



Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board



DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document is intended to outline Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board's Disability Equality Scheme.
- 1.2. Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board is a small authority which was established in 1996 and discharges three statutory functions concerning local taxation and electoral registration on behalf of its two constituent authorities – Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council. The Board has a full time equivalent staff of 12, split between its two offices situated in Kirkwall, Orkney and Lerwick, Shetland.
- 1.3. The Board is made up of five representatives nominated by each of the constituent local authorities. The Board appoints and oversees the work of the Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer who is the Chief Officer of the Board. The Board is supported in the discharge of its functions by a Clerk and a Treasurer. Both these posts are currently filled by senior officials of Shetland Islands Council. Due to the Board's small size, Shetland Islands Council acts as its lead authority and supplies the Board with Administrative Support, Financial Management and Human Resources. Staff terms and condition and employment policies have been adopted from that of Shetland Islands Council.
- 1.4. The 3 statutory functions of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer are as follows -
 - The preparation, publication and maintenance of the Valuation Roll which lists all properties in the area subject to non-domestic rates and their rateable values.
 - The preparation, publication and maintenance of the Council Tax Valuation List which lists all dwellings in the area subject to Council Tax and their valuation band.
 - the preparation, maintenance and publication of the Register of Electors which lists the names of all persons eligible to vote at Westminster, European, Scottish and local Elections.

2. Disability Equality Scheme

2.1. General Duty

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) public authorities are subject to a general duty to promote disability equality. In carrying out any of its functions the Board and its officers must have due regard to the need to –

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- eliminate harassment of disabled people, promote positive attitudes and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

The general duty makes the promotion of disability equality central to the way that the Board's officers operate, with an onus on improving services to all minorities and, in particular, focusing on disability equality.

On behalf of the Valuation Joint Board, the Assessor & ERO will promote equality of opportunity by ensuring that all employees are trained in the promotion of disability equality and their responsibilities under the Disability Equality Scheme.

Promotion of positive attitudes of people with a disability and an encouragement to participate in public life will be achieved by the implementation of good communication strategies, which will ensure active involvement as well as positive initiatives to involve the wider community as consumers of the Board's functions.

2.2. Specific Duties

The Board also has a specific duty to –

- Adopt and publish a disability equality scheme
- Put in place arrangements for involving people with disabilities in producing the scheme
- Put in place arrangements for monitoring its employment practices by reference to disability
- Produce an Action Plan showing the steps it will take towards fulfilling its general duty under the Act.

In looking to its specific duty in involving people with disabilities in the evolution of its disability equality policies, the Board acknowledges that its extremely small size makes consultation processes separate from those of its constituent authorities both impractical and likely to cause unnecessary duplication of work to local disability and volunteer groups. The Board will therefore seek to integrate its consultation processes with that of its constituent authorities, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council, and agree with them how the Board can contribute to the promotion of equality of opportunity within the community. The Board will liaise with the constituent authorities on any matters arising from their consultation processes which concern the delivery of the Board's three statutory functions.

2.3. Employment

The Assessor & ERO will monitor, in relation to disabled persons, the number of staff in post and all applications for employment, training and promotion. Such monitoring already exists in relation to the Board's Racial Equality Scheme and henceforth the results of the monitoring process will be published separately along with annual Performance Indicators.

2.4. In the advertising of all posts in the Board's establishment, and in the subsequent appointment process, the Board's officials will be guided by the Equal Opportunities Policies of its lead authority, Shetland Islands Council.

2.5. Access to Accommodation

The Board occupies two office premises, one in Kirkwall and one in Lerwick. The Lerwick office is provided by Shetland Islands Council and is shared with a section of their Finance Services Department. Questions of disabled access to these premises are looked after by Shetland Islands Council and the Board will at all times follow the Council's guidance on questions of disabled access. The Kirkwall office is let from a private landlord and disabled access is considered to be unsatisfactory. For that reason, the Board will move to alternative premises in March 2007. The new premises are being provided by Orkney Islands Council who are currently installing upgraded disabled access to the building following a consultation process with the local Disability Forum. Following the Board's move to these premises questions of disabled access to these premises will be looked after by Orkney Islands Council and the Board will at all times follow the Council's guidance on questions of disabled access.

2.6. Staff Awareness and Training

All members of staff will be made aware of the contents of this policy document and the Board's duties in relation to Disability Equality. All new staff will be made aware of Disability Equality as part of their induction process.

The Board will liaise with its constituent authorities on the provision of adequate staff training on matters relating to Disability Equality.

2.7. Action Plan

A copy of the Board's Action Plan is attached as an appendix to this document.

2.8. Complaints

Any complaints from members of the public concerning matters of Disability Equality will be dealt with under the Board's existing Complaints Procedure but the number of such complaints will be separately monitored and published.

2.9. Publication

This Scheme will be circulated to all Board members, officials and members of staff. Copies are available from the Board's offices at 8 Albert Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1HP and Charlotte House, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0LX. Copies will also be available on the web-site www.orkney-shetland-vjb.co.uk .

2.10. Duration

This scheme is intended to cover a three year period up to December 2009 when it will be formally reviewed. The scheme may also be reviewed prior to that date should such action be deemed appropriate by the Board in response to comments and consultations by individuals, disability groups or regulatory authorities.

ACTION PLAN

Task	Start Date	End Date
Liaison with constituent authorities on the results of their consultations with local disability groups and forums to identify issues concerning the exercise of the Board's functions	December 2006	Continuous process
Liaison with constituent authorities to identify ways in which the better discharge of the Board's functions can assist in the promotion of equality of opportunity for disabled persons within the community	December 2006	Continuous process
Review the need for, and availability of, staff training facilities	January 2007	June 2007
Review current procedures followed in the discharge of the statutory functions of the Assessor & ERO and assess for their impact on disabled members of the community	December 2006	June 2007
Ensure that the impact of any new legislation concerning the statutory functions of the Assessor & ERO are assessed for their impact on disabled members of the community	December 2006	Continuous process
Publication of results of monitoring processes	June 2007	Annually
Review Action Plan for effectiveness	Continuous process	