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Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

DRAFT Equalities Mainstreaming Report 2017-2021

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HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

EQUALITIES MAINSTREAMING REPORT 2017-2021

Legal Context

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of the following characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

The Public Sector Equality duty

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 introduced a positive Public Sector Equality Duty on public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and persons who do not

Meeting different needs involves taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities. The Act states that compliance with the duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others. The three parts of the duty cover eight of the protected characteristics however it applies to marriage and civil partnership in relation to non-discrimination only.

The specific equality duties

In May 2012 the Scottish Government introduced the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to support the better performance of the public sector equality duty by listed public bodies which include Local Authorities, Licencing Boards and Joint Boards. These duties include requirements to:

- Publish a report on mainstreaming the equality duty every two years
- Publish equality outcomes and report on progress every two years
- Assess and review policies and practices
- Gather and use employee information
- Publish gender pay gap information

- Publish an equal pay statement
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement

What is Mainstreaming equality

The Board must report on how equality is mainstreamed into their work at intervals of not more than two years.

Mainstreaming simply means integrating equality into the day-to-day work of the Board – taking equality into everything we do as an employer, and when planning or providing services. In doing so equality becomes part of our structures, behaviours and culture and contributes to continuous improvement and better performance.

Gathering and considering relevant equality data is central to mainstreaming equality. This could mean monitoring service users and service activity with respect to the protected characteristics and then analysing outcomes.

It is also important for the Board to take steps to gather annual information on its workforce and on the recruitment, development and retention of its employees with respect to relevant protected characteristics. The Board's mainstreaming report must include (if not published previously) an annual breakdown of the information it has gathered, and details of the progress it has made in gathering, and how this information is used to better perform the general equality duty.

Mainstreaming the equality duty is an organisational responsibility, requiring leadership and awareness to both promote equality and challenge inappropriate behaviour and practices.

Training and awareness raising of equality across the Board will help ensure that equality is considered routinely and that staff recognise the relevance of equality duties in their own roles.

The following equalities mainstreaming and equalities outcomes report can be found on our website:

- Equalities mainstreaming and equalities outcomes, March 2013
- Equalities mainstreaming and equalities outcomes progress, March 2015 (updated May 2015)

Highland & Eilean Siar Equality Profiles

As an area of accessing broad statistical information and attitudes in the Highlands we have relied upon the Highland Council's "Working Towards a Fairer Highland: Mainstreaming Equality Report 2015-2017" and information provided from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Organisational Development Officer.

Key information points from the Scotland Census 2011 and the Scottish Household Survey in relation to protected characteristics in both Highland and Eilean Siar are as follows:

Highland	Eilean Siar
51% of the population is female and 49% is male, compared to 52% and 48% respectively for Scotland	49.4% of the population is male and 50.6% female which is comparable to 48.5% male and 51.5% female Scottish profile (Census, 2011)
Highland has an older population than Scotland; 32% of Highland's population is under 30 compared with 36% across Scotland	Eilean Siar has an aging population with 30% under 30 compared with 36% under 30 across Scotland. 29% of the population are over 60 compared with only 23% across Scotland (Census, 2011)
46.1% of people in Highland are married or in a civil partnership (0.12% in civil partnerships). 24% are single compared to 28% of Scotland's population	53% of people in Eilean Siar are married or in a civil partnership in comparison to 47% in Scotland. Only 29% single compared to 35% in Scotland (Scotland's Household Survey, 2015)
The majority of people living in Scotland and Highland are white. In Highland, a larger percentage describes themselves as white-other British (15% in Highland compared to 8% in Scotland). Highland has a higher than average Polish population (1.48% compared to 1.16%)	99% of people in Eilean Siar are White in comparison to 96% in Scotland. (Scotland's Household Survey, 2015) 86.9% of the Eilean Siar population consider themselves as White Scottish; 10.5% as White Other British; 0.5% as White Irish and 0.2% as White Polish. (Census, 2011)
The minority ethnic population of Highland is 1.4%, up from 0.8%, compared to 4% for Scotland overall	The Black minority ethnic population of Eilean Siar is 0.9% compared to 4% for Scotland (Census, 2011)
According to the Scottish Household Survey, 21% of people in Highland have a long-standing limited illness (LTLI), health problem or disability compared to 18% in Scotland. LTLI increases with age, with 59% of men and 66% of women over the age of 75 having an LTLI compared to 8% of men and 7% of women under 30	30% of people in Eilean Siar have long term physical or mental condition. This is comparable to 29% across Scotland. (Scotland's Household Survey, 2015)
The most common response to the question of faith in the 2011 Census was "No religion" in Highland and Scotland. The second most popular faith was Church of Scotland, and the percentage is higher in Highland (36.9%) than in Scotland (32.4%).	The predominant religion in Eilean Siar is Church of Scotland with 42.5% of the population identifying with this faith in comparison to 32.4% in Scotland. This is followed by 19.1% for 'other Christian'; 18.1% 'no religion' and 12.3% Roman Catholic (Census, 2011)

A separate body of information particularly relevant to the department's functions is to be found in the work of the Electoral Commission which since its creation has engaged in much research in the electoral field. In particular there is research suggesting differential levels of registration and attitudes amongst ethnic groups, between age groups and other demographic and economic characteristics.

