

# **EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

## **Public Authority Progress Report 2003 - 2004**

### **Newry and Mourne District Council**

## Introduction

This report covers the period from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 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 21 September 2004.

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 report contains thirteen 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: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

Please enter specific progress on implementation of the good relations duty under section 10 of this template.

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing/meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets and inclusion of these in corporate and annual operating plans. Your response should include any targets for 2004-2005.
- Outline steps taken to work with other public authorities in progressing the duties.
- Outline any details of partnership work developed or further progressed with the voluntary and/or community sector as a consequence of Section 75 work.
- Indicate if Section 75 is a standard agenda item for Board and/or Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis.
- Please provide details of the **direct** resourcing of Section 75 work during 2003 –4. This should include staff appointed/directed (*not names*) to specifically advance work on equality scheme delivery, and details of any budget allocation to specifically deliver equality scheme commitments.
- Outline any factors that enhanced or impeded the process of Strategic Implementation during the period.

### ***Prompt:***

*Have the Board and Senior Officers reviewed the authority's progress report?*

*Has responsibility for equality been agreed and designated within the authority?*

*Has a clearly defined organisational structure with resources for implementation of the duties and assessment of policies been established?*

*Are equality objectives built into the job descriptions and performance targets of relevant staff, and are these reflected in the appraisal process?*

### **Bullet 1**

Newry and Mourne District Council has initiated different methods of developing equality and good relations objectives such as:

- The establishment of an Equality Unit encompassing the functions of equality, community relations, best value, public relations and communications. This has helped to raise the profile of equality and good relations and worked to mainstream these principles.
- 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, produces an annual strategic plan which is approved by both Newry and Mourne District Council and the Community Relations Unit, OFMDFM. The Community Relations Section has undertaken a Community Relations Audit which has identified the issues and priorities for community relations in the Newry and Mourne area.
- As part of the Council's commitment to engage directly with its citizens and in order to seek their views on Council services and facilities it has established a Household Panel. The Household Panel meets on a quarterly basis and provides a direct opportunity for citizens to have a say in how our services are designed and delivered.
- The Equality Unit also continues to co-ordinate and host monthly meetings of the Newry Good Relationships Forum which is facilitated by the Director of Mediation Northern Ireland. This Forum, in its fifth year, has the dual aims of contributing to Good Relations in Newry between people of different religious belief, political opinion and ethnic background and improving understanding between Newry and other parts of the Council District. Citizens from a range of backgrounds, such as nationalist, republican, unionist, catholic and protestant, in the Newry area were invited to attend the forum meetings. Originally starting from a small base of stakeholders within the community the Good Relations Forum has widened the number and range of participants. The main aspect of the forum is to provide a platform and 'safe' environment in which ordinary citizens of the Newry area can discuss, debate, challenge and so gain a better understanding of both their own and other participants views on issues impacting in the area. It is worth noting that everyone at these meetings is there as an

- individual and is not there to represent any groups or organizations.
- The REDI initiative with its Declaration of Principles has been rebranded as the Council's Good Relations Group. It has a remit to encourage positive civic leadership, good relations and improved service delivery through continuing to develop sustainable relationships based on the need for equity, respect for diversity and recognizing the interdependent nature of the society in which we live.
  - The Council has continued to mainstream equality objectives into the corporate structure in areas such as Best Value Service Reviews and its Voluntary Contribution application process. All applications for financial assistance are equality screened to ensure the Council has a targeted and focused funding programme, and this has assisted the process of mainstreaming equality into decision-making and service delivery.

#### **Bullet 2**

- The Council liaises with other public authorities to progress the statutory duties. An example of this is the ongoing Equality Impact Assessment of Environmental Health policies which is being undertaken on a group basis and involves Banbridge, Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon and Newry and Mourne District Councils. Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Officer is a member of the Greater Craigavon Equality Officers Network 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**

- Newry and Mourne District Council is a member of Opportunity Now and the Employees Forum on Disability.
- Newry and Mourne District Council's Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) sits on the Board of Opportunity Now NI which strives to progress equality in the workplace.
- The Council's Environmental Health Department, in conjunction with Newry Institute of Further and Higher Education, continues

- to organize Food Hygiene Training in Cantonese and Madarin for members of the Chinese community.
- Newry and Mourne Council continues to meet with various community and voluntary groups on a regular basis for the sharing of information and has co-ordinated events and seminars such as that with the RNIB involving local people with visual impairment. In addition to enabling participants to learn of services provided by Council, this meeting invited the Equality Commission for NI to discuss the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its impact.
  - The Council has an Irish Language Committee and an Ulster Scots Committee. These committees are comprised of Councillors and lay members of the community.

