



Mid Suffolk District Council

**Gender Equality Scheme
March 2007 to March 2010**

**Version 1
March 2007**

**For further information please contact the Policy Team on
01449 724851**

**This scheme is available in large print, Braille or other
languages upon request.**

Contents

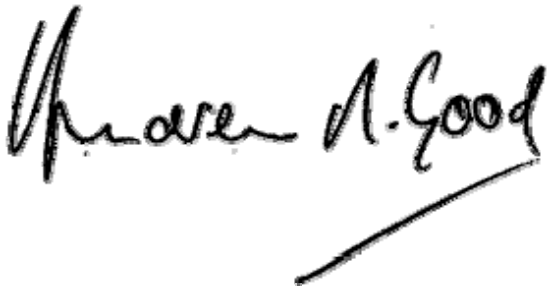
| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword by the Leader and Chief Executive..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Policy..... | 5 |
| Involvement on development of the GES..... | 6 |
| Gender Equality Focus Groups..... | 6 |
| Action Plan..... | 7 |
| Impact Assessments..... | 7 |
| Employment..... | 8 |
| Procurement..... | 8 |
| Partnerships..... | 8 |
| Single Sex Services..... | 9 |
| Arrangements for gathering information..... | 9 |
| Monitoring progress against annual reports..... | 9 |
| Appendix 1 - Gender Equality Action Plan..... | 10 |

Foreword by Leader and Chief Executive

Mid Suffolk District Council, as a democratically elected body representative of all the people who live and work in Mid Suffolk, is conscious of the importance of gender equality in the discharging of its functions and in the civic leadership it provides.

The Council is fully committed to fulfilling its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2006, and this Gender Equality Scheme (GES) sets out how it proposes to do so. The arrangements established by the Council within the Scheme will be proportionate to the size of the relevant part of the Council, the nature of the policies concerned and the potential impact on the public.

The council will ensure that all Elected Members and employees of the Council are aware of our statutory duty and will take the lead in the Council to ensure its effective implementation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew A. Good". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Andrew Good

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Passmore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Tim Passmore

1. Introduction

Mid Suffolk District Council is committed to promoting Diversity within the community and workforce at every level, as the council believes this contributes to Community Cohesion and a safer more economically prosperous district. The potential of our district should not be limited by prejudice or discrimination and diversity should be valued and promoted.

The Equalities Act 2006 imposed duties on local authorities performing public functions in relation to sex discrimination and it requires us to promote gender equality and eliminate sex discrimination. As a local authority, we are required to demonstrate that we treat men and women fairly. The duty also applies to private or voluntary organisations carrying out functions or providing services on behalf of the council.

Women and men experience gender inequality on a variety of levels within society and differing needs between the genders have been historically overlooked when policy or strategic decisions are made within public life. The legislation and schemes being produced across the country aim to redress the balance.

Accordingly, Mid Suffolk has produced a Gender Equality Scheme in partnership with other local authorities and public bodies, which consists of two main parts.

The first part is the council's policy on and beliefs on Gender Equality. The second part is the council's scheme, which establishes why the council has a Gender Equality Scheme and what its purpose is. It also clarifies the council's duties.

Appendix 1 contains the action plan of activity for Mid Suffolk for the coming three years.

Appendix 2 contains a gender analysis of Mid Suffolk District Council and the county of Suffolk.

2. Policy

2.1 The District Council believes that;

- Men and Women should be treated fairly and they should be able to access the same services and have the same opportunities as each other
- The council should support responsive and accessible services for all those who live, work and visit the district
- It should seek to challenge and eradicate sex discrimination
- It should embrace diversity and equal treatment of our residents and see this as a strength in our community
- It should seek to ensure the workforce represents the community fairly and is representative of the population
- It should have exemplary employment practices and service provision, taking full account of gender differences and gender needs

2.2 The District Council acknowledges that between the genders, there is some under representation at certain levels of the workforce. It will therefore engage and consult with both genders to;

