

## **GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report advises Members of the requirements of the Equality Act 2006 and recommends the adoption of a Gender Equality Scheme to meet legislative requirements and help the Council meet its obligations under the Act.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Over the last 12 months the Council has developed its approach to equalities and diversity. Members will recall that, in July 2006, the Committee adopted a Corporate Equality Strategy which provides a framework for our approach to all aspects of equalities. Subsequently, in September, a revised Race Equalities Scheme was adopted and a Disability Equality Scheme in December.
- 2.2 In addition, Maldon District Council submitted a bid for funding to Building Capacity East. The bid was submitted in partnership with ourselves and Castle Point Borough Council. The proposal was for support to enable the three authorities to achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This includes the provision of a bespoke Impact Assessment toolkit, training and support for senior managers in the toolkit and the establishment of a cross-authority community forum to enable effective consultation. The cost of the project over 2 years is £61,000, at no cost to the Council. The bid was successful and implementation is now underway with impact assessments nearing completion. As a result of this additional funding, all three authorities are making significant progress in responding to the equalities agenda.

### **3 GENDER EQUALITY**

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2006 amends the Sex Discrimination Act 1976 by placing a statutory General Duty on all public authorities to: -
- Promote equality of opportunity between men and women
  - Eliminate unlawful sexual discrimination and harassment including discrimination in pay
- 3.2 The General Duty comes into force this month and applies to all aspects of the Council's functions and activities. It covers employment, service delivery, procurement and regulatory functions. It is a '*positive*' duty – this means we must be proactive in eliminating discrimination and harassment and in promoting equality of opportunity between men and women. The Duty is intended to bring about a shift from a legal framework that relies on individual people complaining about discrimination, to one in which the public sector becomes a proactive agent of change.

3.4 In addition to the General Duty, there are also a number of Specific Duties under the Act including the requirement to publish a three year Gender Equality Scheme by 30 April 2007. The Scheme must include information on the Council's arrangements for:-

- Assessing the impact of existing policies and practices and those that are proposed
- Gathering and using monitoring information on the delivery of Council services
- Gathering and using monitoring information on the recruitment, development and retention of Council staff
- How we intend to address any gender pay gap within our workforce
- Consulting with stakeholders to help inform us of our gender equality priorities

3.5 Attached to this report is a draft Scheme for consideration by Members. The Scheme sets out how we will meet our duties over the coming months and may well need to be revised in the light of the information we receive from the impact assessment process and the consultation work we will undertake.

#### **4 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Failure to meet legislative requirements could result in compliance action being taken against the authority. There would also be a risk of damage to reputation if this were to occur.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There will be an officer resource in completing the impact assessments and continuing to develop the Council's approach. It is likely that there will be training requirements. In the longer term, impact assessments may identify service actions which have a resource impact.

#### **6 RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To adopt the attached Gender Equality Scheme.

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

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**Background Papers:-**

Equal Opportunities Commission – Statutory Code of Practice and Guidance

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