#### **Bullet 4**

- The work of the Equality Unit is conveyed to the Council's Management Team at their monthly meetings.
- The Equality Committee is a full Council Meeting which is held monthly.

#### **Bullet 5**

- The Director of Administration is accountable for the overall development, implementation and review of our equality scheme.
- The Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) will advise the Council of progress in relation to the scheme and delegates the Equality Officer, the duty to supervise implementation of the scheme and be a point of contact.
- The Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) is the lead officer of Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Unit. This unit encompasses the functions of equality, community relations, best value, public relations and communications, and has six full time employees. Whilst the Equality Officer has a specific remit to advance work on the equality scheme delivery, the Community Relations Officer and Community Relations Assistant also play a valuable role in promoting good relations.
- Whilst the Council does not have a specific budget allocation to deliver equality scheme commitments, the Equality Officer was allocated £12,000.00 in the period 2003/2004 for Training, Positive / Affirmative Action and Consultancy fees.

## **Bullet 6**

Factors that have impacted upon the process of strategic implementation during the period 2003/2004 have included:

- The movement of the Equality Officer to a new post, and the recruitment process temporarily affected the continuity of strategic implementation.
- The movement of the Community Relations Assistant to a new post and a periods of long term sickness absence by the Community Relations Officer and Assistant Director of Administration (Personnel).
- Increasing and additional workloads of Equality Officer.
- The ongoing consultation fatigue experienced by consultees.

## **Section 2: Screening & Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)**

2a) 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.

2b) If a Screening Report and EQIA Timetable has previously been submitted to the Commission please provide information on the following, in relation to new/proposed/revised policies during 2003-4:

Please list new/proposed/revised policies screened in or out during the period.

- Outline any factors that enhanced or impeded the process of policy screening or EQIA.

We have already requested (9 January 2004) that an update on progress regarding EQIAs is forwarded to the Commission. If your authority has not yet forwarded this information (deadline date was 29 February 2004) please do so as a matter of urgency.

### **Bullet 1**

N/A

### **Bullet 2**

N/A

### **Bullet 3**

Factors that have impacted upon the process of EQIAs are:

- The movement of the Equality Officer to a new post, and the appointment of a new Equality Officer.
- A period of long term sickness absence by the lead officer undertaking the Council's Bilingualism Policy EQIA.
- Increased and additional workloads of Equality Officer due to periods of long term sickness absence by the Community Relations Officer and Assistant Director of Administration (Personnel).

### **Section 3: Training**

- Indicate your organisation's progress on delivery of Section 75 related training and development during the period. Please state if the training is provided within a 5-year Training Plan.
- Outline details of staff and Management Board/Committee training 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, and Consultation) and who this training was provided for.
- Please provide details of training on awareness raising (for new staff) and refresher training (for existing staff).
- Provide details of how affected groups have been involved in the development and/or delivery of training.
- Provide a summary of any training evaluations and comments on the benefits of such training.
- Provide details of arrangements to review training needs as a result of staff recruitment, promotion or reorganisation.
- Outline any factors that enhanced or impeded the processes of Section 75 training during the period.

#### **Prompt:**

*Does the authority monitor attainment of the training objectives contained within its equality scheme?*

*Has Section 75 training involved input from representatives of the nine categories? If so please state how this happened and if it proved useful?*

*Has Section 75 training been evaluated? If so, how has this happened and what are the lessons learned?*

#### **Bullets 1 to 7**

Newry and Mourne District 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 believes that the training plan should evolve to meet the needs participants over the lifespan of its Equality Scheme. Once again it is important to reiterate that the Council is committed to mainstreaming equality which means that 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 the Section 75 categories.

Training undertaken to date has been aimed at increasing awareness and greater understanding of the 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 delivered 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 has included child protection training for employees and elected members, Section 75 and diversity training for employees and elected members, community / good relations training seminars for elected members, specialist training for Officers on the EQIA process, and lunchtime seminars for all employees exploring issues such as diversity, the Irish Language, stress and domestic violence.