- Ensure that the views and concerns of both genders are considered when policies are altered and new working practices are proposed
- Continually monitor its services, employment practices and flexible working options
- Monitor progress on working practices, organisational attitudes and real life experiences of the genders
- Ensure the council stays focused and transparent in its actions towards gender equality

3. Promoting opportunities and accessibility

The District Council will ensure that its services and employment opportunities are accessible to both genders by;

- Ensuring that both genders have equal access to service and employment opportunities across the organisation
- Taking positive action to ensure that more women have an opportunity to return to work after maternity leave
- Tackling stereotyping relating to types of jobs or hours worked in the Council
- Support paternity leave and parental leave to ensure that family responsibilities are not seen as a single gender issue
- Ensuring that all persons with caring responsibilities, male or female are facilitated to undertake those responsibilities whether they be an employee or service user
- Ensuring that all allocations of local authority rented property are considered on the basis of need and conduct within the tenancy conditions, not gender

- Ensuring that resources allocated to issues promoting the rights and opportunities for each gender are equal and fair
- Working effectively with statutory and other community partners to ensure that issues of gender are fully considered when working on community issues in the district and joint projects
- Continuing the Single status harmonisation process to review any gender pay difference.

4. Accountability

To ensure full accountability for this policy;

- The executive member with the lead for equalities issues will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the policy and for recommending changes and improvements necessary to members.
- The Chief Executive will hold all portfolio directors responsible for taking steps to ensure this policy is promoted and understood by council employees.

5. Involvement in the development of the GES

The Equality Act 2006 requires that we involve stakeholders and employees in the development of this GES. This involvement is essential because we need to know what is important to people so that we can prioritise our actions for improvement. We have found it difficult to identify men's groups for consultation.

Mid Suffolk District Council worked in partnership with other local authorities in Suffolk, the Police and Customer Service Direct to share consultation information. A joint consultation within all partner organisations is planned to take place annually. All partners within the scheme also conducted focus groups with staff asking themed questions. This information will be shared as part of the three-year action plan to fully inform us about gender equality issues within our organisations. This is discussed within the action plan.

6. Gender Equality Focus Groups

In March 2007, two Gender Equality focus groups were held at council offices with staff from all services invited to take part. Each group lasted for 75 minutes and both groups were asked a series of questions about policies, treatment by the organisation, pay and conditions, promotion, facilities and perceptions. The groups varied in their responses but all points were recorded to form part of the three-year action plan. Membership of the group was as varied as possible and evenly split between genders. There were also representatives from all levels of the organisation with a variety of working hours/contracts between them.

7. Action Plan

The Action Plan contained in Appendix 1 sets out the key actions which we will take in order to promote gender equality over the next three years. The Action Plan will be reviewed and further actions may be added as circumstances change. In identifying these actions we have taken into account the needs of people who were involved in the development of this GES and our statutory duties.

Where possible we have identified actions that will have the most impact on service users. We recognise that we have more work to do in order to gather further information as to whether or not there is evidence of major disadvantage being suffered by a particular group of service users or employees.

8. Impact assessments

We already have a legal requirement to consider the impact of some aspects of our work on race and disability equality. The Equality Act 2006 introduces a legal requirement to consider the impact on gender equality.

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is to improve our work by making sure we do not discriminate and that, where possible, we promote equality. It is a way to make sure that we think carefully about the likely impact of our work on people in Mid Suffolk and take action to improve strategies, policies and projects, where appropriate.

Our EIA focuses on assessing and recording the likely impact on equalities (including gender equality) of a strategy, policy or project. There is a focus on assessing the impact on certain groups of people known as equality target groups. It involves anticipating the consequences of strategies, policies and projects on these groups and making sure that, as far as possible, any negative consequences are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised. The Equality Impact Assessment is carried out by completing a form and submitting this to the policy team for publication on our intranet service INFOWEB. The first section of the form is used for a preliminary 'screening' of the strategy, policy or project to see if further work is needed. The second section is used where more detailed assessment is needed.

