

Report to: Council Functions Committee  
Date of Meeting: 30<sup>th</sup> January 2008  
Report of: Head of Human Resources  
Title: Proposed Gender Equality Scheme

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**1. SUMMARY**

The attached scheme and associated action plan forms part of the Council's overall equality framework and compliments the Corporate Equality Plan, containing the Race Equality Scheme, and the Disability Equality Scheme. The scheme applies to Watford Borough Council's functions as a service provider as well as an employer and has been subject to public/stakeholder consultation. It is being submitted to Functions Committee for information and approval in terms of its employment aspects prior to submission to Cabinet for final approval because of its impact on service users.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the scheme be approved in relation to its employment aspects.

Contact Officer: Fiona Skene

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Report approved by Tricia Taylor, *Corporate Director*

### **3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

All public bodies are required under the Equality Act 2006, enacted in 2007, to carry out their functions in a way which makes gender equality part of their decisions and activities and to publish a scheme setting out how they intend to carry out these duties accompanied by gender equality objectives.

The general duty differs from previous sexual equality legislation in requiring a proactive approach by local authorities in eliminating sexual inequality and harassment and in promoting equality of opportunity as opposed to avoiding being discriminatory. This proposed scheme emanates from the work of the Corporate Equality Working Group, Strategic Services and HR and has been subject to stakeholder and public consultation. It sets out the Council's proposed strategy for meeting the statutory and related duties from 2007 to 2010 through a 3 year action plan.

As a Council, Watford has performed well in recent years in gender equality BVPIs and is top quartile in the percentage of women in the top 5% of earners, at 58.62% at the end of the last financial year. All its Directors are women, which is not common in local government, and 50% of the Heads of Service. As an employer we will continue to monitor our overall performance on gender equality as part of workforce monitoring.

The scheme itself covers both service provision and employment issues. It is submitted to Functions Committee for information purposes primarily in terms of the employment aspects following public and stakeholder consultation.

Under the EOC's code of practice on the gender equality duty, the areas focussed on are:-

- Recruitment and selection
- Whether men and women may be concentrated in particular areas of work or pay bands
- Support for part-time work

- Management of leave for parents/carers
- Management of pregnancy
- Elimination/avoidance of any harassment
- Elimination of discrimination in respect of any employee or potential employee who may be transsexual.
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures
- Equal pay
- Access to training/development

The Council has a sound record on these issues. However it needs to have a Gender Equality Action Plan which is monitored.( This is attached to the scheme.)

### 3.2 Consultation

The consultation process took place with stakeholders and then members of the public from August to mid - December 2007.

The following consultation was undertaken:-

- Internal – article placed on the intranet on '*What is the Gender Equality Duty*'. Staff were invited to comment on the GES and Action Plan.
- External – GES and Action Plan available on the website for residents to comment.
- Article in "*About Watford*" on the GES and Action Plan inviting residents to comment.
- Copies of GES plus Action Plan e-mailed to all our One Watford partners for comment.
- Copy of GES plus Action Plan sent to Watford Women's Centre for comment.

- Copies of GES plus Action Plan sent out to all elected members for comment.
- GES plus Action Plan circulated to Council's internal equalities group, the Corporate Equality Working Group for comment.

There were no specific issues raised in the consultation on the employment aspects.

To meet our statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2006, the Council needs to publish its final Gender Equality Scheme on its website following approval at Functions Committee and Cabinet.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 Financial

The Director of Finance comments that there are minimal financial implications in this report.

##### 4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services comments that the legal implications are contained in the scheme.

##### 4.3 Staffing

This scheme is designed to comply with our statutory responsibilities as an employer and service provider and can only enhance the promotion of sexual equality within the council.

##### 4.4 Accommodation

There are no implications in this report.

##### 4.5 Equalities

These are contained in the scheme.

4.6 Community Safety

There are no implications in the report.

4.7 Sustainability

There are no implications in this report.

Appendices

Gender Equality Scheme

Background papers:

None