

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
Resources Committee Report
 11th June 2008

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Equal Opportunities Update
Report by Head of Policy and Performance

Summary
 The Council's Programme for Administration places equality and fairness at the centre of the way it conducts business. This report updates Members of the Council's progress in meeting its statutory public sector equality duties.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Programme for Administration states that it "places equality and fairness at the centre of the way it conducts business." The Corporate Plan and Single Outcome Agreement expand on this commitment and include targets to tackle discrimination, and to promote equality, participation and good relations. Failure to comply with Equal Opportunities legislation is an item on the Council's Risk Register.
- 1.2 The Council's [Race](#), [Disability](#) and [Gender](#) Equality schemes and the [Race Equality Policy \(Education\)](#) set out how the Council will meet its statutory public sector equality duties. The Council is also expected to meet legal requirements in respect of Age, Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief. Duties are listed in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Each duty has a statutory 3 year review cycle and an annual reporting requirement. The timescales below also apply to the duties on Education Authorities. Highland Council has committed to a single scheme for 2009.

Scheme:	Current period	3 year review	Annual report
Race	2005 – 2008	30 Nov 2008	Y Employment monitoring
Disability	2006 – 2009	04 Dec 2009	Y Progress report
Gender	2007 - 2010	28 June 2010	Y Progress report

- 1.4 This report follows an update to Resources Committee in February 2008 and ties in with the requirement to report annually on the Council's Gender Equality Scheme. The Council's Race Equality Scheme and the Education Race Equality Policy are due for review by the end of November. Future reporting will be on a six monthly cycle in June and Nov/Dec each year.

2. Embedding equal opportunities into Council practice

- 2.1 One of the Scottish Government's 15 national outcomes is that "we have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish Society". The Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) submission prepared by the Council in collaboration with Community Planning Partners demonstrates our commitment. Key indicators to tackle discrimination promote equality, participation and good relations are presented in local outcome 7.7 and include progress reports on equality schemes. There are additional related

actions which address disadvantage under employability, health and poverty. Elsewhere there are outcomes to support migrant workers, improve systems for reporting and recording of hate incidents and increasing attainment levels of minority ethnic pupils at certain stages. The key equalities indicators and related actions within the SOA are listed in Appendix 2.

- 2.2 The SOA indicators relating to equality and other supporting actions are, or will be, included in the Council's Equality Schemes and in the Corporate Plan. In addition, Service Plans are amended to record where activities are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 2.3 The Equality Impact Assessments referred to above are intended to ensure that our policies, functions and practices do not have a negative impact on any particular group of people and that we take appropriate steps to promote equality. Most policies and practices are assessed for relevance to race and disability equality and a number for gender equality. In preparation for a single equality scheme for 2009 current policies and practices will be assessed for relevance to equality across all strands and, where appropriate, full Equality Impact Assessments scheduled to be carried out. Services are asked to report quarterly on the number of new or reviewed policies and practices that are assessed.

3 Summary of progress and issues

- 3.1 The Council has prepared, published and reviewed its Equality schemes as required by legislation. An overview of progress with key actions in the Disability, Gender and Race Equality schemes is provided in Appendix 3. Actions in the 3 separate schemes all broadly relate to five key aims below and are reported against them.
- [Deliver services that are accessible](#)
 - [Create fair employment practices](#)
 - [Increase involvement, engagement and participation](#)
 - [A culture that will promote equality and tackle discrimination and harassment](#)
 - [Ensure that the Council meets the public sector duties](#)

Where actions cut across all three strands (eg training, development of impact assessment guidance) they are combined. This will be further refined and adjusted in the development of a single equality scheme. The key areas of progress and any issues are highlighted below with actions to address them noted.

3.2 Progress to highlight:

- There has been a very slight increase in the proportion of the top 5% earners in the Council that are women from 35.7% in 2005-06 to 35.9% in 2006-07. The proportion of Head and Deputy Head women teachers in Secondary schools rose from 34% to 35.5% in the same period.
- In 2006-07, 70.2% of the total number of the Council's public service buildings included in SPI Access Programme meet the SPI criteria for disability access. An increase from 61.3% in the previous year.
- Regular reports on Job Evaluation and Equal Pay are presented to Resources Committee. In April 2008, members were informed that the Modernising Employment Sub-Committee will consider detailed proposals for implementation of a new pay structure, conditions of service package and equal pay framework.

