

Chapter Five Gender Equality Chapter

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1. Background

The development of the Wealden Gender Equality Chapter has provided the Council with an opportunity to assess how effective and responsive our policies and services are with regard to the different needs of women and men. This applies to the way our services and employment opportunities are designed and delivered. The aim of this chapter is to set out what we are currently doing and how we intend to meet the gender equality duty.

The Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all individuals and communities in Wealden and this Gender Equality Chapter builds upon the equality principles and values set out in the Wealden Equality Scheme and should be read alongside this.

The gender equality duty came into force in April 2007 and places more responsibility with us to think strategically about gender equality.

1.1 The Gender Equality Duty

As a District Council responsible for delivering services to the people who live, work in, and visit Wealden, we are committed to meeting our statutory responsibility.

The Equality Act 2006 places a duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need:

- To eliminate discrimination and harassment that is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) and discrimination that is unlawful under the Equal Pay Act 1970 (EqPA)
- To promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

This is known as the 'general duty'.

The term 'sex' is used to describe biological differences between women and men. The term 'gender' refers to the wider social roles and relationships which structure men's and women's lives.

As part of the duty, we must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment in the fields of employment and vocational training against transsexual people; people who intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment. In anticipation of the Goods and Services Directive (2004/113) this scheme extends this provision to Council services.

'Due regard' means that in all our decisions and functions the Council gives weight to gender equality in proportion to its relevance to a particular function.

In addition to this general duty, the Act also sets out the specific duties Wealden District Council must fulfil. These include:

- Preparation and publication of a gender equality scheme.
- Implementation of the actions set out in the scheme within three years.
- An annual progress report

- Review of the scheme every three years.

1.2 The Wealden Equality Scheme

The Council aims to ensure that all our services and employment opportunities are provided with equity and fairness to everyone. This will be achieved through the following priority objectives (specific actions are detailed in the service delivery and employment action plan):

- Promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations for all individuals and communities in Wealden.
- Collecting data and information on the impact of our policies and practices.
- Eliminating any unlawful discrimination or harassment in the provision of our services and employment.
- Improving the accessibility of our services and employment opportunities for all and tackling the causes of social exclusion; and
- Ensuring effective implementation of equality duties across all service areas.

This chapter identifies issues that we will be working on over the next three years to achieve equality for men and women and have be incorporated into the Service Delivery and Employment Action Plan of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

1.3 Why has the gender equality duty been introduced?

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) highlights that gender roles and relationships structure men's and women's lives. Women are frequently disadvantaged by policies and practices that do not recognise their greater caring responsibilities, the different pattern of their working lives, their more limited access to resources and their greater vulnerability to domestic violence and sexual assault. Men are also disadvantaged by workplace cultures that do not support their family or childcare responsibilities, by family services that assume they have little or no role in parenting, or by health services which do not recognise their different needs. Both sexes suffer from stereotyping of their roles and needs. Policies and practices that seem neutral can have a significantly different effect on women and on men, often contributing to greater inequality and poor policy outcomes. The EOC also highlight that women and men will experience different forms of disadvantage depending on their age, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status and whether or not they have a disability.

In order to achieve actual equality of opportunity, it is necessary to recognise that in certain circumstances women and men, because of their sex or gender roles, are not in the same position. In some circumstances it may therefore be appropriate to treat women and men differently, if that action is aimed at overcoming previous disadvantage¹.

¹ Equal Opportunities Commission: Gender Equality Duty, Draft Code of Practice, England and Wales.

1.4 National and local statistics

National research from sources such as the Equal Opportunities Commission and Women and Equality Unit highlights.

- Women and men generally have different rates of economic activity; 42% of women and 10% of men work part time².
- The proportion of women who are employed differs vastly depending on the presence and age of dependent children³.
- Fathers are more likely to work and to work longer hours than men who are not fathers⁴.
- There are more female carers than male⁵.
- In 2005, average hourly earnings for women working full-time were £11.67 and for men £14.08. This gave a full-time gender pay gap of 17.1%⁶.
- Women are among the poorest pensioners and they form a substantial majority of Income Support claimants over state pension age⁷.