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

- The views expressed by Section 75 groups during consultation are included in training.
- Participation in the Council's programme of awareness raising lunchtime seminars for employees. Various groups have participated in these such as Newry Women's Aid re: Domestic Violence, Irish Language speakers re: Council's Bilingualism Policy, and the Travellers Movement and local Travellers re: culture and tradition of the Travelling community.
- Specific liaison in made with local and NI wide contacts in Local Government and other organizations to improve training.

## **Section 4: Communication**

- Provide details of internal and external communication of the authority's commitment to the statutory duties.
- Provide details of how the authority communicates progress on delivery of the statutory duties.
- Provide details of any review of communication activities to ensure effective communication on progressing the statutory duties.

### **Prompt:**

*Do the Board and/or Senior Officers promote the authority's equality objectives in public statements, interviews and external events such as conferences?*

*Does the authority have a plan for communication of progress on implementation of the statutory duties?*

### **Bullets 1, 2 & 3**

Newry and Mourne District Council are fully committed to communicating our commitment to the statutory duties. 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 Council has a communications strategy which undergone an equality impact assessment and press monitoring reports are provided on a quarterly basis for consideration by the Equality Committee.
- 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.
- The Council's website is used to disseminate information. This can be viewed in both the English and Irish language.
- The publication of the 'Citizens News' booklet which is produced on a six-monthly basis and circulated to all households in the Newry and Mourne District Council area. This publication is also available in all accessible formats such as braille, large print, audio transcription, and the Irish language.

- Council's monthly internal newsletter – 'The Grapevine'
- Use of the Equality Unit stand at all promotional events
- All lunchtime seminars for employees are co-ordinated by the Equality Unit
- Awareness raising seminars and lectures for the community. Newry and Mourne Council continues to meet with various community and voluntary groups on a regular basis for the sharing of information and has co-ordinated events and seminars such as that with the RNIB involving local people with visual impairment. In addition to informing participants of Council services and how the Council is working to fulfil its statutory duties, this meeting invited participation by the Equality Commission for NI to discuss the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its impact.
- Correspondence and presentations to target groups such as Newry Deaf Club and Shopmobility.

## Section 5: Data Collection & Analysis

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

### **Prompt:**

*Has an audit of data sources been undertaken?*

*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, and focus groups) used to inform policy development?*

*Have new information systems been linked to arrangements for screening policies?*

### **Bullet 1**

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.

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

- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- 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 and RNIB

- 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

**Bullet 2**

The Council has a communications strategy which has undergone an equality impact assessment and press monitoring reports are provided on a quarterly basis for consideration by the Equality Committee.

**Bullet 3**

Often very little relevant baseline data exists and a major factor is ensuring information is current and relevant. The actual style of the process of data collection and analysis is therefore of prime importance in informing any decision-making.

## **Section 6: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services**

- Outline what action has been taken to review and develop arrangements for the provision of information in accessible formats.
- Detail steps taken to audit/improve arrangements to make affected groups more 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 enhanced or impeded the process of information provision and ensuring/improving access to services during the period.

### **Prompt:**

*Are alternative formats provided where appropriate to enable people from across the nine Section 75 categories to have access to all services?*

*Does the authority monitor uptake of services as a standard procedure?*

### **Bullet 1**

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

- The publication of the Council's 'Citizens News' booklet is produced on a six-monthly basis and circulated to all households in the Newry and Mourne District Council area. This publication is also available in all accessible formats such as braille, large print, audio transcription, and the Irish language.
- Leaflets and correspondence to the Chinese community in our local area is translated by a contact provided by NICEM.
- The Council's Environmental Health Department employs a specialist food hygiene trainer to deliver the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene in both Mandarin and Cantonese.

- Signers, and where appropriate, loop systems 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.
- Seeking advice from organizations such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, POBAL, Ulster Scots Heritage Council and 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 through meetings and seminars.
- The publication of the Council's 'Citizens News' booklet is produced on a six-monthly basis and circulated to all households in the Newry and Mourne District Council area. This provides information regarding services offered by the Council such as assisted bin collections for members of the community who are unable to move bins to the front of their houses. The Customer Services Section monitors the levels of this service provision.
- Information leaflets and correspondence to the Chinese community in our local area is translated by a contact provided by NICEM.
- Training courses organised by the Council's 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**

While the uptake of services is not monitored across all Section 75 groups, various systems of monitoring access to information and services are in operation such as:

- The Irish Language Department monitors the implementation of the Council's Bilingualism Policy for the promotion and use of the Irish Language and prepares regular reports to the Irish Language Committee.
- As part of the Council's communications strategy press monitoring reports are provided on a quarterly basis for consideration by the Equality Committee.
- The Council's Customer Services Section monitors the numbers of households receiving assisted bin collections.
- The Council's Finance Department keeps a detailed record of groups who are successful in receiving grant aid from the Council's Voluntary Contribution programme.

