

SUBMISSION FROM NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit my views on equality issues affecting women and work. North Ayrshire Council, has a workforce where 73% is female and of the top 5% of earners 52% are female. I have detailed below some of the current challenges our organisation faces and also the progress which has been recently made in this area.

Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation is still evident with the majority of females being clustered in traditional caring type roles. Within Educational Services action to address this within the 3-18 year old age group includes using female presenters who currently work in male industries (and vice versa) for early career talks with pupils. However, it has been noted that stereotyping commences from birth (e.g. pink for girls and blue for boys) and is evident in children's books (e.g. boys are not ballet dancers) so by the time that children commence within our Early Years Centres, some gender based influences are already apparent.

Corporate Management Team

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) is currently made up of 4 females and 2 males. The extended CMT consists of a further 7 females and 3 males. While the constitution of our senior management team is unlikely to reflect the majority of businesses within the UK, there is good evidence of female career progression within North Ayrshire Council.

Flexible Working

Over the last few years there has been a gradual increase in the number of employees who are working flexible hours i.e. part time, compressed, term time hours. The feedback from employees who have moved to such arrangements has been very positive. This has had the added benefit of increased motivation, morale and retention which has been a significant benefit for the organisation. At the same time, it has also allowed the organisation to deliver some savings, which has created an ideal "win win" situation for both the employee and employer. Currently 5% of Managers and 22% of Teachers have moved to flexible working hours arrangements. The primary reason for these changes have been for caring responsibilities or an improved work-life balance, but in most cases a degree of flexibility has been co-operatively built into the arrangements which has been to the mutual benefit of both parties. It is acknowledged however that for employees who work shift patterns, e.g. Care at Home Assistants there is a limited choice of flexible arrangements available. The situation is also further compounded by very limited childcare available within the local area to suit these employee's working hours/shifts, albeit there is adequate provision locally for childcare between the hours of 8am to 6pm. Over time, given the demographic profile and potentially an increase in dependent care responsibilities, this could become a bigger issue for employees who need childcare essentially on a 24/7 type arrangement.

Equal Pay Audit

We have recently completed our first equal pay audit. The analysis was carried out based on the earnings for the financial year 2011/12. It indicated an overall basic pay gap of 0.21% (in favour of males) and the analysis of total pay revealed an overall pay gap of 1.6% (in favour of males). In general the pay gap is no longer seen as a priority issue for our Council, but is an area that we will continue to monitor and improve on where possible.

Employee Engagement Survey

North Ayrshire Council has also recently undertaken an Employee Engagement Survey. Specific analysis looking at gender has been carried out to ascertain what differences were reported by females and males. The findings of this survey generally indicated that females responded more positively than males in relation to the questions pertaining to management style, recognition and feedback, learning and development and work-life balance. The latter is probably reflective of the gradual increase in employees working a non standard week.

Parental Leave

Looking ahead, in March 2013 there will be a legislative change which will expand the unpaid parental leave entitlement (from 13 weeks to 18 weeks) which will potentially further help working parents. It is anticipated that take up will further increase when the legislation is altered in 2015, when parents of children aged up to 18 (currently it is up to 5 years of age) will be entitled to unpaid leave. As this could provide working parents with an unpaid arrangement during the summer holiday period, it is expected that we will observe an increase in the number of employees exercising their entitlement under this legislation. Provided this can be accommodated operationally within the workplace, this entitlement will likely assist a number of our working parents and help retain motivated and key staff.

Elma Murray
Chief Executive
North Ayrshire Council
5 February 2013