The following facts about women and men living in Wealden are drawn from the Census 2001⁸ and the NOMIS official labour market statistics⁹:

- Of the Wealden population of 140,023, there is an almost equal gender split between females and males- 52.3% and 47.6% respectively.
- There are more females over the age of 75 (61.3%) than males (38.7%).
- More women have limiting long-term illness (70%) as compared to men (30%).
- 11% of women and 5% of men do not have access to a car.
- Among full-time workers, median earnings for men were 35% higher in 2006 than for women.
- Percentage of males and females aged 16-74 in employment:

	Female	Male
Part-time	22.22%	3.52%
Full-time	25.48%	47.58%
Unemployed	1.48%	1.94%
Looking after home/family	13.24%	0.56%

- Looking at lone parent families, 70% of lone fathers are employed full time and 8% part time, while 24% of lone mothers are employed full time and 34% part time.
- Among working age people in East Sussex, 9.0% of men were unemployed or seeking work and 9.1% were not employed and not seeking work, while the equivalent percentages for women were 13.3% unemployed or seeking work and 15.7% not employed and not seeking work (05-06 figures). However, in February 2007, more than twice as

² Census 2001

³ Equal Opportunities Commission: Women and Men in Britain, The Work-Life balance. 2000

⁴ Equal Opportunities Commission: Women and Men in Britain, The Work-Life Balance. 2000

⁵ Equal Opportunities Commission: Women and Men in Britain, The Work-Life Balance. 2000. A Carer is defined as: looking after or providing a regular service to help someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.

⁶ Equal Opportunities Commission: Facts about Women and Men in Britain 2006.

⁷ Equal Opportunities Commission: Women and Men in Britain, Pay and Income. 2001

⁸ Census 2001 through NOMIS <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

⁹ NOMIS official labour market statistics, National Statistics. <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/contents.aspx>

- many men (3.1%) claimed Jobseekers Allowance than women (1.3%).¹⁰
- Of the total number of Wealden males employed, 48% work 38-48 hours a week and 30%, 49 or more hours.
 - Of the total number of Wealden females employed, 25% work 38-48 hours a week and 8 %, 49 or more hours.
 - Of the total number of persons in Wealden collecting benefit (Aug 2006) 53% are female and 47%, male.
 - There are differences in the occupations of men and women in Wealden. Below is the percentages of males and females aged 17-74 in employment in these occupational groups.
 - Administrative and secretarial (Males: 4.57% Female: 22.78%)
 - Skilled trades (Male: 21.33% Female: 3.47%)
 - Personal service (Male: 2.13% Female: 14.71%)
 - Managers and senior officials (Male: 24.71% Female: 12.61%)
 - 10% of the Wealden population provide unpaid care.

A report from the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2006¹¹ summarises data on the gender breakdown of councillors from a census conducted by the Employers' Organisation for Local Government in 2004. Following the May 2004 elections, 70.3% of councillors in England were male, while 29.1% were female (a small proportion did not respond to the survey - 0.6%). This represented a slight increase from 27.8% in 1997. The councillors' census also indicated that male councillors are more likely than female councillors to hold positions such as leader or deputy leader of the council, or to be chairs or vice-chairs of council committees.

Wealden District Council has a better than the national average split between male and female elected councillors. In February 2007¹², of the 55 elected Wealden District councillors, 60% were male and 40% were female. The Leader of the Council, male and the Deputy Leader, female. This gender balance is reflected in the chairmanship of the committees.

2. The extent to which we achieve gender equality in our services

To build a picture of how gender can impact on service delivery and formulate the gender equality objectives for our scheme, information was gathered on how women and men are affected by our services and functions and the extent to which our services and functions take into account the needs of women and men. The information was drawn from national research and from data collected by the Council.

We also consulted with service users through a service-user questionnaire. This was designed to gain an insight into the experience of our service users and identify any inequality. The questionnaire was made available at the

¹⁰ Most of these statistics are available for Wealden District, but too few women are unemployed for the sample used to be accurate, so we used East Sussex figures which are broadly similar in terms of comparing men and women.

¹¹ Gender statistics: An Evaluation, Equal Opportunities Commission, Esther Breitenbach (2006) (pg 16/17).

http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/wp51_gender_statistics_evaluation.pdf

¹² Wealden District will have a full Council election in May 2007.

Council's reception areas and on the website. A total of 55 responses were received over a 4 week period. This represents a relatively small response rate which impacts both on the reliability and representative nature of the results. However some of the findings may provide a snap-shot of certain trends. The people who responded to the questionnaire were self selecting and most had been in contact with the Council in the last 5 years. Of the 55 respondents 38% were male, 58% female and 4% did not disclose their gender.