The majority of new or amended policies and procedures that are considered by our committees are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. Services are responsible for identifying which areas of their work require an Equality Impact Assessment.

9. Employment

Our Human Resources section already holds voluntarily provided data relating to gender, which is used for monitoring purposes. Annual monitoring takes place to make sure that our employment policies are not discriminatory on grounds of gender. We are developing Equal Pay audits with our Customer Service Direct partners and the results of these will form part of our annually reviewed action plan. We will take steps to address any equal pay gaps based on gender.

Equality Impact Assessments are carried out on all new Human Resources policies. We will consult with staff to assess what impact our Human Resources policies have on different groups, for example, single parents, maternity returners, non-resident mothers and fathers and part time employees.

We have a flexible working policy which provides all staff with the opportunity to request flexible working. We are implementing a flexible working strategy that will provide greater opportunities for staff to work flexibly. We will monitor this policy to ensure that it is available in an appropriate way to all staff.

We are developing a culture of zero tolerance of bullying and harassment and are in the process of reviewing all these policies with our human resources partner Customer Service Direct.

10. Procurement

The gender equality duty applies to those functions that are carried out through procurement as well as those that are carried out directly by us. Where a contractor is carrying out a public function on our behalf the legal liability for the gender duty in relation to that function remains with us.

The weight given to gender equality should be proportionate to its relevance to a particular procurement. For example, gender equality issues when buying office equipment are likely to be relatively low but relatively high for taking on contract staff.

11. Partnerships

Mid Suffolk District Council has signed up to the Suffolk Compact, a series of best practice guides to providing services, conducting consultation and volunteering. Within them, they prohibit discrimination and these documents apply directly to all community groups that we fund.

12. Single-sex services

Importantly, compliance with the Equality Act does not rule out the provision of services aimed specifically at male, female or transgender customers. Where compliance with the gender duty requires that it is necessary or appropriate to develop a policy or provide a service in a different way for men and women so that equality of outcomes can be achieved i.e. on a single-sex basis, we will do so provided that such action complies with the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

13. Arrangements for gathering information: services and functions

We recognise that we have limited information and evidence about the extent to which our services and functions take account of gender. We recognise that we have further work to do in this area and it will take time to build up a body of evidence against which we can monitor progress. The results of the consultation mentioned above are just a starting point. We recognise the need to gather information and evidence about the effects of our services on gender equality, as well as the views of our users and non-users. We will use the following methods to gather information:

- equality impact assessments;
- our own customer and resident surveys;
- formal user satisfaction surveys required by the government;
- staff and councilor surveys
- focus groups for employees;
- analysis of complaints;
- service/policy specific monitoring and consultation; and
- locality networks.

14. Monitoring progress and annual progress reports

Progress made against the Action Plan (Appendix 1) will be reviewed annually by the Executive Committee. Our Policy Team will implement and monitor the progress of the Action Plan at regular intervals with key staff. All reports will be published on our website.

We are required to revise the Scheme at least once every three years. A revised Scheme will therefore be published by April 2010 or earlier in order to coincide with the review of our existing equalities schemes. We are committed to building on the lessons from the implementation of this Scheme as well any evidence we will have gathered.

Appendix 1

Gender Equality Action plan

Mid Suffolk will:

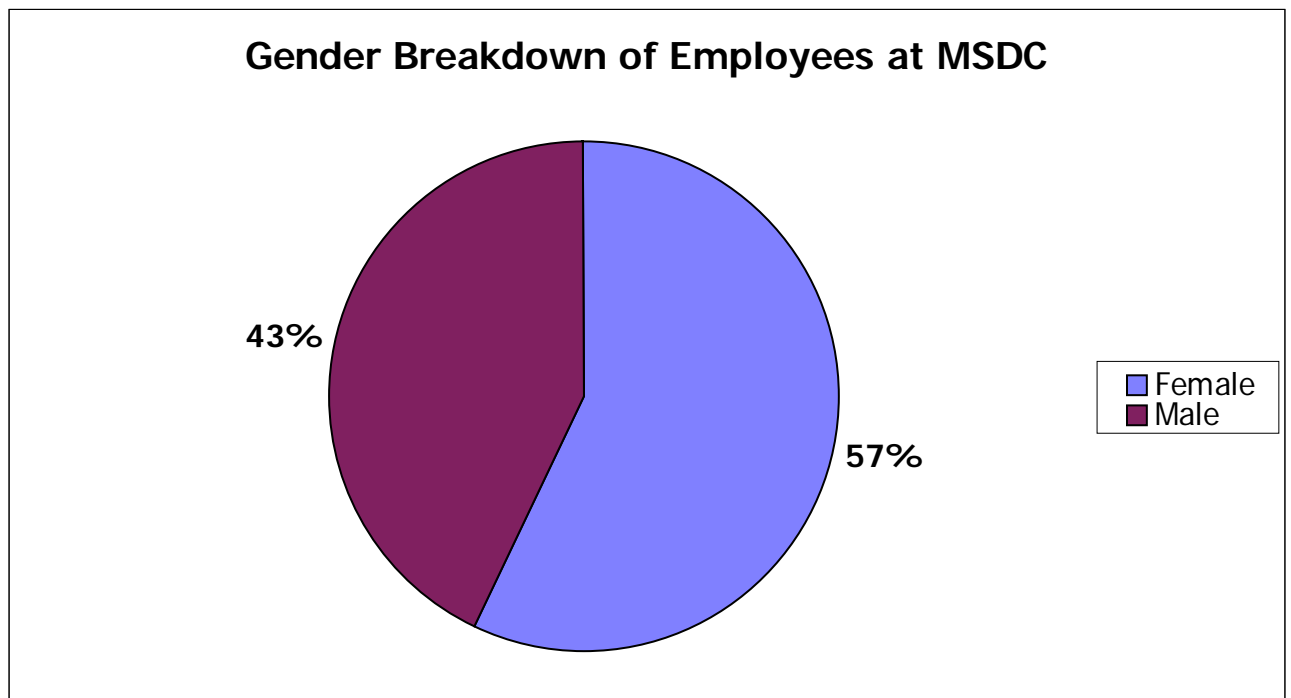
- 1) Conduct Equality Impact Assessments on all policies within Mid Suffolk to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly unfairly disadvantage either gender or transgendered people.
- 2) Train all members in Gender, Equality and Diversity issues after the May 2007 local elections.
- 3) Work with CSD to carry out the equal pay audits to ensure that any differences are addressed.
- 4) Set up an advisory group to represent the views of staff on gender equality.
- 5) Monitor flexible working opportunities and ensure they are available to all staff.
- 6) Be clearer in job advertisements about hours required, responsibilities of the job and what this will entail – e.g. some weekends, evening meetings, etc.
- 7) Ensure that managers are fully aware of corporate maternity and paternity policies, and apply these effectively.
- 8) Ensure that there is best practice within the HR remit to look after the needs of transgendered staff.
- 9) Look at tailoring our services better to best suit both genders.

