SPCB Response to the Findings of the Staff Equality Audit 2007

Introduction

1. Every two years the SPCB has committed to undertaking an equality audit to find out about the experiences of staff working in the Parliament, the perceptions of its equality and employment policies and the extent to which they are being implemented to achieve equality of opportunity. We have now published the third audit report along with this paper which sets out our response to the main findings identified in the report.

2. The audit is an essential part of the SPCB’s Equality Framework which monitors the effectiveness and implementation of our equality policies. It seeks to inform how we establish our policies to promote equality in employment and future priorities for equality. The audit has been helpful in identifying areas where we can develop or which require further improvements to be made.

Main Strengths

3. Overall the findings of the report were positive which identified a number of key strengths in the delivery of our policies and practices. The report shows that:

- 96.1% of staff who responded said they would recommend us as an equal opportunities employer
- 84.7% of staff who responded considered that the SPCB is doing all it can to implement its equal opportunity policies
- 75.3% of staff who responded said there had been significant progress made in implementing the SPCB equal opportunities policies
- 90.7% of staff who responded said they were generally able to balance their work and home life
- There is a very good gender balance spread across the organisation

4. These findings suggest that the SPCB is regarded as a good employer and that the majority of staff continue to be satisfied with our employment practices and policies. There is also a level of awareness that significant progress is being made in the implementation of equal opportunities.

5. As an organisation we hope to build even further on this and recognise that the audit helps to determine our future priorities in the development of our equal opportunity policies. We also want to ensure that staff are treated fairly and with dignity and respect.
6. The following information sets out our response and what actions will be taken to ensure that any areas for further improvement raised by staff are being properly addressed.

Audit Finding

7. The audit reveals that in some areas of employment disabled people feel less content than non disabled staff in their experience of accessing SPCB employment policies and practices.

Our Response

8. This has been identified through the work of the Disability Equality Scheme and we are currently working towards improving our employment practices for disabled people. Disability issues are also being considered in the current review of employment policies under the HR Realignment process.

9. Training and guidance will be provided to line managers on meeting the needs of their disabled staff. They must also be made aware of our legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.

10. Strategy and Development Office and the Personnel Office are working closely together to improve the reasonable adjustments process for staff which became apparent from the work of the Disability Equality Scheme.

Audit Finding

11. The audit reveals a higher number of staff consider themselves to have a disability compared to the figures recorded by the Personnel office. 7.8% of staff identified themselves as disabled compared to 3.3%, the figure held by the Personnel Office.

Our Response

12. The Personnel Office has agreed to issue a notice to all staff asking if they consider themselves to be disabled. As the employer it is important that we are providing the necessary adjustments for staff in order to carry out their job and we can only do this if we know which of our staff are disabled.

Audit Finding

13. Since the last audit there has been a slight increase in the number of staff who feel they have been harassed or bullied while working at the Parliament.
Our Response

14. The SPCB will continue to take active steps to prevent harassment and bullying in the Parliament. In order to ensure that we continue to reduce and indeed meet our aim of preventing any further harassment or bullying the following action will be taken:

- We will continue to monitor the number of harassment and bullying cases under the dignity at work policy reporting this to the Directors Group
- We are widening the spread of dignity at work contacts who are specially trained to deal with dignity at work issues.
- The role of the contacts is being developed to enable line managers to seek advice on harassment and bullying issues.
- The policy has recently been reviewed and a number of improvements are being made to the procedures and process.
- The employee assistance programme will be included in the revised dignity at work policy as an additional support mechanism for staff.
- In the summer of 2008, all staff will be required to attend a refresher equalities training course. The dignity at work policy will be covered in the programme.

Audit Finding

15. There has been a slight increase in the number of staff who feel they did not receive sufficient training.

Our Response

16. The report illustrates that this finding bears no relation to anyone’s particular personal characteristics and the main causes were related to people’s workloads, time and commitments. However, it is important to recognise this issue and that action is taken to ensure that staff can participate in training. In response to this finding there are a range of actions we will take:

- Take up and attendance at training events across the organisation is currently being monitored by the Training & Development Team and the results are reported to the Senior Management Team on a monthly basis. We will continue this practice to monitor training uptake.
- We are due to launch a new corporate training programme and staff will be encouraged to sign up to courses.
• Personal development plans are monitored to check whether training needs are being met and whether these are at a local or corporate level

• The training and development team recognise the need for greater marketing of courses and are taking steps to improve this

Audit Finding

17. There is a lack of awareness and understanding about the role of the dignity at work contacts.

Our Response

18. The dignity at work contacts are valuable assets to the organisation who have been a good source of advice and support for staff who feel they have been harassed or bullied. We regularly monitor the number of cases which are handled by the contacts which shows that the service is being used. It is important that staff feel confident using the service which is why we intend to take the following action:

• We have recently reviewed the dignity at work policy and recognise a refresh of the network is needed

• We will recruit new contacts that will be specially trained to deal with harassment and bullying issues. The network will have a spread of grades from across the organisation as well as a good gender balance.

• Their role is to be developed further where line managers will be able to seek advice on harassment and bullying issues

• We will advertise the new service through various communication channels available to staff.

Audit Finding

19. The audit shows that 1.8% of staff are from a black and minority ethnic background which continues to be an underrepresented group in the organisation.

Our Response

20. The SPCB will take further action to proactively target black and minority ethnic communities:

• We are currently developing a proposal for a positive action programme which includes organising a careers open day and placements within offices across the organisation.
We will continue to advertise our jobs to black and minority ethnic organisations.

The Personnel Office will continue to attend 2 job fairs annually which are specifically targeted at black and minority ethnic communities.

Recruitment and Selection training will be provided to all appointing boards. Equalities issues have been integrated throughout the course.

As part of the recruitment and selection review, Personnel Office will continue to check the application and success rates of all applicants by ethnic origin. This will help us to identify whether applications are being made by black and minority ethnic communities or whether there any issues with the process itself.

Audit Finding

21. There were more women than men who applied for promotion posts but they were less successful in being appointed.

Our Response

22. We have recently published our gender equality scheme which includes an action plan to promote gender equality. Applications and appointments for promotion will be monitored through this scheme.