### **Bullet 4**

Due to 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

- Identify the number of formal Section 75 complaints received by the authority during the period.
- Identify the number of these Section 75 complaints which were resolved during the period.
- Identify the number of these Section 75 complaints which are in the process of being resolved.
- Identify the number of these Section 75 complaints which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.

### **Prompt:**

*Does the authority have in place a Section 75 complaints procedure?*

*Does the authority monitor Section 75 complaints and the issues arising?*

*Have complaints led to policy changes or an undertaking of an Equality Impact Assessment of a policy relating to a complaint?*

### **Bullet 1**

None

### **Bullet 2**

N/A

### **Bullet 3**

N/A

### **Bullet 4**

N/A

## **Section 8: Timetable**

- Provide an update of your equality scheme implementation timetable, identifying any changes since your previous report. Please detail planned actions undertaken during the year and planned actions outstanding.

### **Prompt:**

*Is the authority on course to complete the commitments in its 5-year timetable? If not what action is being taken to ensure completion of timetable commitments?*

*Do Board and Senior Officers review the implementation timetable on a regular basis?*

The five-year equality scheme implementation timetable is endorsed by Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Committee. This committee is a full Council committee including all 30 Elected Representatives.

The Equality Committee meets on a monthly basis. 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.

At 31 March 2004 Newry and Mourne District Council had completed the Equality Impact Assessment of its Corporate Communications Strategy, and the Equality Impact Assessment of the Council's Bilingualism Policy, on the promotion and active use of the Irish Language, was undertaking formal consultation (Stage 4).

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

<sup>1</sup> At 31 March 2004 this EQIA was at formal consultation (Stage 4) of the EQIA process.

<sup>2</sup> This is now to be renamed as an Access EQIA encompassing these areas and at 31 March 2004 was at step 1 of the EQIA process.

<sup>3</sup> At 31 March 2004 this EQIA had reached stage 1 of the EQIA process.

## **Section 9: Consultation, participation and engagement**

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

Provide details of processes adopted to participate/engage with affected groups.

### **Prompt:**

*Describe the system put in place by the authority to plan and manage consultation exercises.*

*What are the main consultation methods that 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?*

*Has the authority used the existing communication channels of groups or consortia within the voluntary/community sector? If so please give examples and comment on the 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?*

*Has the authority developed an overall strategy, plans or processes to engage directly with representatives of affected groups? If so what mechanisms have been used and have benefits been realised?*

*Has consultation/participation been evaluated and improved during the period? Has evaluation led to better approaches to engagement with affected groups?*

Newry and Mourne District Council views all engagement with groups and organizations as an opportunity to better understand views and opinions regarding Council policy and services. It also envisages existing communication channels, and ongoing and new initiatives such as the Newry Good Relationships Forum and the Household Panel playing a vital role in consultation.

The Council set out its commitment to consultation 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.

Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Unit has responsibility for co-ordinating and managing Section 75 consultation exercises and processes. Whilst the Council has used written consultation, it recognizes the deficiency in purely adopting this approach. The Council has therefore committed itself to developing innovative approaches to the consultation process, and ensures these 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.

## **Section 10: The Good Relations duty**

Provide details of steps to progress the good relations duty, such as undertaking a good relations audit, developing a strategy or providing training.

### **Prompt:**

*What steps has the authority undertaken to promote the good relations duty?*

*Has the authority developed a strategy for implementing good relations? If so please provide details of the key elements of this.*

*Has the authority undertaken an audit of its policies that impact on good relations?*

*What models or approaches to good relations has the authority adopted?*

*Has the authority worked in partnership with other public authorities or other bodies to develop its approach to promotion of good relations?*

*Have any policies been changed to better address the promotion of good relations? If so please provide some detail on these.*

Newry and Mourne District Council has had an active Community Relations / Good Relations Programme since 1989 and has a Community Relations section with two full-time staff members working on the programme.

This section, which conducted a community relations audit during 2003, produces an annual strategic plan which is submitted to the Community Relations Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The key elements of Newry and Mourne District Council's plan include:

- Facilitating and coordinating community discussion and dialogue including the unique Newry Good Relationships Forum, which is widely regarded as a model of good practice both in Northern Ireland and also in Great Britain.
- Working in partnership with the Community Relations Council to organize a programme of good relations training to meet the

needs of the Elected Members of Newry and Mourne District Council.

