

**EQUALITY COMMISSION
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Public Authorities Progress Report
2002-2003**

Newry and Mourne District Council

Introduction

This report covers the period from 1 April 2002 to the 31 March 2003 and has been submitted to the Equality Commission further to approval by Newry and Mourne District Council at its Equality Committee at their meeting on 8 July 2003.

This report follows the guidance set out by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on assessing the extent to which progress has been made. The ECNI's guidance is set out in boxed sections. The report contains eleven sections encompassing important developments in the effective implementation of Newry and Mourne District Council's Section 75 duties.

Name of Public Authority

Newry and Mourne District Council

Equality Officer name and contact details

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Section 1: Preparation of Equality Scheme

- *Applies only to organisations whose scheme was not approved by the Commission prior to 1 April 2002)*
- *Outline measures taken during the year to develop the authority’s draft Equality Scheme, including consultation and details of the authority’s formal consideration of the draft Equality Scheme, before submission for final approval to the Commission.*
- *Highlight any other areas of the scheme implemented prior to approval of the scheme.*

<i>Prompt:</i>	<i>Have affected groups, staff, service users and groups representing the nine Section 75 categories been consulted about the organisation’s draft scheme.</i>
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Section 1

N/A – Newry and Mourne District Council’s Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on 27 July 2001.

Section 2: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Equality Duties

- *Outline evidence of progress made in developing equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans. This may include performance information and targets for 2003-2004.*
- *Outline steps to work with other public authorities in progressing the duties.*
- *Outline any details of partnership work developed with the voluntary and/or community sector as a consequence of Section 75 work? Comment on whether these partnerships have proved beneficial?*
- *Indicate if S75 is a standard agenda item for Board and/or Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis.*
- *Provide details of steps to progress the Good Relations duty such as undertaking a good relations audit, developing a strategy or providing training.*
- *Outline any factors that enhance or impede the process of Strategic Implementation.*

<i>Prompt:</i>	<i>Have the Board and Senior Officers reviewed the authority’s progress</i>
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	<p><i>report?</i></p> <p><i>Has responsibility for equality been agreed and clearly designated within the authority?</i></p> <p><i>Has a clearly defined organisational structure with resources for implementation of the duties and assessment of policies been established?</i></p> <p><i>Are equality objectives built into the job descriptions and performance targets of relevant staff, and are these reflected in the appraisal process?</i></p> <p><i>Is the authority on course for completing its 5-year timetable for implementation of its scheme? If not, which areas of implementation are proving most difficult?</i></p>
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Bullet 1

A number of different methods of developing equality and good relations objectives were initiated:

- The establishment of the Equality Unit, encompassing the functions of equality, community relations, best value, public relations and communications, within Newry and Mourne District Council has raised the profile of equality and good relations.
- The REDI initiative with its Declaration of Principles has moved into a new phase and established a Good Relations Group. It has a remit to encourage positive civic leadership, good relations and improved service delivery through developing sustainable relationships based upon the need for equity, respect for diversity and recognising the interdependent nature of the society in which we live.
- On reviewing the integration of equality into the Best Value review framework, equality objectives have been mainstreamed into the corporate structure in areas such as Best Value Service Reviews and the Council’s Voluntary Contribution Application process.

Bullet 2

- The Council continued to liaise with other public authorities to progress the duties. Newry and Mourne District Council’s Equality Officer is a member of the Equality Officers Network Group which shares best practice and gives

advice and support to Officers from other public authorities in their Equality Impact Assessment process and the development and screening of new policies.

Bullet 3

- The “Consulting on Consultation” Conference was aimed at encouraging the public sector to think ‘outside the box’, and raised awareness of the various participative and inclusive consultative techniques which can be employed.
- The “Building Community Relations” course delivered in conjunction with Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education.
- Prejudice awareness training delivered for and in conjunction with the Princes Trust volunteer programme.
- Membership of Opportunity Now and Employees Forum on Disability.
- Newry and Mourne District Council’s Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) sits on the Board of Opportunity Now NI which aims to progress equality in the workplace.
- Ongoing partnership working with Counteract and Future Ways.
- Implementation of the Council’s Ulster Scots Strategy.

