.4 The Equality Act 2006 is different from previous sex equality legislation in two crucial respects as it introduces; (i) the positive requirement to take action, rather than waiting for individuals to take cases against us; and (ii) the requirement to act to promote equality, not just to avoid discrimination. Complying with the Equality Act should mean that women and men get services that meet their needs more closely. It should help us to consider what are the different issues and priorities for women and men who use the services we provide.
- 1.5 We are required not only to have due regard to gender equality when making decisions about the future, but also to take action to tackle the consequences of decisions in the past which failed to give due regard to gender equality.
- 1.6 Discrimination on the grounds of gender also includes discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment in relation to both employment and vocational training. We must, therefore, review all our employment policies and procedures to make sure that they adequately cover transsexual employees. As an employer the statutory duty placed upon us applies, not only to those individuals who have undergone gender reassignment, but also to those who intend to undergo the procedure. The scope of legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment was extended in December 2007 by the implementation of the Goods and Services Directive 2004/113. This means that we

need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender reassignment in the provision of our services.

2 The Duty to Promote Gender Equality

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to place a statutory duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
 - promote equality of opportunity between men and women.
- 2.2 The Council will consider the impact of the duty on its policies and service delivery by:
- Identifying which functions are relevant to gender equality.
 - Prioritising these functions according to their importance, or likely importance, for gender equality.
 - Assessing all relevant functions and policies for their impact on gender equality.
 - Considering and making changes to policies where this is necessary to meet the general duty.
- 2.3 In addition to the above general duty, regulations issued under the 2006 Act require public authorities to undertake a number of specific duties. We must:
- produce and publish an equality scheme identifying our gender equality goals and action to meet them, in consultation with employers and stakeholders;
 - monitor and review progress;
 - review the scheme at least every three years;
 - develop, publish and regularly review an equal pay policy, introducing measures to address promotion, development and occupational segregation; and
 - conduct and publish gender impact assessments of all major policy developments, and publish our criteria for conducting such impact assessments.
- 2.4 This Gender Equality Scheme forms part of our Services for All Policy, and does not stand alone. It is also linked to other Council policies and procedures, in particular our Disability Equality Scheme, Race Equality Scheme, Equal Opportunity in Employment Policy, and our performance management system (our Balanced Scorecards).
- 2.5 This Scheme will be delivered through the Services for All three year action plan. These actions will be managed with existing resources and the activities will be proportionate to the needs of the district. Essentially the focus will be to ensure that providing Services for All is integrated into the general management of the Council rather than it being a separate initiative

3 The Council's Functions and Policies

In order to ensure that all the Council's functions and policies are reviewed, a comprehensive list of all the Council's services is given below. In identifying those services which particularly need to be included in this Gender Equality Scheme we have focused upon those with a public interface, in particular those with a significant element of discretion and/or enforcement. These services are highlighted below.

| Service | Functions |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Legal & Democratic Services | Licensing Electoral Registration and Elections Revenue Grants Capital Grants Rights of Way |
| Finance & Central Services | Legal Services and Land Charges Street Naming and Numbering |
| Planning | Planning Applications Planning Advice Planning Enforcement Planning Appeals Dangerous Structures Building Control Inspections |
| Community, and Economic Services | Tourist Information Centres Sport, Leisure, Art & Culture Tourism Development and Resort Promotion Community Development Local Plans Community Safety and Emergency Planning Economic Development and Regeneration Rural Issues and Countryside Management Tree Preservation Orders |
| Health | Food and Safety Inspections Health & Safety Training Pollution Control/Enforcement Food and Safety Training Food Complaints/Advice Health and Safety/Inspections Accident Notification Infectious Diseases Notification Health Improvement Import of Animal & Non-Animal Products Certification of Animal Products |
| Housing and Benefits | Benefits Applications Housing Advice and Support Homelessness Travellers Home Improvement/Renovation Grants Benefits Recovery Housing Policy and Enabling Private Sector Housing Council Tax NNDR |

| Service | Functions |
|--|--|
| Customer & Strategic Services | Human Resources, particularly Recruitment Customer Services Communications Concessionary Fares |
| SCDC/Ipswich Partnership Internal Audit | Benefit Fraud |
| Suffolk Coastal Services | Refuse Collection Licensing Pest Control Dog Warden Service Abandoned Vehicles Private Water Supplies |

4 Gender Equality in Service Provision

4.1 Suffolk Coastal is a shire district local authority in the County of Suffolk. It is a mainly rural district covering 88,938 hectares. It has a population of 122,000.