- The Council has addressed issues around collating employment monitoring information by ethnicity and is now in a position to analyse and report annually on employee monitoring.
- Increased language support for new residents through English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Migrant worker families have also been supported by a number of Community-based Language Assistants.
- A Cultural Bridges Fund provides grants for projects which promote improved community relations.
- In Education, there has been progress against both Race Equality and Disability Equality actions including improvements to access to Education establishments and a recently established forum for minority ethnic pupils.
- Improved provision of interpretation services, and continued communication support for Deaf and hard of hearing to access Council services.
- A Childcare Voucher scheme has been introduced and used by 146 staff
- The Council's Employee Survey 2007 included questions on perceptions of equality the first time. Results show that 19% of staff think that Council employees face discrimination on the basis of their age; 10% on account of gender and disability. However, a smaller proportion reported having directly experienced disadvantage related to any equality strand.
- The Council has recently retained its award of the Positive About Disabled People "Two Ticks" symbol in recognition of our commitments to ensure that disabled people are supported by employers and treated fairly.
- Policy, guidance and related documents for managers in supporting employees affected by domestic abuse is completed and subject to consultation.
- A draft Violence Against Women Strategy is currently out for consultation from the local Community Planning Partnership.
- The partnership response to adapting services for inwards migrants received the Chairman's Award at the Highland Council Quality Awards.

3.3 Issues for Highland Council

- The percentage of the highest paid 2% of earners in the Council who are women dropped from 30.9% in 2005-06 to 27.6% in 2006-07.
- Following a decrease in the number of staff attending Equality and Diversity Training in 2006 – 07 (138), there has been an increase in 2007 – 08 (214), however this remains below the annual target of 300 staff attending.
- There are over 700 pupils without English as a first language. While not all bi-lingual pupils require support, current figures show an 81% increase in bi-lingual pupils in Highland schools since 2005-6 (404 pupils). The resulting pressures on Education services have been highlighted in the SOA and communicated to the Scottish Government.
- Although considerable efforts are being made by the Council's Web Team to ensure that recognised Accessibility standards are met, a recent Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) report concluded that basic levels of accessibility were not being met. This has been dealt with.
- Consultation and involvement of equality groups in the development of Schemes and assessment of policies and practices are important principles of the public sector duties. Consultation with groups in Highland during 2007 confirmed a willingness to engage but limited capacity to do so and a variable understanding of equality issues. The Community Planning Equality & Diversity group will undertake ongoing engagement with equality groups.
- Actions were identified for the Gender Equality Scheme in Education in 2007,

however staff changes have meant that responsibility to take these forward requires to be reviewed. Education, Culture and Sport Services have recently established a strategic working group to progress equality actions across all strands.

- Further progress is required across the Council to meet requirements to assess the impact of current and proposed policies and practices on equality and to have due regard to the results of impact assessments and the results published.

4 Partnership activities

- 4.1 There are a number of agreed activities being undertaken by the Community Planning Partnership Equality and Diversity Group. Current work includes:
- re-tendering for Interpretation and Translation services (there is increasing demand for this service. Both use and costs of services doubled from 2006-07 to 2007-08
 - development of an on-line reporting system and associated support to report and record Hate Incidents;
 - the preparation of Accessibility Guidance; and
 - proposals for joint engagement with communities on the review of agencies race equality schemes.
- 4.2 Additional related partnership activities include the development of a Violence Against Women Strategy, Inward Migration activities and a multi-agency Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan, some of which have been referred to earlier.

5 The new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

- 5.1 From October 2007 compliance with the public sector duties is enforced by a single Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC also covers the newer strands of age, sexual orientation and religion/belief and has investigatory and enforcement powers as well as powers to intervene in discrimination cases. The EHRC can conduct formal investigations where there is a genuine belief that a person or organisation has committed a discriminatory act and can apply to a court for an injunction or interdict to prevent further unlawful acts. The EHRC can issue a notice to comply in relation to specific duties, and ask a court to issue an order to comply where they are not satisfied with the response to the notice.
- 5.2 Arrangements are being made for Council representatives to meet with the Commission by the end of the summer to establish the Commission's priorities and to demonstrate the Council's commitment to its equalities duties.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to:

Consider and approve appendix 3 as the current progress report against the Council's equalities schemes. This will be highlighted on the Council's website as the most recent update on progress thus fulfilling our reporting duties.

