

## SUBMISSION FROM EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

East Ayrshire Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Equal Opportunities Committee and notes that the inquiry to date has produced a range of interesting evidence highlighting the challenges faced by women in the workplace

As an employer, East Ayrshire Council recognises the importance of equality of opportunity in employment for both existing employees and job applicants. The Council accepts that social, economic and cultural processes can disadvantage certain groups and individuals in society and will take positive steps to redress the situation.

Further, it is appreciated that the Council has a major part to play in the process of influencing organisations, groups and individuals resident within the area to adopt equal opportunities practices.

It is noted that the Committee is now interested in hearing evidence regarding how we can overcome the difficulties in relation to each of the areas identified below. Please find below details of our approach in each area, which I trust will be of interest to the Committee.

### **Workforce Issues**

The Council is within the third quartile of performance in Scotland in relation to the percentage of women within the top 2% and top 5% of earners across the Council. Whilst 72% of the Council's total workforce is female, only 35.9% and 43.7% of earners within the top 2% and top 5%, respectively, are female. This indicator has improved steadily since 2008/09.

Female employees are also more likely to work part time. Of the total workforce, 36.25% of females work on a part-time basis compared with 3.30% of males. The Council uses the 'myjobscotland' website to advertise all vacancies and we welcome applications from all groups of individuals.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission highlighted in their 2011 report 'Sex and Power Scotland' that there is a growing gap between the public and private sectors in terms of opportunities for women. This is largely attributed to relative job security, more flexible working and family friendly policies for women who want to ensure a work-home life balance.

East Ayrshire Council is committed to the development of policies that introduce flexibility into working arrangements to the benefit of the Council, its employees and the community that it serves. It is recognised that there are mutual benefits to be gained to both the Council and its employees from flexible working practices and family-friendly policies. As such, the Council has in place a range of policies, including flexi-time, compressed hours, job-sharing arrangements and term-time working.

The Council has recently developed a Breastfeeding and Returning to Work Policy and this will be submitted for approval to Cabinet on 27 February 2013. The Policy aims to ensure that all pregnant and breastfeeding mothers employed by the Council are confident that they will be supported to continue breastfeeding on their return to work should they wish to do so. The introduction of the Policy will ensure that the Council continues to meet its legislative requirements as an employer and continues to follow best practice guidelines.

### **Occupational Segregation**

It is generally recognised that the subjects children study in school influence the choices they make in the job market. In order to overcome issues of occupational segregation, it is therefore important to consider what action can be taken through Education to promote gender equality.

Whilst there are no specific initiatives directed at girls within East Ayrshire, the Council is developing a number of programmes to encourage improved outcomes for all of our young people. This includes the following:

- In Primary Schools we are rolling out and developing the Primary Engineering Programme, which will involve equal participation of both genders;
- The Council is promoting STEM (Science, Maths, Engineering and Technology) subjects to all pupils;
- Greater opportunities are provided for personalisation and choice within curricular programmes to encourage more ownership of the options process.
- Our Service Level Agreement with Skills Development Scotland will ensure that information is provided to support all young people to consider appropriate, unrestricted choices of study/career paths.

One of the Council's strategic priorities is to raise educational attainment and equip our young people for the world of work. In December 2012, Cabinet agreed a performance management framework for raising educational attainment for all children and young people, formally recognising wider achievement; and equipping young people for the world of work.

The data included within the performance improvement framework will be segmented to consider a number of different dimensions, including difference in attainment and world of work pathways between genders. It is anticipated that the analysis of data within this framework will stimulate the identification of particular workstreams aimed at reducing inequality.

In addition, on 17 August 2011, Cabinet approved the establishment of individual Business Enterprise and Skills Centre (BESC) programmes in each of the nine East Ayrshire secondary schools. Cabinet also welcomed the involvement of local and national business leaders working with our schools to support and challenge Headteachers in the development of the BESC.

## **Childcare**

The work of the committee to date has highlighted the important role of childcare. The Childcare and Recreation Information Service (CARIS) is a service which we deliver in partnership with North and South Ayrshire Councils. The service offers impartial and reliable information on childcare, recreation and family support services across Ayrshire. This includes information about parent and toddler groups, registered childminders, independent and voluntary sector nurseries, providers of pre-school education and out of school care services.

Further, the Council has in place a Child Care Voucher Salary Sacrifice Scheme for employees. Employees can formally agree to a reduction from their gross salary in return for payment towards child care costs to registered carers. This will allow employees to have the amount of Salary Sacrifice free from Tax and NI deductions.