After this initial consultation, the Internal Equality group and members of the Wealden people's panel were consulted on the draft gender equality objectives.

We acknowledge that there are certain limitations in the evidence gathered; we consulted with people who were already in contact with the Council and as such we may not have been able to identify issues or problems faced by people who have problems accessing our services.

However, the objectives selected include actions that we intend to take over the course of this three-year scheme to collect more information on the needs of women and men and the effect of our services and functions on men and women.

The gender equality objectives identified in this section have been developed following an assessment of which of our functions are most relevant to gender equality, in light of the evidence gathered and in consultation with the Internal Equality group and service users. Four main areas have been identified with regard to service delivery; access to services/ service provision, consultation/ engagement, domestic violence and incorporating the duty into all areas of our work.

2.1 Access to services/ service provision

The national and local statistics (1.5) show differentials in women's and men's place in the labour market, working pattern, pay, and childcare responsibilities. These wider inequalities between men and women may result in some women requiring certain functions more than men i.e. Housing and Benefits.

In addition there may be differences in how and when men and women access our services.

In order to provide accessible services our council offices are currently open Monday-Friday 08.30-17.30. There are also Wealden Community help points based at Uckfield and Heathfield libraries, which are open Monday- Saturday¹³ which form part of the joint 'Access East Sussex'¹⁴ strategy.

Touch-screen internet kiosks have also been installed in shops and public buildings across the district to provide access to a range of public services.

¹³ For detailed opening times please visit ESCC website at <http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/libraries/find/default.aspx>

¹⁴ The Access East Sussex partnership is made up of East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Rother District Council, Wealden District Council and Lewes District Council.

In addition there is internet access to the Council's website at all times¹⁵.

In our survey of service users¹⁶ 81% of female and 81% of male respondents thought that the combination of these access routes suited their needs.

However one respondent suggested that to improve access to services and information, the Council should be open Saturday mornings. While another respondent suggested the Council opens later i.e. shop hours (8am-8pm)¹⁷.

This consultation also highlighted respondents' preferred methods of contacting the Council; 100% of female and 90% of male respondents were able to contact us in their preferred method¹⁸.

In 2006 there was an almost equal split in the gender of people using the Council's e-forms on the website (49% female and 51% male)¹⁹.

This snap shot survey indicates that male and female respondents of the questionnaire were able to access our services in a way which suits their needs. However it does not highlight the potential problems that non-users might face. More work will need to be undertaken to establish if there are any gender equality factors, which prevent some people accessing or receiving our services and, ensure that our information and services are accessible to men and women.

There is evidence of different levels of information and advice currently being made available to help to ensure accessibility for both men and women. For example the benefits service undertakes much work to promote advice and information on the benefits available (through voluntary groups, citizen advice, literature and web content). Many services also highlight that they do not provide a one-size fits all service. The service is provided on the basis of need and, where appropriate, the individual's circumstances are considered. For example the waste collection service is provided to all households in the district but an exemption to the standard service is available i.e. assisted collection. This indicates how the Council currently takes into account the needs of individuals

Objective 1: To continue to improve the accessibility of our information and services for men and women.

The broad range of services we provide is indicative of the number of women and men who are affected by our policies and services and supports the identification of this objective. It will help us to ensure the accessibility of our services for both men and women, and take into account potential differences

¹⁵ On-line services now include the payment of Council Tax and housing rent with a credit or debit card, accessing information about schools and social service care, reporting uncollected waste and damaged roads, finding out about community safety, planning applications and recycling facilities.

¹⁶ Wealden District Council: Survey of Wealden District Council Service Users (29.01.07-27.02.07).

¹⁷ Other suggested improvements can be found at Appendix 5.

¹⁸ The 10% of men who were not able to contact the Council in their preferred method totalled 2 respondents.

¹⁹ Wealden District Council: E-form reports.

in need. This will help us to eliminate discrimination and promote equality between men and women.

2.2 Gender profile of service users

Some of our services are able to determine a gender profile of users. In other service areas, at this time, it is difficult to accurately say if particular groups of women or men do not use or under-use the service.