Bullet 4

- The work of the Equality Unit is conveyed to management team at their monthly meetings.
- The Equality Committee is a full Council Meeting which is held monthly.

Bullet 5

- Newry and Mourne District Council are committed to progressing the good relations duty, and the Equality Unit produces a strategic plan on a yearly basis. In addition, the Community Relations Section, containing the Community Relations Officer and Community Relations Assistant, is situated within the Equality Unit, and produces an annual strategic plan which is approved both by Newry and Mourne District Council and the Community Relations Unit, OFMDFM. The Community Relations Section has identified the need for a Community Relations audit to identify the issues and priorities for community relations in the Newry and Mourne area.

- The REDI initiative¹ has established a Good Relations Group whose membership is the Equality Unit, Management Team, Elected Members and employees. It has a remit to enable positive civic leadership, good relations and improved service delivery through developing sustainable relationships based upon the need for equity, respect for diversity and recognising the interdependent nature of the society in which we live.
- A new voluntary contributions process has been established, and all applications for financial assistance are equality screened to ensure the Council has a targeted and focused funding programme. This has assisted in mainstreaming equality into decision-making and service delivery.
- Newry and Mourne District Council have been actively committed to exploring good relations issues and developing innovative and practical solutions to issues of division. The Council has pioneered many initiatives which have an internal and external impact such as:
 - Community Relations training seminars for Elected Members
 - Administering and facilitating community dialogue through the Newry Good Relations Forum which brings together key influencers from within the unionist, nationalist and republican community.
 - Lunchtime seminars for employees exploring diversity issues such as Travellers, and sport and politics.
 - Initial diversity training for all employees.
 - The ongoing implementation of the Dignity at Work policy.
 - REDI Training

Bullet 6

Factors, which have impacted upon strategic implementation during 2002-2003, have included:

- The Equality Officer deputised for the Assistant Director of Administration (Personnel) between October 2002 to February 2003, which impeded the process of strategic implementation.
- The movement of the Equality Officer to a new post, and the subsequent recruitment process temporarily affected continuity of strategic implementation.

¹ Relationships in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence

- Consultation fatigue experienced by consultees.
- However, the Council is on course to complete the 5-year timetable of implementation of its scheme.

Section 3: Screening & Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Timetable

3a)

- *If a Screening Report has not yet been submitted to the Commission please advise us on the current position with regard to producing this report and forwarding to the Commission.*

3b)

- *If a Screening Report and EQIA Timetable has previously been submitted to the Commission please provide an update detailing -*
 - *those policies that were subject to Equality Impact Assessment during 2002-2003 (An indicative matrix is included in Appendix 1)*
 - *those policies screened and not subject for assessment with justification for their non inclusion.*
 - *the timetable for Equality Impact Assessments in 2003-2004.*
- *(If relevant) list any proposals for legislation for which an assessment for the implications for the Section 75 duties was undertaken.*
- *Outline any other factors that enhance or impede the process of policy screening or EQIA.*
- *Outline how the authority, following screening of new policies, informs consultees of the outcomes from such screening exercises.*

Prompt:	<p><i>Does the authority require each department/directorate to identify how its policies impact on equality of opportunity and can promote good relations?</i></p> <p><i>Has the authority involved consultees in screening of new policies? If so how?</i></p> <p><i>Has the authority informed consultees of the outcomes from screening of new policies? If so, how?</i></p>
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3a)

Bullet 1

N/A

3b)

Bullet 1

EQIA Timetable Reporting Matrices – period to end March 2003

Existing policies – included in initial EQIA timetable

Title of existing policy EQIA's to be completed pre-March 2003	Stage (as per Steps 1-7 of EQIA Process)	If joint-EQIA please state partner authorities	If EQIA completed is amended policy now being implemented	If EQIA completed is amended were adjustments to policy a result of <u>A</u> ssessments of adverse impact / feedback from <u>C</u> onsultation, or <u>B</u> oth. Please enter A, C or Both
Communication	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bilingualism Policy	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Accommodation Policy – St Christopher's Park	Since committing to this timetable, circumstances have changed and this site has now been closed. Therefore the Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.			

