

**THE GENDER EQUALITY DUTY  
(Report by Head of Policy and Strategic Services)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to a Gender Equality Scheme and for the Cabinet to note associated action plan.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In December 2006 the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) 1975, as amended, places a duty on all public bodies to promote gender equality, with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2007.
- 2.2 The new duty requires the Council, along with other public sector organisations, to actively promote gender equality, in the same way as it is required to promote race and disability equality.
- 2.3 This positive duty is designed to build gender equality at the beginning of the process; rather than make it an adjustment at the end. It will bring about a shift from a legal framework, which relies on individuals complaining about discrimination, to one in which the public sector becomes active in promoting change.
- 2.4 The Act sets out a general duty, which, means that the Council will have to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity between men and women. The Council also has a specific duty which is to produce a Gender Equality Scheme which defines how we will meet the general duty.

**3 Development of the Scheme**

- 3.1 In producing a Gender Equality Scheme the Council has examined existing research and data and produced an employee profile, copies of which are available upon request from Policy and Strategic Services Division. Because of the timing of the new legislation and its need to have a scheme in place by 6<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the scheme will be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) at their meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> April and any comments will be reported to the meeting. Unfortunately it has not been possible to seek the views of the Employment Liaison Advisory Group nor those of the Employment Panel on the scheme. This will be done at their next meeting and may result in changes to the supporting action plan.

**4. ENFORCEMENT AND GUIDANCE ON THE SCHEME**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights will be responsible for guidance and enforcement of the new duty. In the meantime there is a recently published Code of Practice and the attached Gender Equality Scheme is compatible with this. The Scheme is similar in format and content to our current Race and Disability

Equality Schemes. The Schemes can be easily integrated with other processes to promote equality.

## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Cabinet is invited to adopt the Gender Equality Scheme and to note associated action plan.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Duty to Promote Gender Equality Code of Practice

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