One area where we do have a gender profile of our service users is Housing and this information indicates no significant gender equality issues. We have information on the tenants in our council housing by gender. This shows that approximately 40% of the main named tenants are male and 60% are female. In approximately 20% of total agreements the tenancy is joint (it is for the applicants to determine the main tenant). As such, these statistics do not indicate a significant difference in the gender of those in receipt of council housing support. This is broadly reflective of the results of the Housing in England 2004/05 survey, which shows that (based on the ONS Labour Force Survey) 44% of the households renting from Council are male households (which includes married, Cohabiting, Single, Widowed, Divorced or separated) and 55% are female²⁰.

We do collect information on the number of households found eligible under the homelessness provisions of the 1996 Housing Act. The first three quarters of 2006 show the following:

Households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need²¹:

2006 (Q1-3)	Couple with dependent children	Lone parent household with dependent children		One person household		All other household groups	Total
		Male Applicant	Female Applicant (includes expectant mothers with no other dependent children)	Male Applicant	Female Applicant		
Total	15%	5%	21%	19%	26%	13%	99%*

In households found to be eligible for assistance the largest difference between gender can be seen in the lone parent household with dependent children; with more female applicants than male being found eligible for assistance. The 2001 Census²² highlights that there are more female lone parent households than male; in Wealden 12% of all lone parent households were male and 88% were female. As such this differential is likely to reflect

²⁰ Housing in England 2004/05, Department of Communities and Local Government October 2006.

²¹ Wealden District Council P1E form

²² Census 2001

<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadDatasetList.do?a=7&b=276954&c=wealden&d=13&q=442427&i=1001x1003&m=0&enc=1&domainId=14>

wider national trends as opposed to a direct gender inequality in the service provision.

Wealden District Council provides its formal leisure facilities in Wealden through Freedom Leisure, who collect information on the gender use of facilities. Of the total leisure centre membership in Wealden during 2005/06, 46% of members were male and 54%, female. This represents an almost equal gender take-up of leisure facilities in Wealden.

It is acknowledged that if we do not collect information on the breakdown of our service users we will not be able to accurately determine if some groups are disadvantaged in any way. This statistical data will also be useful in generally improving the service. In assessing which of our services have the most relevance to gender equality, almost all of our services were identified including: communication, consultation, customer services, complaints, procurement, benefits, planning policy and development, tourism & economic development, housing, crime and disorder reduction partnership, public health development, car park management, public convenience provision and cultural services, emergency planning (Appendix 8.2).

These will be priority areas to seek more information over the three-year period about how the service impacts on men and women. However all service areas will undertake a gender impact assessment within the next 3 years.

The Best Value Performance Indicator triennial survey was undertaken in November 2006 by an external research company. The survey was sent to a randomly selected number of Wealden households. At the time of writing this report the results of this survey are not available. However it is hoped that post-publication of the scheme we will be able to disaggregate the general satisfaction rate and specific service area questions by gender, which will be used as a base line from which to monitor the future progress of the scheme.

Objective 2: To ensure we have sufficient data and information to assess how certain policies and procedures affect women and men

This objective will help us to identify any discrimination in our services and the data collected will feed into our future gender impact assessments.

We will use the information gathered on the effect of our policies and practices on women and men to determine appropriate actions, where necessary, to address any inequality, disadvantage, discrimination or harassment in our services. The following objective is key to meeting the duty.

Objective 3: To ensure that the Council takes positive action to address any inequality, disadvantage, discrimination or harassment in the delivery or use of our services.

2.3 Experience of service users

The table below indicates some of the key findings from our recent service user questionnaire. The responses from men and women reflect no significant difference in experience or perception, with the exception of the percentage of male or female respondents who felt they would have the same chances in accessing our services as anybody else. However where respondents expanded on this, the difference is explained by the fact they felt they have an advantage in accessing our services over others, either because they live near to the offices or are familiar with the council processes.

	% of female respondents	% of male respondents
Service received from Wealden District Council was excellent, very good or good	96%	93%
Respondents were treated fairly and courteously	78%	67%
Respondents felt they would have the same chances in accessing our services as anybody else	75%	95%
Respondents experienced difficulty in contacting us	6%	19%

It must be highlighted that the responses to this survey are relatively small, which affects the margin of error of this data. It is also difficult to determine from the responses to some of the questions if the level of service received is the result of the individuals' gender or other service delivery/ customer service issue. In the future, some of the questions in this survey will be repeated by different service areas as part of the on-going satisfaction survey work, to establish if there are any significant difference in satisfaction rates between men and women or difficulties in experiences.