Signature:

Designation: Head of Policy and Performance

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Date: 26.5.08

APPENDIX 1

General and Specific Duties on the public sector

DISABILITY:

General Duties

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and others
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disability
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- Take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities even where this involves treating the disabled person more favourably than other persons.

Specific Duties

- publish a Disability Equality Scheme (including within it an Action Plan)
- involve disabled people in producing the Scheme and Action Plan
- demonstrate they have taken actions in the Scheme and achieved appropriate outcomes
- report on progress annually
- review and revise the Scheme every three years

Education authorities are also bodies subject to the duty to prepare a Disability Equality Scheme. The Council's Education elements in the scheme link to existing activities undertaken in the Education Accessibility Strategy and Additional Support for Learning.

RACE:

General Duties

- Promote equal opportunities
- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- Promote relations between people of different racial groups

Specific Duties

- A Race Equality Scheme which sets out those functions or policies which have relevance to race equality, and include their arrangements for:
- assessing and consulting on the impact of policy on race equality
- monitoring policies for adverse impact
- publishing the results of assessments, monitoring and consultations
- ensuring public access to information and services
- training staff in the new duty

Additionally, there are specific Employment Duties to monitor employees by ethnicity and Education Duties including producing a Race Equality Policy.

GENDER:

General Duties

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex
- To promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Specific Duties

- Gather information on how its work affects women and men;

- Consult employees, service users, trade unions and other stakeholders;
- Assess the different impact of policies and practices on both sexes and use this information to inform their work;
- Identify priorities and set gender equality objectives;
- Plan and take action to achieve gender equality objectives;
- Report annually and review progress every three years.

In addition, the Council is required to:

- Publish an equal pay policy statement and report on progress every three years.

Education authorities are required to produce a gender equality scheme and equal pay statement and ensure that the schools they manage gather information on the effects of their policies and practices on gender equality, assess the impact of those policies and practices on gender equality, carry out steps to meet the duty in line with the education authority scheme, and report on these activities. These are included in the Council's scheme.

Equalities indicators and related actions in the Single Outcome Agreement 2008

APPENDIX 2

National Outcome 1				
We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place to do business in Europe				
	Relevant indicators	Frequency / Type / Source	Baseline (2006-7)	Targets & Timescales
Local outcome 1.3 Balanced population growth across the Highlands	Increase the number of new learners supported with English language tuition	Annual/ quantitative/ Highland Council (CLD partnership CP 5.13)	758 2006-7	1090 2008-9 with review in 2009
	Increase the number of inward migrants and their families, who have limited English language, to settle in to the Highlands.	Annual / Quantitative/ Highland Council (Service from Community Based Language Assistants, ECS CP 5.14)	0 2006-7	285 (2008-9) Target reviewed 2009
National Outcome 2				
We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people				
Local outcome 1 High levels of economic activity are sustained	At least one wrap around child care provider to be available within each of the 29 Associated School Groups (ASG).	Annual / Highland Council (HC CP 9.19 amend)	17 2007-8	24 2010-11
National Outcome 6				
We live longer, healthier lives.				
Local outcome 6.1 Increase proportions of older people receiving appropriate care in the appropriate setting to maintain or improve their independence.	600 new houses built for older people or people with disabilities	Quarterly-RSL returns Highland Council (CP 1.1)	40 2006-7	600 2010-11
Local outcome 6.3 Reduce obesity in the population See also National Outcome 12 on services to promote the enjoyment of the natural environment and visits to the outdoors.	Increase the average cardiovascular fitness of boys in primary 7 Number of shuttle runs over set period in controlled conditions	Annual / Quantitative controlled testing / Highland Council 2006-7	28 2006-7	29 2010-11
	Increase the average cardiovascular fitness of girls in primary 7 Number of shuttle runs over set period in controlled conditions	Annual / Quantitative controlled testing / Highland Council 2006-7	34 2006-7	35 2010-11

	Increase by 4% No. participant session in Active Schools programme for girls in primary school	Annual/Quantitative/ Highland Council	173,079 2006-7	180,000 2010-11
	Increase by 3% No. participant session in Active Schools programme for boys in primary school	Annual/Quantitative/ Highland Council	205,003 2006-7	211,100 2010-11
	Increase by 4% No. participant session in Active Schools programme for girls in secondary school	Annual/Quantitative/ Highland Council	83,892 2006-7	87,200 2010-11
	Increase by 3% No. participant session in Active Schools programme for boys in secondary school	Annual/Quantitative/ Highland Council	143,055 2006-7	147,300 2010-11