Appendix 2

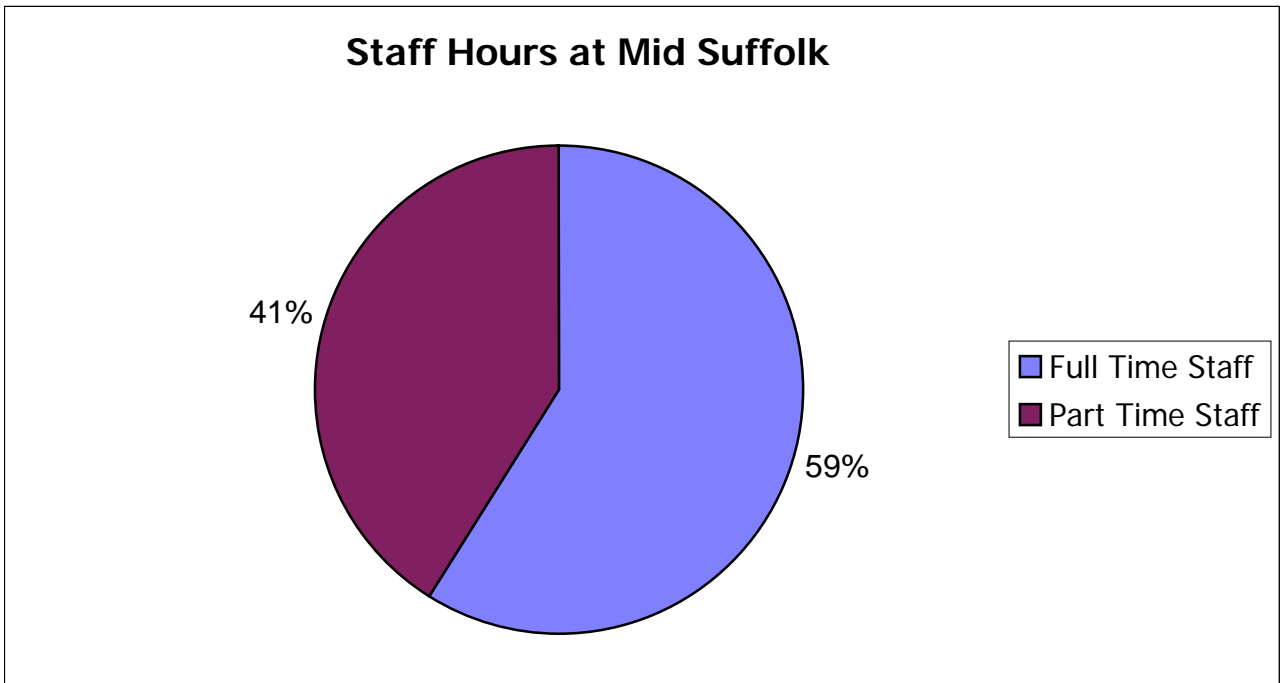
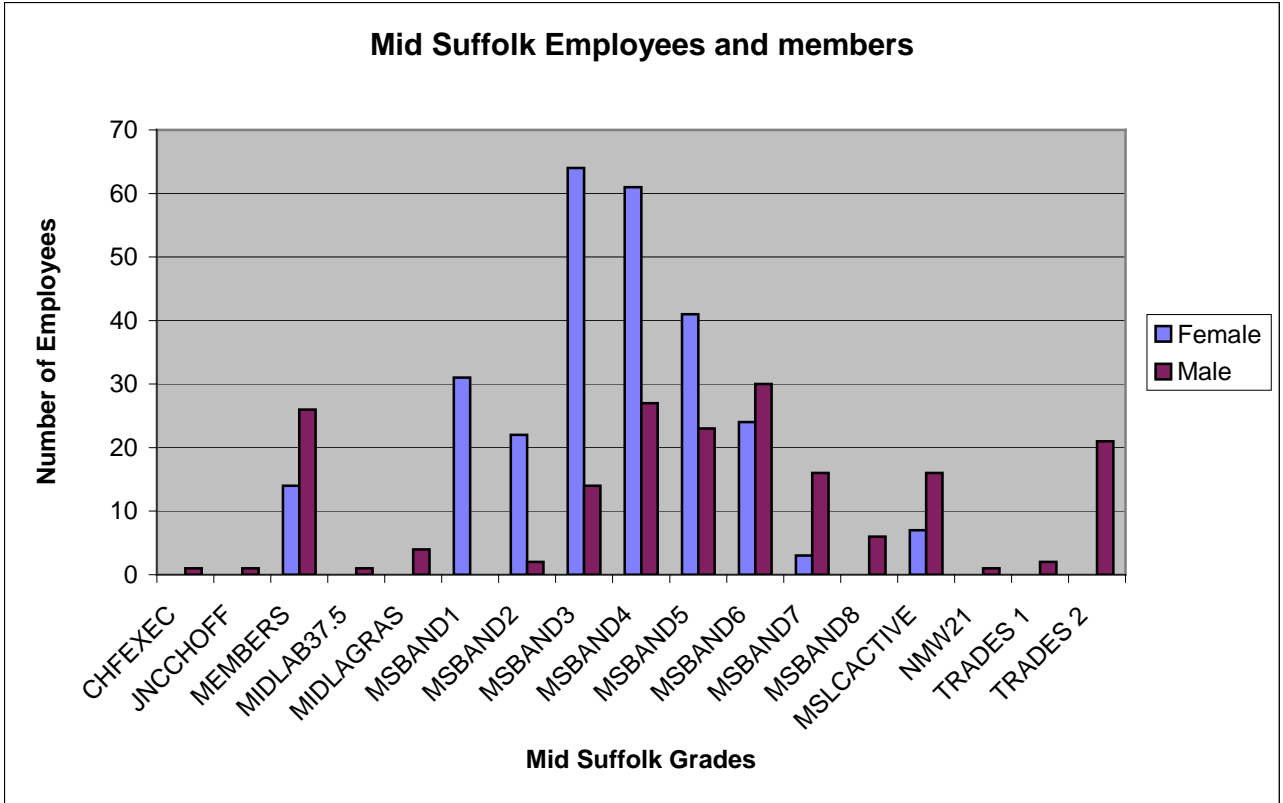
Background gender analysis and statistical information