The Electoral Commission's report entitled "The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain" on the accuracy and completeness of the registers in Great Britain and the transition to Individual Electoral Registration published in July 2016¹ highlights the following:

- **Length of residence:** people who had lived at their address for up to a year, or between one and two years, were significantly less likely to be registered (27% and 69% completeness) than those who had lived at an address for longer
- **Age:** there has been a decline in completeness among people aged under 45 with the biggest drop recorded for 18-19 year olds (65%, down nine percentage points since 2014)
- **Gender:** as in the past, women are more likely to be registered than men (85% vs. 83% respectively)
- **Nationality:** European Union (53%) and Commonwealth citizens (61%) are significantly less likely to be registered than UK and Irish citizens (86%)
- **Ethnicity:** there has been a drop in completeness among people who give their ethnicity as white (from 86% in 2014 to 85% in 2015) but they are still the ethnic group most likely to be registered
- **Disability:** in line with 2014, people with a physical disability are more likely to be registered (90%) than those without (83%) while those with a mental disability are less likely (76%)
- **Tenure:** homeowners were found again to be more likely to be registered than private renters. Comparison with 2014 shows an increase in completeness among those who own their property outright (from 94% to 95%) and a decrease among private renters (63% to 57%)
- **Number of adults in the household:** the pattern remained consistent pre/post-transition with two-person households returning the highest level of completeness (85%).

It is clear that even if the equalities legislation did not apply to electoral registration there would be many issues arising in registration that demand attention under the terms of the legislation that requires the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to engage in delivery of registration activities to maintain accurate and complete registers.

At a general level therefore there is a confluence of issues arising out of equalities work and electoral registration duties that acts as a clear pointer as to actions that may be required.

¹ The Electoral Commission, The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain, Accuracy and Completeness of the registers in Great Britain and the transition to Individual Electoral Registration, July 2016

Pertinence and proportionality

The process of preparing equality outcomes requires to understand the most significant equality issues arising in the organisation and sector. Efforts and resources require to be targeted as effectively as possible to meet the equality duties. Setting outcomes should focus on the areas where the organisation can have the most impact taking a strategic overview of the organisation as a whole and its functions.

Partnership and working with others

The Joint Board does not operate in a vacuum albeit that its remit has a very narrow, wholly statutory compass. It is important to recognise that its functions are restricted but also that the impact of its functions are fundamental – the franchise and taxation.

Quite apart from the assistance gained in addressing the Board's equalities duties that is received by utilising specialist skills in the lead authority, the billing activities of the constituent councils are a continuation of the valuation and banding process and require close co-operation. This same holds true of the Returning Officer function where the year round activity of registration forms the bedrock of the large but short lived organisation that comes into existence when there is a major polling event.

The department is one of a number of Boards and liaison with other Assessors and EROs as to experiences and developments in the field is plainly pertinent. In the field of electoral registration the involvement of the Electoral Commission through their research, monitoring and more specific duties is also of great importance.

The full realisation of equality outcomes requires that the wider environment be kept in mind and that the complex interactions that can arise are not permitted to act counter to individual initiatives.

The many organisations which seek to advance the interests of those with protected characteristics are also viewed as partners with a particularly important role to play in providing feedback as to performance.

Examples of partnership working on equality and diversity would include the following:

- Access to Interpretation Services
- Identify suitable partners to assist with carrying out public engagement work to ensure all eligible electors are encouraged to register to vote

Outcomes

The Highland Council Plan “A Fairer Highland” has the following high level outcomes:

1. People are, and feel free to live their lives without harassment and discrimination, and can take part in community life

2. People benefit from public services in a fairer way and are able to have their say about them
3. Staff feel there is an organisational culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The Board has no difficulty in associating itself with these ambitions. The mainstreaming process requires that more specific outcomes are established in order to tailor general ambitions to the circumstances of the organisation keeping in mind the ideas proportionality, priority and partnership.

It is also pertinent to keep in mind the circumstances in which the Board finds itself.

