

## The Highland Council

### Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee 12 September 2013

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CPE 31/13

#### Revised Equalities Action Plan

#### Report by Assistant Chief Executive

##### Summary:

In March 2013, the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee agreed the Council's first full set of equality outcomes. This report presents the revised action plan to accompany the Council's Fairer Highland equality plan. The action plan has been updated to align with, and support, our equality outcomes.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a general duty on the Council to give due regard in all its work to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
  - Advance equality of opportunity
  - Foster good relations between people
- 1.2 The public sector equality duty covers people with the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The public sector equality duty also covers marriage and civil partnerships, with regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation in employment.
- 1.3 In addition, the Scottish Government introduced a set of specific equality duties in May 2012 to support the better performance of the general duty above by listed public bodies, including Councils and Education Authorities. These include the publication of equality outcomes and reporting on progress to meet them.

#### 2. Highland Council's Equality Outcomes

- 2.1 The Highland Council agreed a new equality plan in April 2012, A Fairer Highland; this includes three overarching outcomes that:
- People are, and feel, free to live their lives without harassment and discrimination, and can take part in community life
  - People benefit from public services in a fairer way and are able to have their say about them
  - Staff feel there is an organisational culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect
- 2.2 To meet the requirements of the specific equality duties in Scotland, the Council agreed 20 additional, more specific, [equality outcomes](#) in March 2013.
- 2.3 The outcomes are incorporated into, and will support, the Council's Equality Plan, [A Fairer Highland](#). The Action Plan to accompany A Fairer Highland has been revised and updated and can be found in the Bulletin on the Members' Intranet. Wherever possible, the outcomes, related activities and measures of progress are linked to the current work in the Council's Programme and the

Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). Appendix 1 lists relevant Council commitments.

- 2.4 Many of the actions in the equality plan are on-going and long term and are already planned. They include activities to address hate incidents, for example homophobic or racist incidents or those affecting disabled people and Violence Against Women, improving access to information and services, measuring public attitudes to equality and diversity, improving information about accessible transport, raising staff awareness of our legal requirements and good practice in terms of customer contacts and fair recruitment and employment.
- 2.5 There are also a number of Education activities ranging from work on prejudice based bullying in schools to meeting the needs of children and families who have experienced interrupted learning such as Gypsy/Traveller and Roma Children, young carers and Children with ASN (Additional Support Needs); raising awareness of how teachers can support equality through delivery of curriculum for excellence and wider school approaches following the principles of the Highland Practice Model and SHANARI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respective, Responsible, Included) and tackling gender segregation.
- 2.6 As an employer, we have actions to increase staff uptake on diversity development opportunities, promote flexible working opportunities, use positive action to encourage applications from under-represented groups, reduce the gender pay gap where actions appropriate to an employer can be identified, increase employment opportunities and training for young people, and review areas of significant gender segregation in services.
- 2.7 There are a number of new activities which are noted in the Action Plan. Some that result from the recent Citizen's Panel survey were presented to Council on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2013, including.
- To hold focus groups with older people and people with disabilities to understand what is needed to assist them to use on-line services more and to understand if we need to adapt our self-service functions (currently under development) to meet their needs.
  - To identify how to support older people, people with disabilities and Council tenants better with access to computers and on-line services.
  - Investigate ways to ensure that considerations of accessible design (including signage) and privacy are taken account of in our public caller buildings, and for this to be built into the process for the Council's Asset Management Plan.
  - To use the survey results in our customer care training (e.g. awareness of different perceptions of men and women when contacting us) and the need to be sensitive to the circumstances of our high contact groups of people with disabilities, council tenants and people unable to work or unemployed.
  - To work with the Highland Third Sector Partnership for further support to be offered to people with disabilities to volunteer and to feel more involved in community life.
- 2.8 There are a small number of new actions for this committee to consider, including action to support more people to be engaged in community life, to gather better information on customers and complaints, and improve access to information. Specifically these are to:

- Over the next year screen the progress with Theme 6 in the Council Programme on empowering communities to assess whether any particular groups in the community need more support to be involved and empowered;
- Investigate the inclusion of a complaints category by protected characteristics (PC), e.g. complaint due to unfair treatment on the grounds of each PC;
- Introduce equalities monitoring for complainants to opt into for all complaints and follow this up in surveys of customer satisfaction with complaints.
- Development of accessible media on transport in Highland to include information online, and in a range of formats, on accessible routes etc.