Mid Suffolk District Council staff gender analysis (Figures March 2007)

Mid Suffolk District Council have been through two restructures in the last nine years and from these, a major overhaul of staff, roles and working styles took place. Since then, the staff profile has enhanced opportunities for part time workers. The gender breakdown of employees at Mid Suffolk is 57% female staff and 43% male staff.

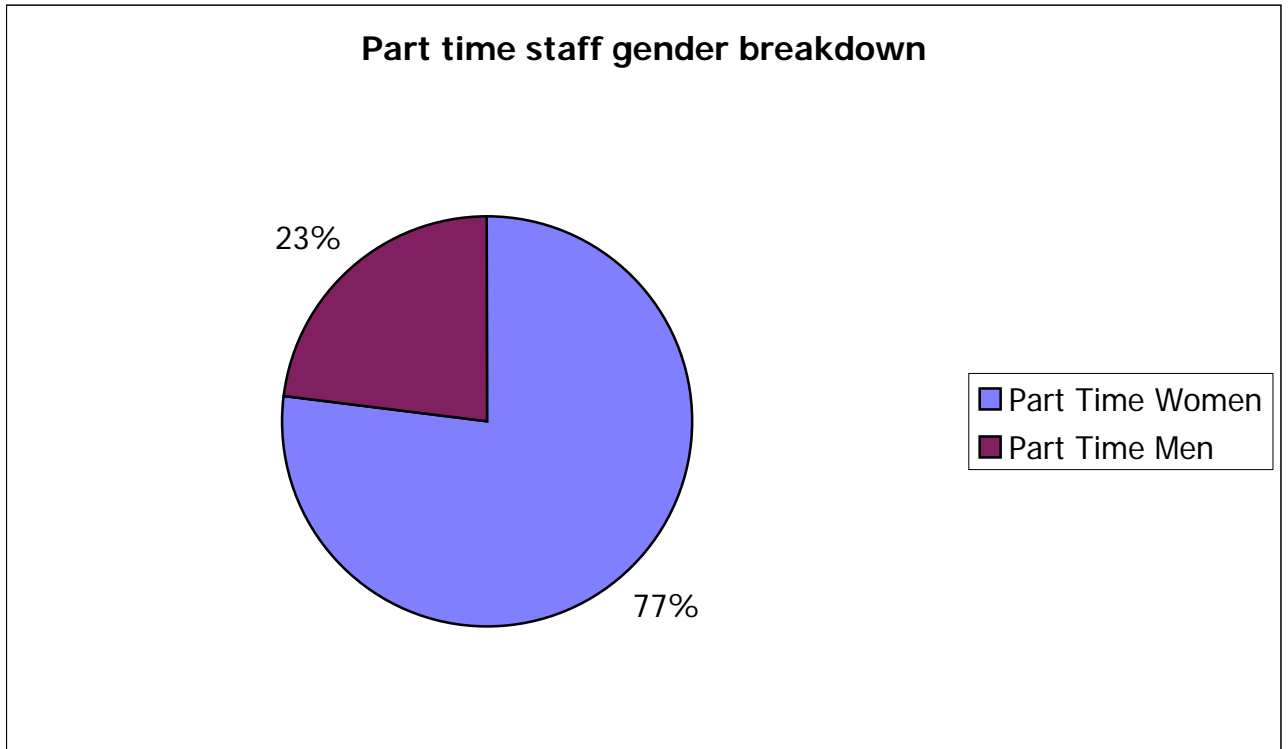


At the higher officer levels of the organisation, there are more females than males at Grade 5 and only six fewer females at Grade 6. Since the 2007 election, the gender imbalance has altered to include 10% more female members than before. However females