## **Women in Business**

Whilst there are no specific activities for Women in Business, the Council is committed to delivering economic development. The Council has reviewed its Economic Development service and is developing a partnership strategy to address the weaknesses in our local economy and to stimulate local economic growth. The Council continues to provide support to our 850 indigenous business base to grow in parallel with efforts to attract inward investment, as well as, supporting skills development and employability across our communities, to complement investment in our towns and our business and industrial locations.

The Council works with the Ayrshire Association of Business Women (AABW), which is the leading business, entrepreneurial and professional women's group in Ayrshire. The AABW offers networking and training opportunities, relevant motivational speakers and a chance to share experiences, and challenges, with other women.

Within earlier evidence to the Committee, submitted in August 2012, we highlighted the success of our Equalities Week 2012. The week took place from 3 March to 10 March; the week set out to challenge misconceptions, promote community relations and develop innovative ideas to achieve equality and promote diversity. It was also a vehicle to learn more about our communities, and the opportunity for debate, learning and challenge increased the capacity of the stakeholders to understand the different needs of particular groups within our community.

It is important that we promote success stories and one of the events held during the week was Question Time, which was an informal session to give women an opportunity to discuss the challenges of juggling family life and a successful career. A panel of five successful women within East Ayrshire answered a number of challenging questions posed by an audience of women. The event has been a regular feature of the Council's Equality Week and continues to be well received by all who take part.

## **Managing Unequal Pay in Local Authorities**

The Council has in place a Job Evaluation Scheme which has been used to systematically assess all roles within the Council, ensuring that posts are evaluated, rather than post holders, avoiding discrimination.

Equal pay audits are carried out on an annual basis within the Council. The 2011/12 Audit showed that the Council employed 6,008 people (excluding bank and other occasional employees) and of these 1,675 (28%) were male and 4,333 (72%) were female.

Average salaries of male to female employees, and the resultant pay gap, is based on all employees and includes additions to salary, such as overtime. The average Council salary in 2011/12 was £25,134. The average male employee salary was £27,322, whilst the average female employee salary was £24,289; this represents a pay gap of just over 11%.

The Council has recently agreed an Organisational Development Strategy. The Strategy describes the actions we will take to enable all employees across the Council to make their contribution to the achievement of the Council's vision, including the delivery of the Community Plan, Single Outcome Agreement and the key workstreams set out in our Transformation Strategy.

Within the Strategy we set out the specific actions we will take to make sure that our workforce is well led, well managed, supported and developed, motivated and engaged to deliver change. The Strategy and the actions we have identified will make sure that every employee will be able to access support and development relevant to their needs and understand how they can play their part in delivering necessary change and ensuring that the Council continues to be a high performing organisation fit for the future.

In addition, we deliver a range of Management Programmes for employees:

- the Introduction to Management delivered in house, targeted at new and identified future managers;
- the First Line Manager programme delivered in house and externally accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ilm); and
- the Senior Manager Management Development Programme delivered in partnership with the University of the West of Scotland and accredited by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI).

In addition, bespoke management programmes tailored to the specific needs of sections and roles are delivered in partnership with managers.

## **Cross-Cutting Issues**

The Council has an effective Skills Development and Employability Service which enables unemployed members of East Ayrshire Communities gain access to various training programmes (Skillseekers, Modern Apprenticeships, Get Ready for Work, and Training for Work) and job search facilities. Supported employment and Transitional employment are also offered to help people get back to work. In 2011/12 the Skills development and Employability Service worked with 947 participants.

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The Council has in place a range of policies to reflect its commitment to equal opportunities. There is a Corporate Equalities Strategy Group chaired by the Chief Executive, and each department has its own Equalities Group. All of these groups have a monitoring role in equalities matters at corporate and departmental levels, respectively.

The Council has in place a system for carrying out Equality Impact Assessments of all policies, procedures and proposed changes to ensure that the Council's decisions and activities do not disadvantage any one group. This has included a programme of ensuring all decisions made as part of our budget setting process are supported by equality impact assessments.

The implementation of the UK Government's Welfare Reform Programme will be a major issue for the Council and the residents of East Ayrshire. I am aware that there have been a number of reports by academics, charitable and independent organisations which consider the gender impact of the reforms and I am sure that the Committee will want to consider this in their deliberations.

### **Conclusion**

We hope that this submission is of assistance to the Equal Opportunities Committee and would be happy to provide any additional information that would assist the Committee in its work.

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