EQIA time-table for 2003-2004

Title of EQIA's due to be commenced during April 2003 – March 2004	Existing or New Policy? Please enter E or N below.	If joint-EQIA please state partner authorities	Expected completion date of EQIA
Registration	E	N/A	March 2004
Procurement	E	N/A	March 2004
IT	E	N/A	March 2004
Grants	E	N/A	March 2004

Bullet 2

- Initiatives leading to good practice reviews or changes in policy and practise include:
 - Access audit and developed programme of work, in consultation with a wide range of people with a disability.
 - Ongoing Single Status meetings provide a proactive approach to address Single Status issues for local government employees.
- Dignity at Work Policy and harassment complaints procedure.
- Following the open spaces event the Open Spaces Working Group was established which initiated a number of actions such as the review of canteen facilities, car parking, flexible working policies, training and development and communication issues.
- Implementation of Flexible Working Policies (Career Break, Jobshare, Special leave, Flexitime).
- Monthly staff Newsletter promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.
- Mainstreaming equality issues into Best Value Reviews.
- Membership of working groups' encompassing all levels in the Council to enhance sharing of knowledge and resources which are can be targeted at promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.

Bullet 3

Impediments have included:

- increased workloads of employees;

- consultation fatigue amongst consultees;
- lack of understanding of equality issues leading to resistance in some areas.

Bullet 4

The Council continuously updates its database of consultees, and an integral part of the process of screening new policies is that consultees are informed directly of the outcomes of screening exercises. In addition, as stated in our Equality Scheme, Newry and Mourne District Council are committed to ensuring any barriers to communication are identified and removed, and the Council is consistently researching / testing new methods of communication.

Section 4: Communication & Training Provision

- *Indicate if your organisation has developed a 5 year Training Plan (the Commission may wish to discuss details with individual bodies).*
- *Outline details of staff and Management Board/Committee training provision associated with the Section 75 duties/Equality Scheme requirements. Provide details of types of training provision (e.g. general awareness raising, specialist training on EQIA, Screening, Consultation) and who this training was provided for.*
- *Provide details of how affected groups have been involved in the development and/or delivery or training*
- *Provide a summary of any training evaluations and comments on the benefits of such training.*
- *Provide details of internal and external communication of the authority's commitment to the statutory duties.*
- *Outline any factors that enhance or impede the process of communication and training.*

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|----------------|---|
| <i>Prompt:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the authority monitor attainment of the training objectives contained within its equality scheme?</i> • <i>Has section 75 training involved input from representatives of the 9 groups? If so please state how this happened and if it proved useful?</i> • <i>Has section 75 training been evaluated? If so how has this happened and what are the lessons learned?</i> • <i>Do the Board and/or Senior Officers promote the authority's equality</i> |
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	<i>objectives in public statements, interviews and external events such as conferences?</i>
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Bullet 1

The Council’s commitment to training was set out in Section 12 of its Equality Scheme and further in the Summary Action Plan and timetable.

The Council believe that the training plan should evolve to meet the needs of participants over the lifespan of the Equality Scheme. It is important to reiterate the Council’s commitment to mainstreaming equality means all training related to people management and service delivery includes details of the Council’s statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations across section 75 categories.

Bullet 2

Training undertaken to date has been aimed at increasing awareness and greater understanding of equality duties and to ensuring improved delivery of our services. We value training that is of both a formal and informal nature.

Examples of training undertaken April 2002 – March 2003 has been formal Section 75 and diversity training for all employees, training for Elected Members provided by NICEM, specialist training for Officers on the EQIA process, and informal lunchtime seminars for employees exploring issues such as Travellers, and sport and politics.

Bullet 3

Affected groups have provided input into training in a number of ways:

- The views of Section 75 groups, which were obtained through consultation, have been included in training.
- Participation by the Travellers Movement and local Travellers at the Council’s awareness raising lunchtime seminar for employees.
- Specific liaison is made with local and NI wide contacts in Local Government and other organisations to improve training.

Bullet 4

- Training evaluations are not available for this period. This will be reviewed during the 2003 - 2004 period.