4.2 We will aim to:

- Provide appropriate, accessible and effective services to all sections of our community.
- Encourage participation in Council decision-making by all sections of our community, consulting about the likely impact of new policies on different gender groups.
- Ensure that all employees understand what gender equality in service provision means.
- Review and monitor our services to ensure that they do not discriminate.
- Carry out impact assessments on new and existing policies to ensure that they don't adversely impact on either men or women.
- Challenge discrimination wherever it is identified.
- Ensure that all service users have equal access to our complaints procedure and that we act upon complaints.

5 Gender Equality in Employment

5.1 The Council is committed to an active equal opportunity in employment policy from recruitment and selection, through training, development, appraisal and promotion to retirement for all employees. It is our intention to promote an environment free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Harassment is unwanted behaviour, whether physical, verbal or non-verbal, which is offensive, humiliating and viewed as unacceptable by the recipient.

5.2 Harassment of employees because of their gender is a disciplinary offence, and may constitute gross misconduct, which could lead to dismissal. Disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who is found to have committed an act of discrimination, and serious breaches of this policy will be treated as gross misconduct.

- 5.3 If any employee believes that he/she has been discriminated against for a reason relating to his/her gender, they should use the organisation's grievance procedure.
- 5.4 Employees will be recruited solely on the basis of work criteria and the applicant's abilities and individual merit. We will monitor our recruitment process to ensure that recruitment decisions are made in an objectively justifiable way.
- 5.5 All employees will have equal access to training and opportunities for promotion and other aspects of career development based solely on their abilities.
- 5.6 All employees will have equal access to all employment benefits and facilities. We have a flexible working policy which provides all staff with the opportunity to request flexible working. We also have a home working scheme which aims to provide greater opportunities for staff to work flexibly. We will monitor take up of this policy to ensure that all staff are able to take up the opportunity of flexible working where appropriate.
- 5.7 We will develop, publish and regularly review an equal pay policy, introducing measures to address promotion, development and occupational segregation, and carry out regular equal pay audits.

6 Gender Equality in Partnerships, Procurement and Contracting

- 6.1 The Council recognises its responsibility to encourage and work with partners and other groups to integrate equality and diversity into their policy-making, service delivery and monitoring arrangements. This includes any organisation that has a contract to deliver services on behalf of the Council.
- 6.2 Through our strategic partnering work we will ensure that significant partners, contractors and suppliers are aware of our policy on equality and diversity and are clear about their obligation to provide services that are free from discrimination.
- 6.3 We will ensure that our selection and tendering processes include gender equality considerations.
- 6.4 We will provide training for relevant employees in gender equalities issues for procurement.

7 Monitoring & Reporting

- 7.1 We will monitor and review the Services for All Policy and the Gender Equality Scheme at least every three years to ensure that they remain up to date and relevant. We will keep the Gender Equality Scheme distinct, but bring its review into line with the Services for All Policy.
- 7.2 The Gender Equality Scheme Action Plan will be incorporated into the Services for All Action Plan. Actions specific to our duty to promote Gender Equality will be identified as such in the plan.

- 7.3 We will monitor and review the Services for All Action Plan through the Services for All Working Group on a regular basis. The Action plan will cover the following areas:
- Policy and Communication
 - Representation and Consultation
 - Employee and Member Development
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Employment
 - Equality Standard for Local Government
 - Community Cohesion
 - Specific Service Area Issues
- 7.4 We will report annually on the performance and achievements under the Services for All Policy to Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and publish the report on our website. We will identify specific performance and achievements under the Gender Equality Scheme in that report.