

Accounts Commission Annual Report Disability Equality

December 2007

Background

Equality legislation has developed significantly over the last forty years and in particular over the last five years with a move to a more proactive approach to addressing prejudice and discrimination through the public sector equality duties.

There are three public sector equality duties for race, disability and gender. They place a positive duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and promote equality of opportunity. These duties aim to ensure that public policies, practices and services take into account the different needs of ethnic groups, disabled people and women and men in their development and delivery and make real improvements to people's lives.

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a statutory independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities, police and fire boards in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission has four main responsibilities:

- Securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
- Following up issues of concern identified through the audit
- Carrying out national performance studies to improve economy efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- Issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 40 joint boards (including the police and fire services). Local authorities spend over £14 billion of public funds a year. Together with Audit Scotland and the Auditor General, they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

The Accounts Commission can have between six and 12 members appointed by Scottish Ministers. The Accounts Commission does not employ any staff but Audit Scotland supports the Commission in its work.

Accounts Commission disability equality scheme

We published our first disability equality scheme by 4 December 2006. It sets out our commitment to disability equality and the steps that we have taken and will take to meet our disability equality duties over the period 2006 to 2009.

The development of the scheme was led by Audit Scotland's Diversity Working Group and included the involvement of Audit Scotland staff with a range of disabilities.

Our disability equality scheme is available via [Audit Scotland's website](#).

As part of our disability equality duties we are publishing this annual report containing a summary of:

- the steps we have taken to fulfil our disability equality duty;
- the results of the information gathering we have undertaken, and;
- what we have done with the information gathered.

We worked with Audit Scotland in producing our Disability Equality Scheme and action plan. Similarly, Audit Scotland worked with us in drawing up this annual report of progress, as it has responsibility for implementation of the scheme.

Summary of actions taken

Our main activity on policy during the year has been reviewing progress on the delivery of the best value audit and engaging in a stakeholder consultation process on the development of the next phase of best value auditing. This work is in progress and as part of our considerations we are reviewing how the best value process takes account of diversity and equality issues. This review will conclude in 2008.

We have worked with Audit Scotland in exploring and developing relationships with external organisations to help us understand the impact of our policies and processes. Audit Scotland will carry out impact assessments on our behalf. They will continue to use these relationships and their internal involvement group in carrying out our programme of Impact Assessments using their impact assessment toolkit. Audit Scotland undertook a six-month stock take of activity across our disability, gender and race equality schemes during mid-2007. Audit Scotland then procured additional specialist resource to advice on progress and assist its diversity and equality working group. Following the stock take, work on impact assessments was rescheduled and we now have a revised programme from January 2008.

On our behalf, Audit Scotland continue to benchmark and learn from other organisations such as the Wales Audit Office, National Audit Office and the Audit Commission. For example, sharing information and learning in respect of diversity and equality.

Accounts Commission publications are available through Audit Scotland's website which has been redeveloped to improve accessibility, using best practice standards. Our reports are now available in a range of formats to suit diverse needs. Further details of the improvements to web accessibility can be found in Audit Scotland's annual report on disability equality.

Conclusion

Progress has been made against our action plan, and through our key priority of reviewing the best value audit process we will seek to make further progress next year in our duty to promote equality. We acknowledge that there is still more to be done. We will update our action plan during January 2008, as previously stated within our Disability Equality Scheme action plan. This will be published alongside our scheme and our next Annual Report will be published in December 2008.