Bullet 5

Examples of internal and external communication include:

- The establishment of a Corporate Press Office administered by the Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) and Public Relations Officer who are members of the Equality Unit. Press releases / statements and Corporate documents reiterate our commitment to equality.
- The Clerk and Chief Executive, Officers and Elected Members express their commitment to the Council's Section 75 duties during speeches at corporate events and public meetings etc.
- Council's monthly newsletter – 'The Grapevine'
- Use of the Equality Unit stand at all promotional events
- Lunchtime seminars for employees
- Awareness raising seminars and lectures for the community
- Conferences – 'Consulting on Consultation' and our PR Conference 'Is Spin Spinning Out of Control'
- Correspondence and presentations to target groups

Bullet 6

Newry and Mourne District Council are fully committed to training, and encouraging greater awareness and understanding of equality issues and enhancing service delivery for section 75 groups.

Section 5: Information Provision, Data Collection & Analysis

- Describe systems that have been established to supplement available statistical and qualitative research including consideration given to using internal organisational data and external networks.
- Describe systems established to monitor the future adverse impact of policies that have been equality impact assessed.
- Outline any factors that enhance or impede the process of information provision, data collection and analysis.

Prompt:

- Are the results of awareness or satisfaction surveys used to inform the development and review of policies?
- Is relevant external data (for example Census, workforce profiles, customer surveys, focus groups) used to inform policy development?
- Have new information systems been linked to arrangements for screening policies?

Bullet 1

A variety of links have been established to enhance the Council’s ability to supplement available data and research. These include:

- Greater Craigavon Area Equality Officers’ Network
- LGSC Statutory Duty Network
- Southern Region Community Relations Officers Forum
- Best Value Forum
- Membership of Opportunity Now
- Membership of Employers Forum on Disability
- Links with locally based community networks e.g. ROSA, ROMAL, Confederation of Community Groups,
- Future Ways/Counteract
- Newry and Mourne Deaf Club
- Newry and Mourne Women, South Armagh Rural Women’s Network
- Newry and Mourne Users Consortium
- Links with NISRA and the Community Relations Council

- Liaison with various organisations such as NICEM, Mediation Northern Ireland and the Parades Commission etc.
- Internet research

The Council continues to develop and enhance the quality of its relationships and links in the voluntary, community and private sectors through its Community Services, Economic Development and Community Relations Sections.

Bullet 2

N/A – At present the equality impact assessments scheduled for 2001-2003 have not been completed.

Bullet 3

One major impediment to data collection and analysis is that currently very little relevant baseline data exists. Although the 2001 census figures have helped in the process of data collection, the drip feed effect on how this information was published impeded the process of analysis.

Section 6: Information Provision and Access to Services

- *Outline what action has been taken to review and develop arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats.*
- *Detail steps taken to make affected groups aware of information disseminated by the authority and the services it provides*
- *Describe any arrangements to develop monitoring systems regarding access to information and services to ensure equality of opportunity.*
- *Outline any factors that enhance or impede the process of information provision and ensuring/improving access to services.*

Prompt:

- *Are alternative formats provided where appropriate to enable people from across the nine Section 75 categories to have access to all services?*
- *Have appropriate consultation mechanisms been developed and used to establish needs/satisfaction levels?*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the authority monitor uptake of services as a standard procedure?</i>
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Bullet 1

The Council continues to liaise with service providers such as RNIB, Newry Deaf Club and Newry and Mourne Carers, to enable the provision of information in accessible formats. Examples of this include:

- Leaflets and correspondence to the Chinese community in our local area was translated by a contact provided by NICEM.
- Employing a specialist food hygiene trainer to deliver the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene in both Mandarin and Cantonese.
- Signers are made available to all conferences organised by the Council.
- Council’s Bilingualism Policy which enables anyone who receives a service from the Council to do so through the medium of Irish or English according to his/her personal choice, and promotes the use of Irish in the internal administration of the Council, in its dealings with other public bodies and also with bodies which provide services to the public of Newry and Mourne.
- Our website can be viewed in either the English or Irish language.
- We seek advice from the Plain English Campaign.

Bullet 2

The Council is committed to effective communication, but recognises not everyone enjoys equality of opportunity in accessing information provided by the Council.