- 2.9 There are actions related to the Council as an employer which have recently been presented to the Joint Consultative Group (JCG), they include:
- Create and support an on-line learning resource for female employees interested in supervisory and management roles.
  - Advertise appropriate vacancies as "suitable for flexible working hours up to 35 per week".
  - Sustain and review the Women into Management programme.
  - Identify female role models in male dominated job groups and publicise their achievements in corporate communications (e.g. the Big Picture and ED matters).
  - Review core flexi hours to better support flexible working opportunities.
  - Take action to increase the number of female apprentices.
  - Review areas of significant gender segregation with appropriate Heads of Service to identify and address any barriers to employment of underrepresented groups.

Employment actions related to equality are considered at Finance, Housing and Resources Committee.

- 2.10 We propose that this Plan will be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances during its lifetime as well as being in line with our legal requirements.

### **3. Reporting on progress and further work**

- 3.1 Once the Action Plan is agreed it will be incorporated into the Fairer Highland Plan. The Fairer Highland Plan has also been reviewed and updated with minor amendments to bring it in line with the specific equality duties. These will be published on the [Equal Opportunities](#) pages of the Council web site.
- 3.2 The Fairer Highland Plan is also accompanied by a Highland [Equalities Profile](#) which uses a range of local and national equalities evidence. This resource is currently under review and a refreshed version will be completed in early 2014 in line with the release of Census 2011 details.
- 3.3 The specific duties require the Council to report on progress to meet its equality outcomes by the end of April 2015 and thereafter every two years. The outcomes should be reviewed every four years. Report on progress with the Fairer Highland Plan will continue to be made to Members on an annual basis.

#### **4. Implications**

- 4.1 Financial implications: There are no financial implications arising from this paper.
- 4.2 Risk implications: There is a risk that the Council would not meet its public duties in the Equality Act by failing to respond to the issues raised through the research.
- 4.3 Equalities implications: The report provides on how the Council aims to fulfil equalities duties and respond to the need of different equalities groups. The Council's equality plan and the associated actions detailed with this paper describe how we aim to positively advance equality and contribute to a Fairer Highland.
- 4.4 Climate change implications: There are no climate change implications arising from this paper.

#### **Recommendations**

Members of are asked to:

- a) NOTE the actions that have recently been presented to Council and that new employment actions will be reported to the Finance, Housing and Resources Committee;
- b) AGREE the new actions in 2.8 relating to equalities screenings, complaints and information on transport;
- c) NOTE that these will all be incorporated into the Fairer Highland Plan; and
- d) NOTE the requirements to report on progress.

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**Appendix 1:** List of Council commitments supported by equality outcomes

## Council Programme commitments that support the Fairer Highland Plan

Theme No.	Commitment No.	Lead Service	Commitment
1	20	PAD(Lead)/ECS(Support)	The Council will prioritise the publication of a youth employment strategy.
1	21	PAD(Lead)/ECS(Support)/CEX (Support)	Working with private and public sector partners, the Scottish and UK Governments, the Council will aim to ensure every 16-19 year old seeking employment has the opportunity to access a modern apprenticeship or further training.
2	1	HSC (Lead) / ECS (Support)	The Council aims to 'Get it Right for Every Child' in the Highlands and to tackle inequality early. In doing so, we will develop our pioneering integration work of children's services with NHS Highland.
2	2	HSC (Lead) / ECS(Support)	The Council will ensure that every child aged 3-4, and every looked after child aged 2 in the Highlands will have access to 600 flexible learning and childcare hours, in line with the Scottish Government's coming Children's Services Bill.
2	3	HSC (Lead) /ECS(Support)	The Council will implement the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework, and continue support for wraparound childcare across the Highlands.
2	4	HSC (Lead) /ECS(Support)	The Council will work with communities to identify innovative and affordable solutions to nursery provision. Where appropriate support will be given to establish co-operative provision.
2	7	ECS (Lead) / HSC(Support)	Opportunities for those with a learning or physical disability, or those who are at a social disadvantage, will be provided so that every child is offered an educational experience best suited to their needs.
2	13	ECS	The Council will continue to support teachers in their efforts to raise attainment levels in literacy and numeracy at all levels. We will work to maintain high levels of achievement in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.
2	14	ECS	The Council will introduce a training program, so that parents, parent forums and parent councils are more aware of their rights, powers and responsibilities, and are able to make a substantive contribution to the life and work of their school.
2	16	HSC (Lead) / ECS(Support)	The Council will enhance services for children who need extra support, including implementation of the role of 'Pupil Support Assistant', investing further in social care, and ensuring a more personalised approach.
2	25	ECS	The Council will continue to roll out a single 'smart' card to all young people by 2013, allowing access to leisure, libraries, arts & cultural activities, youth information and school meals.

