



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	27 September 2007
Report from:	Performance & Improvement Manager
Title of Report:	European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life
Agenda Item Number:	17

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the background, purpose, and plan of action for the adoption of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life. This Charter encourages local and regional governments of Europe to ensure that the fundamental right to gender equality, an 'essential value for every democracy', is met.
- 1.2 The adoption of this Charter will help the council to meet its statutory obligation in relation to meeting the Gender Equality Duty, as set out in its Equality Scheme which was approved by Council in March 2007.
- 1.3 A draft European Charter Statement and Action Plan is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.4 Council are recommended to approve the adoption of the attached draft Charter.
- 1.5 A public launch of the adoption is planned to take place during Local Democracy Week. MEP Stephen Hughes has agreed to attend the launch ceremony, which is to be held at the Riverside Pavillion on Monday 15 October 2007.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The action plan to address the Gender Equality Duty, which is now incorporated into the council's all-strand Equality Scheme, was approved by Council in March 2007. Members were invited to make comments at that time.
- 2.2 A report was presented to Council in May 2007, which provided background and information about the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local

Life. Members' comments were invited in the preparation of this final report and Charter Statement.

- 2.3 Officers' comments and contributions have been actively sought during this period also.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 This project, and ultimately the Charter itself, supports Corporate Priority 1 – Customer Excellence.

- 3.2 The council's approved Equality Policy is clear in its commitment towards fair and equitable treatment for both employees and the community on the grounds of gender. No further policy implications apply immediately, however ultimately where gaps are identified in current service provision, there may be a need for policy change.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report. All actions have been taken, or will need to be taken, within existing budgets.

4.2 Legal

This project supports the council's objectives in meeting the statutory Gender Equality Duty 2007.

4.3 Personnel

The Council has a duty to ensure fair and equitable employment practice in terms of gender. How this will be achieved is set out in the approved Corporate Equality Plan 2007 v2.1.

4.4 Other Services

All services will need to ensure that the requirements of the Charter are considered as part of their annual Diversity Impact Assessment review.

4.5 Diversity

This project supports the council's firm commitment to the principles of equality and diversity as set out in the Corporate Equality Plan, and in particular relation to gender equality and multiple discrimination.

4.6 Risk

The project and its progress will be monitored through the Equality and Diversity Working Group, thereby ensuring that all identified actions are addressed fully and within agreed time frames.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific implications of the report on Crime and Disorder.

4.8 Data Quality

There are no data quality issues arising from this report.

4.9 Other implications

Information on the Charter will be made available on the Council's website, which provides read-speak facilities as well as the opportunity to request the information in different languages. Hard copies in various formats, or audio tape, will be made available on request.

5 **BACKGROUND, STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL**

5.1 A new statutory duty for local authorities on gender equality came into force in April 2007. To address this duty, local authorities were required to have a Gender Equality Scheme.

5.2 An gender equality action plan was approved by Council in March, and it was then incorporated into the Council's all-strand Equality Scheme.

5.3 One of the agreed objectives within the gender equality action plan was:

‘The council adopts the European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life’.

5.4 In signing up to the European Charter, the council will ensure that:

a) a clear message is sent to employees, Members, our communities and stakeholders – locally, regionally, nationally and indeed in the wider European community – that the District Council is firmly committed to ensuring that both women and men have equality of opportunity in terms of employment, democratic representation and as service users; and

b) we identify where there are gaps in our current policies, procedures, and service provision relating to gender equality, and identifying the means by which these gaps may be rectified.

- 5.5 Council received a report in May 2007 setting out the proposals for the drafting of a Charter statement and action plan. Comments were invited from Members during the drafting stage.
- 5.6 A European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life Statement and Action Plan has now been drafted, and is attached as Appendix 1.
- 5.7 A public launch of the adoption is planned to take place during Local Democracy Week. MEP Stephen Hughes has agreed to attend the launch ceremony, which is to be held at the Riverside Pavillion on Monday 15 October 2007.
- 5.8 Once approved by Council, the Charter Statement and Action Plan will be posted on the Council's website.

6 MONITORING

- 6.1 Implementation of this project and subsequent action plan will be monitored by the Equality and Diversity Working Group. Progress will be reported to Executive, as part of the quarterly performance management report.
- 6.2 Progress on the implementation of the Charter will be reported in the Equality and Diversity Annual Report (which is integral to the council's Corporate Plan).

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that Council approves formal adoption of the attached draft European Charter for Women and Men in Local Life.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 Corporate Equality Plan 2007 v 2.1 (incorporating the Equality Scheme)

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14 September 2007

Version 1.0

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