Various methods have been used to ensure affected groups have access to information disseminated by the Council and the services we provide. Examples of this include:

- All corporate documents are made available in large print, audio, Braille, and Irish Language. This is actively promoted to groups.
- Information leaflets and correspondence to the Chinese community in our local area was translated by a contact provided by NICEM.
- Training courses organised by our Environmental Health Department employ a specialist food hygiene trainer to deliver these in both Mandarin and Cantonese.

- Signers and, where appropriate, loop systems are made available at all conferences organised by the Council.
- Ensuring press statements and public advertisements are accessible to all sections of the community.
- Council's Bilingualism Policy which enables anyone who receives a service from the Council to do so through the medium of Irish or English according to his/her personal choice, and promotes the use of Irish in the internal administration of the Council, in its dealings with other public bodies and also with bodies which provide services to the public of Newry and Mourne.
- Our website can be viewed in either the English or Irish language.

Bullet 3

The uptake of services is not monitored across all section 75 groups. Guidance is awaited from the Equality Commission on monitoring.

Bullet 4

One major impediment to information provision and ensuring/improving access to services is that because of the very personal nature of some information it is difficult to access local data for some of the nine groups. This can be particularly relevant to those persons of different sexual orientation, political opinion, with a disability and of different ethnic origin.

Section 7: Complaints	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify the number of S75 complaints received and resolved during the year.</i> • <i>Identify the number of S75 complaints referred to the Commission.</i> • <i>Identify the number of ongoing Section 75 complaints</i> 	
Prompt:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does the authority have in place a Section 75 complaints procedure?</i> • <i>Does the authority monitor Section 75 complaints and the issues arising?</i> • <i>Have complaints led to policy changes or an undertaking of an Equality Impact Assessment of a policy relating to a complaint?</i>

Anyone who believes they have been directly affected by a failure of the Council to meet the processes and commitments set out in our Equality Scheme may make a complaint to the Assistant Director of Administration (Equality). Complaints in writing are preferred, but a complaint can be made verbally. Newry and Mourne District Council take complaints seriously, and are dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Bullet 1

None

Bullet 2

None

Bullet 3

None

Section 8: Timetable	
<i>Provide an update of your Equality Scheme implementation timetable, identifying any changes since your previous report.</i>	
<i>Prompt:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Is the implementation timetable reviews on a regular basis by the Board and Senior Officers?</i>

Bullet 1

The timetable is endorsed by Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Committee which is a full Council committee including all 30 Elected Representatives.

The Equality Committee meets monthly. The agenda is comprised of a variety of issues that enable the elected members keep up to date with work undertaken to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The following table outlines Newry and Mourne District Council's revised equality scheme implementation timetable.

Year	Policy to be Equality Impact Assessed
Year 1 (2002-2003) ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Bilingualism
Year 2 (2003-2004) ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration • Procurement • IT • Grants
Year 3 (2004-2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development and Tourism • Human Resource Policies • Pricing • Arts / Culture / Sports Development • Environmental Health Protection and Promotion
Year 4 (2005-2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds Maintenance • Equality, Community Relations, REDI and Best Value • Member services • Community Development • Review of EQIAs

² Accommodation Policy St Christopher's Park was to be subject to an equality impact assessment during this period. Since committing to this timetable, circumstances have changed and this site has now been closed. Therefore the Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

³ Human Resource Policies, Economic Development and Tourism, and Pricing were to be subject to an equality impact assessment during this period. On reviewing our timetable these have been repositioned to be equality impact assessed in Year 3 (2004-2005).

In addition, the Travellers accommodation policy was to undergo an equality impact assessment in this period. However the enactment of the Housing Bill 2002 in February 2003 will change the responsibility for providing Travellers accommodation. This will transfer to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Section 9: Consultation

- *Provide details of organisational arrangements for managing Section 75 consultation exercises and processes e.g. system, processes, methods, communication channels.*

Prompt:

- *Describe the system put in place by the authority to plan and manage consultation exercises?*
- *What are the main consultation methods which you have used?*
- *Have consultation exercises involved consulting on Equality/good relations in conjunction with other policy development/review areas e.g. Best Value, Good Practice Reviews?*
- *Have the authority used communication channels of umbrella groups or representative groups? If so please give examples and comment on usefulness of using such mechanisms.*
- *Have consultation exercises been joined-up in relation to consulting on similar policies at the same time or in relation to joint-consultation exercises with other public authorities?*

The Council sets out its commitment to consulting on its equality scheme, namely:

- ensuring that it is proactive, in its work with representative groups and individuals of the Section 75 categories;
- finding out how best to obtain their views;
- using participative and user-friendly consultation techniques to ensure that consultation is innovative, inclusive and meaningful; and
- ensuring that any barriers to effective consultation are removed.

