

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

ANNUAL REPORT

DECEMBER 2009

Introduction

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 11.5, split between its two offices situated in Kirkwall, Orkney and Lerwick, Shetland.

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.

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 Council Elections.

Legislative Background

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 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.

The Board's Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan was published in December 2006 and has been updated in December 2009.

Progress 2009

Ongoing Commitment

Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board is committed to eliminating discrimination against disabled persons in all fields of its activities and to help to promote equality of opportunity for all members of society.

Employment

As stated in the introduction to this Report, Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board is an extremely small authority with low staff numbers (11.5 F.T.E), a low turnover of staff and, consequently, a low number of employment opportunities. In advertising any employment opportunities all advertising and literature follows the guidance of the Board's lead authority, Shetland Islands Council, in promoting the Board as an equal opportunities employer.

During 2009 only 2 posts were advertised, one of which was temporary and part time, and on neither occasion were applications received from disabled members of the community. The numbers of applicants for these posts are detailed in a Gender and Disability Monitoring document which is appended as part of this report.

A further document showing a breakdown of the Board's current staff by gender, ethnic origin and disability is also appended as part of this report.

Access to Accommodation

The Disability Equality Scheme published in December highlighted the fact that although disabled access to the Board's Shetland office was good, access to the Orkney office was not acceptable. This matter has now improved slightly. In July 2007, the Orkney office moved to new premises at 8 Broad Street, Kirkwall with an automated disabled entrance and ground floor accommodation accessible to disabled persons. However a disabled or infirm person would still require pressing a bell for assistance before being ushered into a utility room on the ground floor.

Training

Staff have all been made aware of The Board's responsibilities and commitment to Disability Equality and new staff are briefed on these matters as part of their induction process. In the introduction of any new legislation affecting the statutory duties of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer, staff have been made aware that, in the development of new policies and procedures to deal with any such measures, the impact on disabled persons should form a major part of their thinking.

The Board continues to liaise with its two constituent authorities on the provision of training courses which they are supplying to their own staff and may be of benefit to the Board's staff.

Consultation

In accordance with its Disability Equality Scheme, the Board has not sought to seek direct consultation with local groups and bodies but has chosen to look to the results of consultation processes of its two constituent authorities. This route was chosen because the Board's basic function is to deliver what are normally local authority services on behalf of the two authorities. For that reason it is considered that any bodies consulted by the two authorities on service delivery would include comments on delivery of the Board's services when framing their reply and any direct consultation by the Board would only cause confusion and duplication of effort to what are usually small voluntary organisations.

During 2009, there were no issues brought up with the two local authorities which directly involved the Boards functions. In the preparations for the European election held in June 2009, the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer liaised with the Returning Officers in the identification of suitable premises for Polling Stations which had suitable disabled access.

Complaints

The Board has a Complaints Procedure which has been in force for a number of years. Although not specifically monitored for complaints by Disabled Persons, there have been no complaints made which concerned disability equality issues.

Action Plan

The Board's action plan is continuously reviewed and for 2010 it will continue to monitor all situations that might give rise to situations where the needs of a disabled person and to include training for staff and to expand Equal Opportunities monitoring to include the Board's Complaints Procedure.

Conclusion

Although, because of its small nature and the restricted scope of its services, the Board is limited in the contribution that it can make to Disability Equality in the community at large, however, it will continue to seek any improvements which can be made in its service delivery and try to ensure equality for all. The first year of the Disability Equality Scheme has seen improvements to disabled access to premises, especially in Orkney, and every opportunity will be given to improving access to buildings occupied by the Board where they fall short of the mark. Staff have become more aware of their responsibilities to meeting the needs of disabled persons.

Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board

Employee Breakdown - December 2009

Racial Group	Total Male	Total Female	Including With Disability
White Scottish	7	5	0
White English	1	0	0

**Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board
Gender and Disability Monitoring
Job Applicants – Year 2009**

Post Advertised	Application Forms Returned	Monitoring Forms Returned	Applicants			Successful Candidate		
			Male	Female	Disability	Male	Female	Disability
Temporary Job Share Part-Time Admin Asst, Shetland	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0
White Scottish	█	█	1	0	0	0	0	0
White English	█	█	0	1	0	0	1	0

Post Advertised	Application Forms Returned	Monitoring Forms Returned	Applicants			Successful Candidate		
			Male	Female	Disability	Male	Female	Disability
Full-Time Technician, Shetland	9	9	8	1	0	1	0	0
White Scottish	█	█	8	0	0	1	0	0
White English	█	█	0	0	0	0	0	0
White European	█	█	0	1	0	0	0	0