The survey highlights the importance of this kind of consultation to monitor access to, and satisfaction of our services and in the future could be supplemented by more qualitative work to determine any gender difference in satisfaction.

In order to provide effective service delivery it is important to ensure that our services and practices are effective, efficient and reflect the needs of the community, including the transsexual community. We will investigate working with partners of the East Sussex Equality group to jointly consult with the community including the transsexual community to identify specific service delivery issues and needs.

Objective 4: To ensure that service users are satisfied with the services provided and are treated with dignity and respect.

This objective is important to help us ensure that there is no discrimination or harassment in our service provision for any service user. This includes transsexual people. Service delivery issues will be established through future consultations.

2.4 Consultation/ engaging people

The Wealden People's Panel is a database of Wealden residents who have volunteered to take part in consultations on a wide range of issues. We are currently in the process of reviewing and recruiting members to the panel. At this stage of the review, we know that 52% of members are male and 48% are female, which represent an almost equal split. Through our corporate work on consultation we will investigate actions to ensure representative participation of men and women in consultation exercises, focus groups etc.

In the past we have not consistently asked respondents' gender in line with other equality questions in customer satisfaction surveys, evaluations forms and consultation activity. As a result there is limited data available from individual service areas at this time. In order to determine future gender equality objectives, we will need to have more information at our disposal. In future all customer satisfaction forms, service evaluations and consultations will have a corporate equality/demographic profile to enable trends to be identified and conclusions made.

Objective 5: To ensure women and men from all groups feel equally involved and consulted regardless of gender.

This objective was selected because of the importance of listening to both women and men from all groups to establish issues which have a direct effect upon them. Involvement of men and women will help us identify any discrimination and harassment in our policies or services and promote equality.

2.5 Domestic Violence

The Government defines domestic violence as "Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality."²³

Domestic violence is chronically under-reported, but research shows that:

- One in four women and one in six men will be a victim of domestic violence in their lifetime with women at greater risk of repeat victimisation and serious injury.
- 89% of those suffering four or more incidents are women
- One incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute
- On average, two women a week are killed by a current or former male partner
- Domestic violence accounts for 16 per cent of all violence crime²⁴

Wealden District Council is a member of the Safer Wealden Partnership which is committed to tackling the problem of domestic violence. The Safer Wealden

²³ <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/dv/dv01.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/dv/dv01.htm>

Partnership strategy²⁵ document provides detailed actions which the partnership plan to take during 2005-2008. In summary it is hoped that this will be achieved through:

- Building the confidence of victims to report domestic violence
- Identifying ways to support victims
- Supporting action against prolific offenders in an attempt to alter their offending behaviour.

Objective 6 : To reduce the level of domestic violence in Wealden

This objective has been selected on the basis of national evidence which highlights the problem of domestic violence which disproportionately effects women.

2.6 Incorporating the duty into all areas of our work

Objective 7: To ensure effective implementation of the gender equality duty across all service areas.

This objective was selected with a number of corresponding actions to help ensure that the gender equality duty is part of everything we do, in order for it to become embedded in our policy development and service provision. This objective contributes to the totality of the duty and will impact upon women and men who are directly or indirectly affected by our policies and/or services.

Gender impact assessments: The purpose of a gender impact assessment is to ensure that the Council's decisions and activities do not disadvantage either sex and identify where we can promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

The Council's Equality Impact Assessment process is detailed in Chapter Ten of the Wealden Equality Scheme.

An impact assessment is the process which the Council will go through in order to identify and act on the need to modify policies and practices to have better regard to the need to promote gender equality. This includes all proposed and current activities which the Council carries out.

Once a full impact assessment has taken place the Council will consider changes to reflect the findings of the assessment and any arising actions will be taken forward in the policy proposal and/ or in a future action plan.

The results of our impact assessment will be available through an annual equality progress report.

Equality training: The Council has previously undertaken a number of equality training events for its staff. Under this scheme we will ensure that

²⁵ The Safer Wealden Partnership Strategy 2005-2008:
http://www.wealden.gov.uk/health_and_public_safety/Crime_and_Disorder/SWP2005-8.aspx

gender equality forms part of the equality training to all Councillors and staff. This will help to ensure that Councillors and employees are aware of the gender equality duty, understand how it will affect their work, and have the skills to implement the duty. Councillors and staff will receive information and guidance on the gender equality duty; Heads of Service and the Internal Equality Group will be briefed and this will be filtered down to all staff through team meetings. Information will also be published on the intranet.