National Outcome 7

We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society

Local outcome 7.1 Reducing poverty by supporting more people into sustained employment	Increase the number of lone parents supported into work	Fairer Scotland Fund – number clients registered with a key worker/ annually/ Highland Council FSF contribution	328 2006-7	>328 TBC June 2008
	Increase the number of lone parents supported into work experiencing a positive outcome	Fairer Scotland Fund – transition measure/ annually/ Highland Council FSF contribution	163 2006-7	>163 TBC June 2008
	<i>Further indicators on supported employment services to be developed.</i>			
	Reduce the number of young people not in employment, education, or training	Annual / quantitative / Highland Council SDS (HC CP 9.12) FSF contribution	296 2006-7	281 2007/8 review targets for 2008/9
	Increase opportunities for Adult Literacy Learners and take up by 10%	Annual/Quantitative / Highland Council Potential FSF contribution	1828 2006-7	2011 2010-11
Local outcome 7.5 Tackling discrimination, promoting equality, participation and good relations	Delivery and review of equalities schemes across the public sector	Annual progress reports and three yearly reviews published.	Race from 2005 Disability from 2006 Gender from 2008	Satisfactory reports 2010-11
	100% of all new and reviewed Council policies, functions and practices are screened for relevance to equalities (and full assessment done where relevant)	Quarterly / Highland Council (HC CP10.11)	Reporting begins 2008-9 – for base-line	100% 2010-11
	Production of an integrated community care strategy	Strategy developed and approved- HC and NHS		

In progress
2007-8

2009

	servicing the needs of older people, those with physical and learning disabilities and those with mental health difficulties.	Highland (HC CP 1. 5)	Initial focus on care of older people	
	100% of all Council public caller buildings are accessible to people with disabilities	Quarterly/ SPI/ Highland Council (HC CP10.13) SPI CM4	61% 2006-7	100% 2009-2010
	Increase the % of buses suitable for people with disabilities	Annual/ Highland Council/ HC CP 8.9	TBC 2006-7	TBC 2010-11
	Sustain investment for improving access for people with disabilities on roads and footpaths	Quarterly/ Capital programme/ Highland Council	Base-line to be set 2008-9	At least = to 2008-9
	Increase % highest paid 2% of earners among council employees that are women	Quarterly/ SPI / highland Council CP 10.14	27.6% 2006-7	30.6% 2010-11
	Increase % highest paid 5% of earners among council employees that are women.	Quarterly/ SPI / highland Council CP 10.14	35.9% 2006-7	41.9% 2010-11

National Outcome 9

We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger

Local outcome 9.4 Reduced reconviction rates and levels of repeat victimisation.	Incidence of domestic abuse per 100,000 population	Annual / Quantitative / Northern Community Justice Authority	1350 (2005/06)	Increase until confidence in reporting levels reached
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National Outcome 11

We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

Local outcome 11.3 Improved quality of life through community led action and more people feeling connected to their communities	At least maintain the levels of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community acceptance of new residents (to some or great extent) 	Annual / Public Performance Survey - Qualitative/ Highland Council “	82% 2007	At least 82% 2010-11
	Reduce the number of recorded hate crimes. Racist incidents (forms recorded - reported to PF as crime) Other hate crimes (incident forms recorded - reported to PF as crime)	Monthly / Quantitative/ Northern Constabulary	Racist: 124 – 113 Gender / Sexual : 5 – 3 Religious: 1 - 0. 2006-7	Increase expected until confidence in reporting levels reached possibly before 2010-11

National Outcome 13 We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity				
Local outcome 13.2 Growth in Arts, Literary, Drama and Music Festivals and local involvement in them and which celebrate the diverse heritage and interpretation of the Highlands	Increase the number of, and participants in, sports, arts and culture events promoting community cohesion through the Cultural Bridges Fund	Quarterly / Cultural Bridges Fund awards / Highland Council (HC CP 5.15)	£30k 2007-8 Base-line on number of events and participants to be gathered 2008.	At least £30k 2010-11 Target TBC
National Outcome 15 Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs				
Local outcome 15.4 A workforce which is the right size, skilled, supported and rewarded fairly.	Modernised working conditions, new pay and grading structure and a single status Council workforce delivered.	Regular reports to Resources Committee / Highland Council (CP 10.34)	In progress 2008	Delivered By end of 2009

Equality Schemes Action Plan Progress: June 2008

1 Deliver services that are accessible

Taking account of equality groups, the Council aims to improve access to Council services, premises and information and will address barriers to access.