are not currently highly represented at senior management. Reasons for this are being examined within staff focus groups and more are planned for the next three years to facilitate the Mid Suffolk Gender Equality Action Plan.



Of the staff, 41% of workers work reduced hours, the majority of these being women. However, just under one third of Mid Suffolk part time workers are

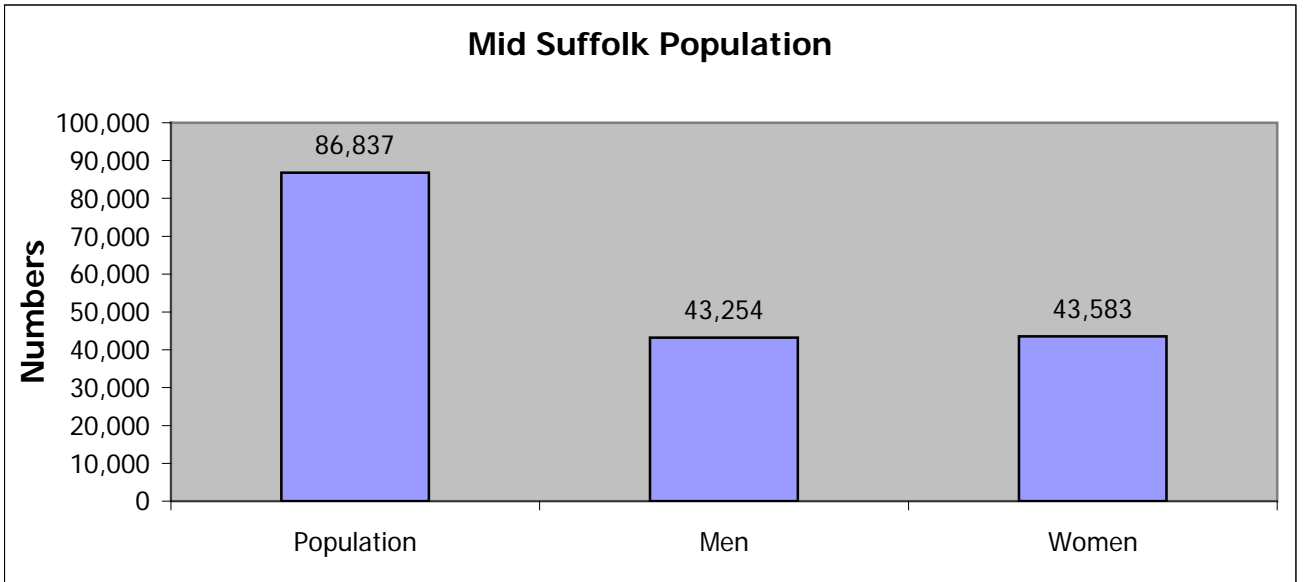
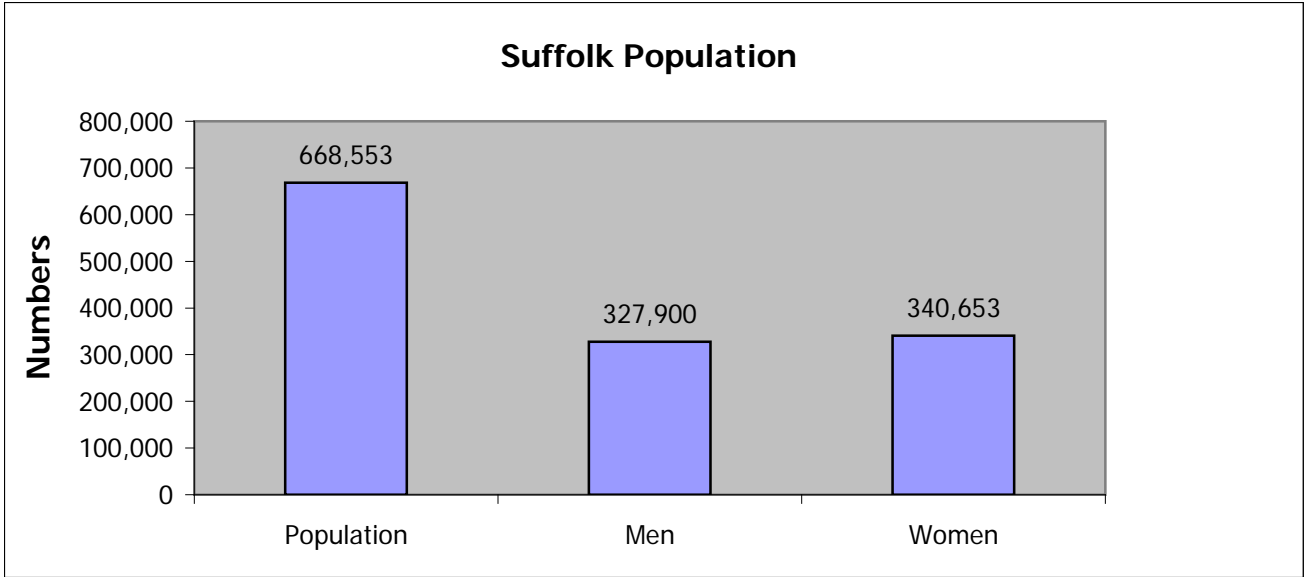
male. Women in part time positions generally occupy the more senior roles with a noticeable number in grade five and six posts. Part time male workers are in the majority relief staff without permanent contracts or fall into grades one to four.