Procurement: The gender equality duty applies to those functions which are contracted out as well as those which are carried out directly by the public authority. The Council will ensure that where the gender equality duty applies to functions or services that are contracted out that the contractors have their own, or are able to implement the Council's equality policy. Integrating equality issues into all the Council's procurement processes is currently being undertaken as part of the Council's Corporate Procurement Strategy.

3. The extent to which we achieve gender equality duty in employment policies and procedures

In determining the extent to which the Council promotes equality between male and female staff data was collected on the Council's employment policies and procedures from statistics and evidence gathered by the Council and in consultation with staff.

3.1 Consultation with staff and other stakeholders

All staff were invited to volunteer to be part of an informal staff focus group, held in February 2007. There were 14 staff at the meeting, 9 females and 5 males. There were 6 Employee Consultative Group representatives and all directorates were represented. All equalities issues were discussed at this meeting, including gender. A briefing sheet was produced to shape the agenda for the meeting and allow participants to think in advance about some of the issues. It also describes the Council's existing policies/practices and is attached as Appendix 8.7. The group formed a list of action points which included gender equality objectives. In addition the Internal Equality Group and Employee Consultative Group were consulted on the employment objectives.

The objectives identified in the employment action plan have been developed in light of the evidence gathered and in consultation with staff.

3.2 Information gathered

National research shows that women tend to be disadvantaged in the work force, especially those with young children. Nationally women are lower paid compared to men doing similar jobs, tend to undertake less skilled work in spite of being better qualified than men, and far more women than men wish to work part time. The aim of Wealden's employment policies is to provide equal access to employment for men and women which reflect the gender balance of working people in the local community, to ensure that women are not paid less for doing similar jobs to men and to provide part time and flexible working opportunities to retain staff where operationally possible.

The Human Resources service routinely collects information at the point of application for employment, when staff join and when staff leave. A summary of monitoring data for job applicants is attached as Appendix 8.4 and for existing staff and leavers as Appendix 8.5. In addition one of the council's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) measures women in the top 5% of earners and is attached as Appendix 8.6. The following objective was selected to ensure we continue to monitor the gender and equality profile of applicants, staff and leavers in order to ensure our employment policies and procedures do not discriminate against any group.

Objective 8: To continue to monitor policies and procedures to promote best practice in terms of recruiting, employing, and retaining employees.

In terms of the local community in Wealden, the last census (2001) showed that the district was 48% male and 52% female, however, of males aged 16-74, 55% worked whereas for females aged 16-74 only 45% worked. As can be seen at Appendix 8.4 the gender breakdown for the Council has a slightly higher proportion of working women than in the district as a whole (48% compared to 45%). Appendix 8.4 shows that a slightly higher number of men apply for jobs (53% male to 47% female) but a slightly higher number of females than males are appointed (52% female to 48% male). This would seem to show that there is no discrimination against women at the point of recruitment. The results for BVPI 11a relating to women in senior management as attached at Appendix 8.6 shows a disappointing reduction in the number of women at senior levels in the Council. The current figure of 10% is in contrast to a couple of years ago when the figure was around 25%. The reasons for this are explained in Appendix 8.6 and it should be noted that the figure is due to increase over the next 3 years as the women recently appointed in the grade included in this figure move up the pay scale.

The following objective was selected in response to the BVPI 11a data which indicates the needs to investigate the possible reasons and take positive action. This will help promote equality between men and women and remove any indirect discrimination identified.

Objective 9: To encourage an increase of women employed in senior management

We know that far more women than men wish to work part time (in Wealden District at the last census 22% of women worked part time and only 3.52% of men). In Wealden District Council 19% of females work part-time compared to 2% of males (the other 79% work full-time). The Council appears to do well in facilitating part time work for women who return to work after maternity leave. Since 1999, 27 women have returned to work after maternity leave with 21 of them returning to a part time role who were previously full time. This allows the Council to retain experienced staff.

The Equal Opportunities Commission highlight that over a third of mothers and more than one in ten fathers have given up or turned down a job due to

their caring responsibilities²⁶. By encouraging both men and women to work flexibly we will enable, where possible, both male and female staff to balance work and caring responsibilities. Flexible working includes, job-sharing, staggered hours, term-time hours, annualised hours, compressed hours, home-working and part-time working. It is hoped that flexible working will encourage women in particular to enter and remain in the workforce, which in the longer term will help women be represented at more senior levels. In addition, allowing men to work more flexibly will encourage their partners to work more flexibly and share childcare responsibilities. It is hoped that this objective will promote equality between men and women.