Disability:

- Work continues to improve access to Council's premises through both physical adjustments and changes to the way services are delivered. Progress reported against a Statutory Performance Indicator shows that good progress has been made from a low level (3%) of accessibility in 2004/05, 24.9% accessible premises in 2005/06; 61.7% in 2006/07; to 70.2% in 2007/08 with a target of 100% by 2012.
- The Council's annual Public Performance Survey asks customers who had made contact with the Council about their satisfaction with facilities for people with a disability. There has been a year on increase in satisfaction and decrease in dissatisfaction in responses to this question from 35% rating it as "good" and 18% rating as "poor" in 2002 to 64% "good" and 6% "poor" in 2007.
- The Council's website is continually checked to maintain and meet the Web Accessibility (WAI) AA standard and progress is sought to meeting the AAA standard. However, a recent Society of Information Technology Management (SOCTIM) national survey flagged up some areas of concern for the Council that are being addresses with Fujitsu
- There is existing guidance for HC staff on ensuring services and information are accessible, but a comprehensive guide has been drafted by NHS Highland with the intent of adoption by all Community Planning partners. This has been sent to partners for consultation before wider engagement with disability groups

Gender:

- The Gender Equality Scheme identified that further work needs to be undertaken to identify gender imbalance in access to services.
- Activities to support women and men to enter and progress in the workplace have been progressed through the Working for Families Project as well as through Early Years activities in the Children's Service Plan. The Working for Families project will continue in 08/09 under Fairer Scotland Fund and will continue to assist women and men progress into the workplace. Central (Scot. Govt.) collection and analysis of data has finished but interim arrangements will be established in 08/09 to ensure clients are monitored by gender until new Fairer Scotland Fund monitoring arrangements are in place.

Race:

- Official population projections appear to understate the scale of inward migration to the Highlands particularly from out with the UK and especially in comparison to other official statistics on e.g. National Insurance Registrations. The Council's SOA notes that this under-estimation, along with the time lag in considering population change within the Council's Grant settlement, means that the Government support for inward migration is insufficient for the way in which services need to be adapted, particularly for those migrants and their families without English as a first language.
- A number of related activities have been implemented to meet local requirements due to the increase in migrant workers coming to the Highlands.

Actions that are ongoing will be included in the review of the Council's Race Equality Scheme in 2008 but include the following.

- Improvements have been made to access to professional interpretation and translation services which are used by a range of Council services. The use and associated costs have more than doubled from 2006-07 to 2007-08. This is likely to continue to increase in the short term as both staff and members of the public become aware of services. A recent evaluation of services has been undertaken prior to re-commissioning for services in Summer 2008.
- An on-line Welcome pack is available in Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian on the Highland Life website; individual sections can be printed out as required. Information will be refreshed during 2008. The number of "hits" in each language during 2007-08 was as follows: Polish 13, 895; English 9303; Latvian 5075, and Lithuanian 4338.
- Language support for new residents through English learning opportunities for speakers of other languages (ESOL) has increased greatly over the past 4 years through partnership working between Highland Adult Literacies partners. In 2006-07 758 people received tuition and a target has been set of 1090 in 2008-09. Training of trainers has also been provided. Improvements to the provision of interpretation services have been made. The Council also continues to support the provision of communication support for deaf and hard of hearing to access Council services.
- There are over 700 pupils without English as a first language, speaking 61 different languages in Highland schools, with Polish spoken by 31%. Migrant worker families have been supported by a number of Community-based Language Assistants. A target of supporting 285 families has been set for the Assistants during 2008-09.
- A Cultural Bridges Fund was established by Community Planning partners and delivered through Highland Council to provide grants for projects or programmes which promote improved community relations between new residents, minority ethnic community groups and the wider community in the Highlands.

Following the preparation of the Single Outcome Agreement, three new actions will also be added to the action plan in this section:

- Production of an integrated community care strategy serving the needs of older people, those with physical and learning disabilities and those with mental health difficulties.
- Increase the % of buses suitable for people with disabilities
- Sustain investment for improving access for people with disabilities on roads and footpaths

2 Create fair employment practices

Barriers to recruitment, employment, training and retention of staff on the basis of equality characteristics will be removed, and the Council will ensure that employment practices and policies are fair and accessible.