Suffolk and Mid Suffolk gender analysis

In Suffolk at the 2001 census, there were 668,553 people living in the county, which consisted of 327,900 men and 340,653 women. Although across the county as a whole, there are considerably more women than men, in Mid Suffolk there was very little difference between the genders.

Overleaf are two charts that illustrate the differences.



Accordingly, our staff body reflects Suffolk, as there are more females than males working for the council.

Policy Healthcheck Checklist

| Corporate Standards | Checked | Considerations |
|----------------------------|----------------|--|
| Equality and Diversity EIA | Yes | Considered |
| Safeguarding Children | Yes | If children involved, follow CYP procedure |
| Corporate Plan | Yes | 6.1, 6.2, 8.1 |
| Community Strategy | Yes | Link to 'Just and Equal' society |
| Audit trail | Yes | Complete and sufficient |
| Training implications | Yes | Yes – for inductees |
| Health and Safety | No | |
| E-Government | Yes | Publication on InfoWeb |
| CSD Partnership aware | Yes | CSD aware/Partnership production |
| Legal | Yes | Approved |

Review date: May 2010

Review cycle: 3 yearly

Policy Panel: Executive Committee

Reviewed by: Legal Services

Quality Control: Policy Team

E-Government Suggestion: Link on Changing Gear to the following policies that relate to it –

- Comprehensive Equality Scheme
- Disability Equality Scheme
- HR policies on service, code of conduct, bullying, maternity, paternity and absence.