Objective 10: To provide employment policies and a culture which encourages both men and women to work flexibly

The following objective was selected in consultation with the Internal Equality Group which highlighted the importance of ensuring training takes place on a variety of different days so part-time staff and those who work flexibly can access training. This objective is also important in eliminating any potential discrimination in training opportunities.

Objective 11: To ensure that training and development opportunities are open equally to male and female staff

A survey of Wealden staff was carried out in June 2005 and contained a specific question with regard to staff perceptions about advantage and disadvantage. Using the information from the survey a report was presented to the Wealden Employee Consultative Group (ECG) in November 2005. The survey showed that 84% of staff who responded felt neither advantage or disadvantage on account of sex/ gender, whereas 7% felt an advantage and 9%, a disadvantage.

Since this date more work has been done on training and family friendly policies, but it was decided at the recent Focus Group²⁷ that the equalities survey needs to be repeated to see what progress has been made on these issues.

Using a staff survey and other methods (highlighted in the Wealden Equality Scheme Action Plan) we will use the information gathered on the effect of our employment policies and practices on women and men to determine appropriate actions, where necessary, to address any inequality, disadvantage or discrimination. The following objective is key to meeting the duty.

Objective 12: To take positive action to address any inequality, disadvantage or discrimination in employment policies and procedures.

²⁶ Equal Opportunities Commission: Meeting the gender duty in employment

²⁷ Wealden Staff Focus Group February 2007

Objective 13 was selected as a result of the staff focus group meeting. The group felt that the Wealden harassment policy should be widely publicised and that professional respect levels should be brought to staff's attention through training. It is hoped that this objective will help ensure that the Council's employment policies and procedures eliminate any potential harassment.

Objective 13: To ensure effective policy and procedures exist to eliminate harassment.

In consultation with the staff focus group it was felt important that all staff were made aware of the Council's equality duties. The following objective was selected in order to fulfil our obligations under the gender equality duty.

Objective 14: To provide training and development opportunities for Councillors and staff to improve their understanding of the area of equality and diversity.

An equal pay audit was undertaken by an external consultant during February 2007. This process compared the pay and benefits package for all staff on the basis of male/female and looked for any discrepancies such as clusters of low/high paid males/females within grade boundaries. The preliminary findings are that there appears to be no discrepancies between male and female pay for all the jobs evaluated within the Hay evaluated posts. For manual staff, males and females are paid the same rates for the same jobs. More work will have to be undertaken to investigate the comparability of the pay and benefits package between manual staff and officer staff.

The following objective identifies the need to further investigate the findings of the equal pay review.

Objective 15: Investigate comparable jobs further to ensure equal pay across the Council and work towards harmonisation of terms and conditions, where possible.

An equality impact assessment for human resources was completed in early 2006 and can be seen at Appendix 8.8. The results of this assessment summarise many of the points highlighted in this section.

4. Implementing the scheme

We aim to implement the actions identified to gather and use information to meet the duty to promote gender equality. These actions and objectives have been incorporated into the Wealden Equality Scheme Service Delivery and Employment Action Plans.

On an annual basis we will publish a report containing a summary of the steps taken to fulfil the gender equality duty, the results of the information gathered in this time period, and what action we will take as a result. This will form part of an annual review on all equality work and will be reported to Members and published on the Council's website.

5. Concluding comments

The aim of this gender equality chapter is to identify and tackle discrimination, to prevent harassment, and to ensure that the Council's work promotes equality of opportunity and between men and women.

Appendices

GES Appendix 8.1	National research- main findings
GES Appendix 8.2	Assessment of Council functions
GES Appendix 8.3	Results of the service user questionnaire
GES Appendix 8.4	Monitoring data for job applicants
GES Appendix 8.5	Wealden Equality Scheme monitoring data
GES Appendix 8. 6	Performance indicators for Human Resources 2006/7
GES Appendix 8.7	Information and discussion points for focus group
GES Appendix 8.8	Human Resources Equalities Impact Assessment 2005
GES Appendix 8.9	The Wealden People's Panel survey responses