2	27	FIN/ ALL	The Council will ensure that all bidders for significant council contracts must provide targeted plans to recruit young unemployed people in the Highlands.
2	28	HSC(Lead)/ECS(Support)	The Council will introduce a single Children's Champion, to uphold the values of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child.
3	1	HSC (Lead) / ALL(Support)	Working with the NHS and other agencies, the Council will continue to deliver the pioneering integration of health and social care services.
3	2	FIN(Lead) / CEX (Support)	The Council will work to alleviate poverty by encouraging benefit uptake and supporting a range of advice services.
3	3	HSC (Lead) / ECS(Support)	The Council will commit at least £3million of the Council's budget each year to spend preventatively to improve the quality of life for young people, older adults and those struggling with deprivation.
3	6	HSC	The Council will work so that adults who may be at risk of harm are better supported and protected.
3	7	HSC	The Council will appoint a Carers' Champion, responsible for representing the interests of carers at a council level and with other appropriate public bodies, and engaging with carers across the Highlands.
3	8	HSC	The Council will appoint an Older People & Adults' Champion, responsible for representing the interests of elderly people in receipt of council services. The post-holder will also engage with appropriate bodies representing older people.
3	9	HSC	Adults with additional needs will receive the support they require to maximise their independence, help promote and retain their dignity, and enable them to contribute to decisions about their care.
3	10	HSC	The Council will encourage people to consider and make use of the opportunities provided by self-directed support.
3	11	HSC (Lead) / ECS(Support) /CEX(Support)	Working with the NHS, the Council will support people, particularly older people, to get the most out of technology for personal use, including tele-health and tele-care.
4	9	TEC	The Council will engage with the private and third sector to carry out a review of community transport across the Highlands.
5	1	HAP(Lead)/PAD(Support)	The Council will work with the Scottish Government, Housing Associations, and the private sector to help to deliver 5000 new homes by 2017. This will include at least 600 Council houses and other affordable homes.
5	5	HAP	The Council will work with partners to reduce and prevent homelessness in the Highlands.
5	6	HAP	The Council will work with and empower tenants to become more directly involved in the management of their local environment and council housing estates.

5	7	HAP	The Council will work with other housing providers to develop a “housing options approach” to ensure that everyone looking for housing in the Highlands gets consistent information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about housing options that meet their needs.
6	2	ECS	The Council will continue to engage with and support the work of the Highland Youth Convener, Highland Youth Voice and local members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. We are committed to giving more young people a voice in this council.
6	5	CEX/ALL	The Council will improve public access, including out-of-office-hours access, to the Council and its services, offering members of the public a range of access points including by phone, online and in person.
6	7	CEX/ALL	The Council will engage meaningfully with the third sector across a range of policy areas and in service provision. We will also agree with partners a joint approach to supporting volunteering and community development in the Highlands.
6	12	ECS/ALL	The Council will ensure that all new school buildings will act as a community-hub. We will investigate new and innovative ways to deliver more community access to existing buildings as part of a review of the schools estate.
6	14	ECS/ALL	The Council is proud to serve a region of many cultures and will actively promote multi-culturalism.
6	15	ECS	Working with Highlife Highland and other partners, the Council will widen access to English language tuition, support Adult Basic Education and deliver progressive and innovative library services.
6	17	CEX/ALL	The Council will provide information to the public in clear language, to the ‘Crystal Mark’ plain English standard.
6	19	CEX	The Council will improve public engagement, consultation and our handling of complaints
7	2	CEX	The Council will ensure that elected members will play a full part in agreeing the priorities and local plans for police and fire and rescue services in the Highlands. Elected members will also monitor performance against these plans.
7	3	CEX/ALL	The Council will plan for effective engagement with the new national services for police and fire and rescue and the Scottish Ambulance Service.