The strategic position

On a broad canvass the Board's strategic position can be summed up as follows:

- So far as the electoral registration function is concerned Local Government Elections were held on 4 May 2017 closely followed by a snap UK Parliamentary General Election on 8 June 2017. No further major polls are envisaged before the next outcomes report in spring 2019. The change from household to individual electoral registration is a fundamental one and has been a prime focus for attention in the equalities field given the particular characteristics of the change of regime and the known difficulties affecting the under-registered or less-engaged groups
- Rating – the rating revaluation due to be held in 2015 was postponed until April 2017. The revaluation has been completed, however new entries require to be made for shooting rights. A significant number of appeals is to be expected and these will require to be considered over the next three years. There may be further changes to the rating regime once the Government considers the finding of the Barclay review later this year

The Council Tax regime is currently a stable function. Minor changes were made to the payment ratios for the upper bands but this has yet to impact significantly on the valuation function. There are no further changes identified at this time

- So far as the Board's role as an employer is concerned, during a time of severe restraint in public expenditure, there will be any expansion of the staff compliment and turnover in staff is likely to be low other than that engendered by retirements. Given these circumstances there is likely to be limited scope to affect change through the recruitment channel

Against that background and recognising that the rating and council tax function are largely property based, it seems clear that the main focus in the next two years requires to be in electoral registration.

This is not to suggest that when it comes to service delivery, there are no issues which can arise in the rating and council tax areas. These however are less likely,

less obvious and plausibly may well be of a similar character as those that arise in the electoral field.

The Board's obligations as an employer must also assume a prominent position.

Accordingly the following outcomes are proposed:

Outcome One

People feel involved and are able to participate in public life and influence decision-making

This will require a number of measures to track progress which are provisionally as follows:

- Number on the register relative to population estimates
- Number of responders to household enquiry forms and invitations to register throughout the year and during the annual canvass as a proportion of the total number of households
- Number of corrections and complaints
- The existence of a comprehensive publicity engagement strategy to ensure eligible people are able to participate in the electoral process
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards for EROs
- Ensure all property that should be taxed is included in the valuation roll and council tax list.

Outcome 2

We will improve customer satisfaction rates in particular from people with protected characteristics

In order to track this outcome the following will be required:

- We will establish public performance survey via random sampling of transactions with the department
- We will monitor performance more generally via partners' survey work, such as Electoral Commission research, Highland Council research, close monitoring of complaints, and analysis of the electoral errors that come to light
- Focus on improved materials using plain English tested with relevant groups and in partnership with other EROs and the Electoral Commission.
- Through continued use of interactive voter registration throughout the annual canvass of electors giving the opportunity for household replies to be made via internet, SMS, telephone or by paper return

Outcome 3

Increase the proportion of staff who feel they are treated fairly

In order to track this outcome we shall require the following:

- Carry out annual employee review and development plans
- Introduce an improved induction programme for new employees
- Carry out a systematic review of HR policies
- Introduce a number of Health & Safety policies and procedures
- Promote flexible working arrangements to support employees to achieve a balance between work and their life outside work
- Ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for disabled candidates and employees
- Increase training in equalities matters for staff at each of the departments offices
- Attendance at a one day training course on equality and diversity through Highland Council's Learning and Development Team for senior management
- Increase commitment to training where there is an identified need for the organisation to improve the skills of staff
- Reduce occupational segregation where this contributes to an equal pay gap and generally seek to reduce the gender pay gap
- Gather more comprehensive employment data
- Continued commitment to the Scottish Living Wage
- Review recruitment channels

Adopting these outcomes will require that a revised Equalities Plan be prepared that sets out in greater detail the steps that will require to be taken to advance towards these outcomes. It may also be necessary to modify some of the measures that are proposed.

The Board as an employer

As an employer, the Board is committed to providing equality of opportunity in employment. No job applicant or employee will receive less favourable treatment because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Our working culture aims to promote dignity and to respect the contributions of all. Employees are expected to behave in a manner that reflects our commitment to fair treatment and respect.

Staff are supported to achieve these aims through policies, management guidance and a range of training and awareness activities. Relevant policies include Equal Opportunities, Flexible Working, Grievance and Harassment, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption, Attendance Management and Recruitment and Selection.

Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 there is a requirement to publish an equal pay statement and to publish information as to the characteristics/demographics of the Board's employees and the gender pay gap.

Under section 7(3) and 8(3) the Board has less than 150 employees since these Regulations came into force. The Board has 54 members of staff based across four offices based in Inverness, Dingwall, Wick and Stornoway.

Reporting

The Board is required annually to report and publish information on equalities matters. It is intended to accommodate this requirement by including a section in the annual report that is produced each year which will draw together performance, equalities and financial information.

Review

It is a requirement to review equalities practices, policies and outcomes from time to time. A suitable timeframe for review is the end of 2018.

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