The Equality Unit has responsibility for managing section 75 consultation exercises and processes. It ensures consultation processes are meaningful and inclusive, with consultation events being designed to raise awareness of the Council, engage interest, be user friendly, non-wordy, participative, time efficient and encourage positive feedback.

We are also committed to developing innovative approaches to the consultation process. This is evidenced by the 'Consulting on Consultation' Conference

organised by the Council which was attended by over 100 delegates. It encouraged public sector organisations to think ‘outside the box’, helped share best practice models, and raised awareness of the various participative and inclusive consultative techniques that can be used.

Section 10: Impacts and Outcomes

Please provide relevant information about impact of implementation of Section 75 to end of 2003. This should include details of existing policies changed to better deliver equality of opportunity; equality proofing of new policies; information about impact of new policy (better service provision, alternative service provision, accessibility to services, information gathering on users/non-users of services, satisfaction survey information); information on improved policy/services for nine groups.

<i>Prompt:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How is policy formulation being managed to take account of the need to mainstream Section 75 duties?</i> • <i>Are all new or revised policies equality proofed by the authority? If so what process is used?</i> • <i>How have policies subject to EQIA changed as a consequence of the process?</i> • <i>Is there any evidence of how newly formulated policies or existing policies changed as a result of impact assessment are better delivering Equality and/or good relations?</i> • <i>Has Equality Impact Assessment led to better policymaking and service delivery? Please provide specific examples. These should indicate which Section 75 groups have benefited from Section 75 and how.</i> • <i>What, at this stage, do you perceive to be the main outcomes from implementation of the statutory duties?</i>
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The fact that the Section 75 duties are a statutory function adds weight to their importance in that they must be implemented. This has helped to ensure a meaningful commitment and engagement by Newry and Mourne District Council of issues which previously may have been viewed as contentious and sensitive.

Implementation of Section 75 duties has enabled Newry and Mourne District Council to challenge and critically appraise everything it does as a Council. As an evolving statutory function the process of implementation has allowed innovation, creativity and a learning environment to develop across the organisation.

Examples of this include:

- All new policies are now equality proofed. This is undertaken in conjunction with the Officers responsible for the new policy's implementation.
- Through active promotion of equality and good relations there is now a greater level of informed decision-making which has had a positive impact upon the civic leadership role of the Council.
- Through fulfilling our statutory obligations we are more aware of our stakeholder groups and their needs. This means we are better able to target our services in the future.
- Employees are now more aware of alternative formats of communication.
- The Council's Voluntary Contribution Application process now contains an equality assessment of all applications. While this has an internal dimension in enabling the development of a strategically targeted and focused funding process which can monitor and identify trends in terms of what groups are being funded, this also has an external impact in forcing applicants think through the equality impact of any projects which they are developing.

Section 11: Additional Information

- *Report information on any other matters considered relevant to the authority's implementation of the Section 75 duties*
- *Please include general statement on whether the implementation of the duties is leading to improvement in how the authority undertakes its work?*

Bullet 1 and Bullet 2

Newry and Mourne District Council's experience of the implementation of Section 75 duties is that it has enhanced the knowledge and skill base of employees. Specialist training for employees and Elected Members such as that relating to equality impact

assessments has helped mainstream the principles of equality of opportunity and good relations.

In addition, the implementation of statutory duties has played an important role in enabling the Council address issues which previously may have been viewed being of a contentious and sensitive nature. Through this work the Council has helped persons from the nine groups have greater access to decision-makers in the area.

It has therefore had a positive direct impact upon increasing participative decision-making processes and formulation of policy. Through the key themes of access and communication, implementation of Section 75 duties continues to improve the Council's civic leadership role as a major employer and deliverer of services in the area.