A gender equality impact assessment is underway as part of the development of the new pay and grading structure.

In 2007 for the first time, the Employee Survey included questions on staff perceptions of Equal opportunities in Highland Council as a fair employer with regard to Disability, Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion/belief and Age. Around one in five staff perceived that employees face discrimination on the basis of their age

and one in ten agreed that employees face discrimination on account of gender and disability. However relatively few staff reported that they themselves had been disadvantaged on account of their age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, race or faith.

Disability:

- Personnel Services have reviewed a number of policies and practices in relation to equality. This included Recruitment and Selection policy. Associated materials and training were developed in keeping with the aims of fair employment practices.
- In April 2008, the Council retained its award of the Positive About Disabled People “Two Ticks” symbol in recognition of our commitment to ensure that disabled people are supported in employment and treated fairly at every stage of their selection and employment
- Equalities data monitoring of existing staff and applicants has been implemented with 87% of data collection complete. Information on staff and applicants with disability will be analysed.
- A small employee group met to discuss the potential to establish a staff disability forum, or other methods of engaging with disabled staff. It is proposed to follow this with an event during 2008 to raise awareness of support for and the rights of disabled employees and gather wider views on engagement.

Gender:

- The Council continues to deliver activities through the Women in Management programme including workshops and a mentoring programme. Generally there has been a steady increase in the number of women in senior management posts since 2001 when 11% of the most senior posts were held by women. In 2007 27.6% of the highest paid 2% of Council earners were women; however this was a drop from 30.9% in the previous year. In addition, there is wide gender segregation amongst employees in a range of Council services which is to be explored further.
- The Council developed an Equal Pay Policy Statement and work continues implement equal pay objectives will be delivered through Job Evaluation and Single Status, the implementation of the approved job sizing scheme for teachers and the harmonisation of pay and conditions for craft operatives. Regular reports are submitted to Resources committee. A Members only Report was presented to Resources Committee in April 2008 to provide an update on Job Evaluation progress.
- A Child Care Voucher Scheme was implemented by the Council in August 2007 and has been used by 146 staff to May 2008 (106 female and 40 male employees).
- Policy, guidance and related documents for managers in supporting employees affected by domestic abuse is completed and subject to consultation

Race:

- There is a statutory requirement on the Council to monitor employees and job applicants by ethnicity and to report annually. Following delays in the implementation of processes and communication from the Commission for Racial Equality about compliance, the Council now collates and reports on this information. The next report will be published with the review of the Race Equality Scheme in November 2008.

3 Increase involvement, engagement and participation.

Engagement, involvement and representation of under-represented equality groups, including Race, Gender and Disability will be increased, and barriers to participating in public life and decision making will be eliminated.

- The Council has developed training and guidance to support staff to comply with the national Standards of Community Engagement developed by the Government. When used these standards support work with equalities groups and promote inclusive engagement. Training is presently being rolled out to staff.
- In 2007, the Council and local Community Planning partners engaged consultants to work with local equality related groups on their preferred methods of engagement with agencies. The recommendations identified that there is still much to be done to build the capacity of most equality strands to engage effectively. The partnership Equality and Diversity Group will continue to progress this area of activity
- **Disability:**
Following the publication of individual Disability Equality Schemes, Community Planning partners disseminated a joint report from the involvement activities (questionnaires and focus groups) with disabled people outlining their feedback and the actions in partner's schemes as well as partnership actions.
- Council Services engage with disability groups on a range of issues around access to services including Disability Access Panels, user groups of mental health and learning disability services, and sensory disabilities and good links exist with many groups in Highland and nationally.

Gender:

- In Autumn 2007, the Council hosted and participated in an event organised by the local Women@Work project to promote participation in public life.
- Work is proposed to identify the gender representation of structures that the Council supports. With regard to young people, work has been done increase the number of young people from youth forums to be involved in pupil councils. Gender representation is presently evenly balanced.

Race:

- During 2007-08, the Council hosted two and participated in three events organised by the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations to promote democratic participation. A further event will be hosted by the Council in June 2008
- While there are a small number of ethnic minority groups in the area, there is not a formalised structure of engagement in place. However, most groups have good relations with different services in the Council, for example with Community Learning and Development. Further work is planned with partners as identified above.

