

GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

1. BACKGROUND

The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and places a statutory general duty on all public authorities to promote gender equality. The duty provides a framework within which public authorities can carry out their functions more effectively and tackle discrimination at its root causes, by making gender equality an integral part of decision-making and activities. As a public authority required to comply with the duty, we need to be aware of unnecessary or discriminatory barriers, and how we can remove them.

2. THE GENERAL DUTY

Under the general duty, in carrying out their function, public authorities must have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- eliminate harassment
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

3. THE SPECIFIC DUTY

The General Duty is supported by Specific Duties which includes the requirement for Tayside Contracts to prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme (GES), demonstrating how we intend to fulfil the General and Specific Duties, and setting out our gender equality objectives.

The GES must include the following:

- The actions taken, or intended, to address the causes of any gender pay gap (including publishing an Equal pay Statement by 28 September 2007).
- How we will collect and analyse information to check if our policies and practices affect gender equality in the delivery of services and in the workplace.
- How we will consult with service users, employees, trade unions and others.
- How we will assess the impact of our current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality.
- How we will implement the Scheme through our action plan.
- How we will publish the Scheme.
- How we will monitor and review the effectiveness of the Scheme.
- How we will report on progress.

The Specific Duties as stated serve as a means to an end. They are steps, methods or arrangements, not an end in themselves. Meeting the General Duty is the main objective. Fulfilling the duties should help make equality central to policy making and service delivery, and will help us consider gender equality in all our activities.

4. SPECIFIC DUTIES: SERVICE DELIVERY

To ensure we comply with the duty, we will develop an Action Plan, focusing on the core areas of:

- i) involving people
- ii) impact assessing policies and practices
- iii) service delivery
- iv) communication

v) procurement

5. SPECIFIC DUTIES: EMPLOYMENT

Tayside Contracts has approximately 2,300 employees, and acknowledges the benefit of attracting and retaining a diverse and effective workforce and strives to support employees by helping them to maximise their potential. We prohibit all forms of unlawful discrimination or unfair discrimination, including harassment, on any grounds including gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or marital status. We are committed to the principle of equal opportunity in employment when attracting job applicants, and in access to training, development and promotion at all levels within the organisation.

We aim to operate fair and consistent procedures in recruiting and selecting staff; offering flexible working arrangements; pay; staff appraisals; grievances and disciplinary matters. We will achieve this by monitoring our action plan to make sure it works in practice. We will collect and review employee data regularly on gender, race and disability.

(i) Monitoring

In recent years, we have introduced a new personnel database, Snowdrop, which is increasingly able to provide appropriate equal opportunities' statistics. However, the need for further development in some areas remains and will be addressed. We consider the most appropriate means of reporting such information is annually with other annual reports, which are accessible on our website.

(ii) Recruitment and Selection

We are committed to promoting the benefits of having a career with Tayside Contracts. We will do this by identifying and removing any unnecessary barriers that may prevent men, women and transgender people from applying to work with us. Most job outlines have been reviewed recently as part of our Job Evaluation exercise. We have removed any requirements which are not essential for the job which could prevent an individual from applying.

For example, the majority of our jobs could be carried out on a job share or other flexible working basis and this is made clear in our job adverts, or information sent to all applicants. Equal opportunities monitoring is carried out at the initial application stage, and at the point of selection. This allows us to monitor whether our employment policies and practices are working well in reality. As part of our action plan we will consult relevant stakeholders to further develop appropriate actions in this important area.

(iii) Work-Life Balance

Tayside Contracts is committed to, and acknowledges the value of achieving patterns of work which facilitate improved operational effectiveness, balanced with individuals' personal life and commitments. As a result of the Work and Families Act 2006, any employee who is on maternity leave can elect to attend a maximum of ten "keeping in touch" days at work without an adverse impact upon their maternity pay. This may help employees to feel less isolated whilst on maternity leave, and will be encouraged.

There is a Parental Leave Policy, Time off for Dependents, an Adoption Policy which sets out entitlements for any employee who adopts a child or children, and a flexible working hours scheme wherever it is operationally possible within Tayside Contracts.