4 A culture that will promote equality and tackle discrimination and harassment.

The Council creates a positive culture that will promote equal opportunities and diversity and will demonstrate that the Council does not tolerate unlawful discrimination and harassment.

- Since 2004, over 1400 employees have attended a one-day in-house Equality and Diversity training course. This is a corporate course and part of the

Council's core competencies. While this is a significant achievement and the course has evaluated well, numbers attending dropped during 2006 – 7 (1380 and the target of 300 participants annually was not met. However, the course has been promoted recently and attendance figures increasing towards the end of 2007-08 (214). During 2008, elected members will receive training on equal opportunities requirements.

- On a monthly basis, the Council prepares an electronic bulletin on Equality related news and articles which is distributed through the Highlands & Islands Equality Forum to over 800 organisations and individuals.

Disability:

- During 2007, almost 100 staff completed an e-learning package "Disability Confident". This course has been evaluated and a new licence purchased
- In the preparation of the Council Disability Scheme, Community Planning partners worked together to ask the views of disabled people and disability groups about life in the Highlands in relation to a number of topics. One area of concern was a high number (23%) reporting "hate" incidents related to their disability. Further investigation with Capability Scotland reveals that the national figure indeed be higher. Resources have been identified from the Scottish Government for the Community Planning partnership to develop an on-line "hate incident" reporting system. Work is underway and web designers have been commissioned and consultation started with community groups.

Gender:

- Through representation from Social Work Services, the Council continues to be involved with the partnership Violence Against Women Training Consortium. A draft partnership strategy has recently been circulated for consultation until 19th June 2008. Violence Against Women multi agency training is ongoing and training linking Violence Against Women and Child Protection has been developed. Guidance for managers to support employees subject to Domestic Abuse has been drafted by Personnel services.

Race:

- Most racist incidents are reported to the police and followed up as a crime where appropriate. The Council had signed up to a multi agency Racist Incident scheme which required partners to support the reporting of incidents. With the exception of Education, where incidents are reported and monitored, progress in the Council has been slow due to staff resource issues. However, as mentioned earlier renewed activity and identified resources are enabling partners to develop an on-line reporting system for "hate Incidents" widening the scope of reporting to disability, homophobic incidents etc.

5. Ensure that the Council meets the public sector duties.

Equality is given a high profile; the Council meets its responsibilities set out in its Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes. Council's policies and functions pay due regard to the duties and consideration of equality appears in all aspects of the Council's work.

- In each of the Council's Equality Schemes, a commitment is made to establish process and to undertake Equality Impact Assessments as a means of ensuring that equality is considered in all aspects of our work. Progress in this area has been slow but there is now quarterly performance reporting of assessments carried out by service. Further progress will be required by all

services to meet this commitment and publish assessments in 2008.

- Equality indicators have been included in the Single Outcome Agreement and are reflected in the Corporate Plan. The Service Plan template has been amended to include monitoring of policies, functions and practices that have been screened and/or assessed for impact on equality groups.
- In order to ensure a high profile and that the Council meets its equality commitments, regular progress updates will be made to Senior Management Team and a six monthly report to Resources committee.

6 Education

There are specific duties covering education. A head teacher has been seconded one day a week to implement race equality activities and much work has been undertaken particularly to raise awareness of legal requirements and the impact of discrimination. A forum for minority ethnic pupils has recently been established and further work to address racist incidents in schools will be undertaken as a result of feedback. With regard to disability, much of the activity is encompassed within the Councils Education Accessibility Strategy. There has been significant progress to improve access to education buildings but more work is identified to raise awareness of disability matters.

Staff changes have meant that while actions were identified for the Gender Equality Scheme in 2007, responsibility to take these forward requires to be reviewed. As with the corporate activities, key improvements areas include the implementation of Equality Impact Assessments and equality proofing of activities. Education, Culture and Sport Services have recently established a strategic working group to progress equality actions across all strands.

7 Partnership activities

The Council is an active partner in the Community Planning Equality and Diversity group. A number of partnership activities are already underway and planned as a means of making efficiencies, sharing good practice and improving services. Current partnership equality activities include: consultation on engagement with equality groups, gathering demographic information, commission of interpretation and translation services, and developing on-line "hate incident" reporting.

There are a number of related partnership groups and activities where strong links exist including the Inward Migration Action Group, Gypsy/Traveller Working Group, and the Sensory Impairment working group.