(iv) Equal Pay

A new analytical Job Evaluation Scheme is being introduced for most employees during 2007. As part of this process, all job outlines have been revised and updated. Job Evaluation analysts were recruited from within Tayside Contracts and these included men and women at a range of levels from across Tayside Contracts. All analysts attended training and local

union representatives have been involved with developments. Independent consultants will impact assess the outcomes for compliance with gender equality requirements once the results of the Job Evaluation Scheme have been concluded. Tayside Contracts' strategic statement on equal pay will be finalised by 28 September 2007 at the latest.

6. EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND AWARENESS RAISING

Existing training courses will be revised and new training courses developed to ensure equality compatibility, including:

- Induction
- Appraisal Training
- Customer Care
- Race Awareness
- Recruitment and Selection
- Disability Awareness.
- Harassment

(i) Impact Assessing Policies and Practices

Tayside Contracts is required to include in our Scheme a statement of our methods for assessing the impact of our policies and procedures, or their likely impact, on gender equality. Policies and procedures covers all proposed and current activities, both written and unwritten e.g. custom and practice.

The purpose of undertaking impact assessments is to ensure that our policies and practices do not disadvantage certain people, and also to identify where equality of opportunity could be enhanced. We recognise that undertaking an impact assessment should be a corporate responsibility, embedded within our culture and mainstreamed throughout Tayside Contracts. We have adopted a basic template called a Gender Equality Screening/Impact Assessment Template (Appendix) to review existing policies and procedures and assess all proposed ones.

We will look to identify evidence or research findings to show that the policy may be affecting people in an unfair manner, and may need to be changed. We aim to complete all screening and impact assessments by 2010.

(ii) Public Access to Services

Tayside Contracts is committed to the provision of quality services to our customers and opposes any unlawful discrimination in relation to the delivery of these services.

(iii) Public Access to Information

Tayside Contracts aims to ensure that all members of the community have equal access to information regarding our services.

(iv) Procurement

Although the duty does not override other laws or regulations in public procurement, procurement may be relevant to the duty to promote gender equality in regard to services provided under contract or agreement and contractors' equal opportunities policies and practices.

We will:

- revise standard contracts to require that suppliers are compliant with gender equality legislation.
- ensure that potential contractors will be made aware that any service they provide must be without discrimination

- revise contracts and service level agreements to require service providers are compliant with gender equality legislation. New suppliers will be made aware that any service they provide must promote equal opportunities.
- give guidance and support, where necessary, to contractors to aid their understanding in order to comply with their duties.

7. COMPLAINTS

While Tayside Contracts will do its best to meet the duties placed upon it under the Equality Act 2006 it is recognised that on occasion people may be dissatisfied. We will attempt to deal with any complaints received in relation to this duty through our customer complaints procedures which allow service users to make complaints about any aspect of Tayside Contracts' services or policies.

A senior manager from the Unit/Division providing the service which has prompted the complaint will deal with the complaint initially and attempt to resolve the problem at the first point of contact. If the complainant is still not satisfied they can lodge a written complaint to the Managing Director who will conduct a full review of their complaint and will provide a full report on the outcome of the review within 20 working days. If the complainant is not satisfied with Tayside Contracts' response, they will be advised of their right to refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

8. ACTION PLAN 2007-2010

As part of this Scheme, we will draft an action plan for the first three years and progress will be reported annually to the Joint Committee.

9. ADVISING THE PUBLIC AND EMPLOYEES OF PROGRESS

We will review and monitor progress against our Gender Equality Scheme on an annual basis. A report on progress will be submitted to the Joint Committee and published on our web site.

The facilities to provide this report into alternative formats, such as audio, larger print or Braille, are available wherever a need is identified. The mechanisms for advising employees and trade unions of progress are under review. Currently employees are advised of progress by means of information contained in the employee newsletter, Target, our Intranet and on our website.

10. REVIEW OF SCHEME

This draft initial Gender Equality Scheme covers the period up to 2010. We will work with our employees and members of the community to produce a revised scheme by June 2010 and every three years thereafter. Policies and functions which have been identified and prioritised are subject to annual review and action plan targets for each year will also be reviewed annually. The scheme is a living document and changes in circumstances or further legislation may occur.

We are committed to annually reviewing our progress of the Scheme prior to the comprehensive review in 2010.

Any comments on the Scheme are welcome and should be forwarded to Frank Reilly, Personnel Manager, Tayside Contracts, Contracts House, 1 Soutar Street, Dundee; Tel 01382 834173; email frank.reilly@tayside-contracts.co.uk