- Support for a programme of cross community events with a particular focus upon diversity.
- Support for a programme of events aimed at increasing understanding of cultural traditions and identity.
- Providing advice, support and financial assistance to groups and organizations addressing issues of good relations within the community.
- Mainstreaming a good relations ethos throughout the Council through the REDI<sup>4</sup> initiative.

The Council's Community Relations programme focuses primarily on relationship building and in providing space for difficult conversations to take place between citizens of different backgrounds and traditions. In recent years the traditional two-identity approach has been expanded to include the recent growth the ethnic minority communities.

The Council's programme has a strong partnership dimension working with Mediation Northern Ireland, the Community Relations Council, Confederation of Community Groups, local Women's networks and a wide range of community organizations.

The strengths of the people centred approach of the Council programme lie in its flexibility and ability to respond and adapt to the changing needs of the community.

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<sup>4</sup> Relationships in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence.

## **Section 11: Impacts and outcomes**

Please provide relevant information about the impact of implementation of Section 75 to end of March 2004. Information provided should be in relation to outputs and outcomes being achieved. Also clarify the outcomes which have impacted on the authority, in terms of efficiency or effectiveness, and outcomes for people in the nine categories.

This could include: details of existing policies changed to better deliver equality of opportunity; incorporation of the EQIA process into policy development; 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 the nine categories.

### **Prompt:**

*How is policy formulation being managed to take account of the need to mainstream the Section 75 duties?*

*Are all new or revised policies equality proofed by the authority? If so what processes are used? Is the 7 step EQIA process mainstreamed into policy processes?*

*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?*

*Has EQIA led to better policy making and service delivery? Please provide specific examples. These should indicate which Section 75 groups have benefited from policy changes and how.*

*What, at this stage, do you perceive to be the main outcomes from implementation of the statutory duties?*

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 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 12: Additional comments on Mainstreaming**

The main aim of the statutory duties is to help to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations considerations into the functions of the authority, leading to better policies and service delivery.

Whilst many of the questions in the previous sections of this template relate to actions on mainstreaming of Section 75 duties we would be grateful if you could provide any additional information/comment which you think may be relevant to your report. You may wish to report here on your view of the:

- extent of mainstreaming of the duties within the authority
- benefits for the authority resulting from mainstreaming
- factors which have impeded mainstreaming
- plans for future effective mainstreaming of the duties.

Overall, Newry and Mourne District Council's experience of the implementation of Section 75 duties is that it has helped to continue to enhance the knowledge and skill base of employees. Ongoing specialist training relating to equality impact assessments for both employees and Elected Members has mainstream the principles of equality of opportunity and good relations through helping them positively and creatively 'think through' processes.

Additionally, the implementation of statutory duties has continued to play an important role in enabling the Council, both Officers and Elected Members, address issues which previously may have been viewed as being of a contentious and sensitive nature.

Furthermore, greater consultation and specific programmes, have enabled organizations and persons from the nine groups to 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.

### Section 13: Concluding questions

This short questionnaire is included in the template to enable you to, provide an overall view of the effectiveness of the statutory duties, for your authority and for the Section 75 categories.

#### QUESTION A

**Does the authority believe its work to date on implementing the statutory duties has produced positive benefits for the organisation? (Please tick) YES \_\_\_√\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_**

**If you answered yes to QUESTION A, please tick appropriate boxes below to what extent the duties have:**

	Very noticeably	Noticeably	No real change
Increased awareness of equality issues in policy making		√	
Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect equal opportunities objectives		√	
Increased awareness of good relations issues in policy making		√	
Increased ability to ensure policies are designed and targeted to reflect good relations objectives		√	
Increased awareness of equality issues in service delivery		√	
Increased ability to ensure services are designed and targeted to reflect Section 75 requirements		√	

**QUESTION B**

**Does the authority believe its work to date on implementing the statutory duties has produced positive benefits for groups within the Section 75 categories? (Please tick) YES\_√/ NO \_\_\_\_**

**If you answered yes to QUESTION B, please tick appropriate boxes below on what extent the authority’s implementation of the statutory duties has increased equality of opportunity for**

	<b>Very noticeably</b>	<b>Noticeably</b>	<b>No real change</b>
<b>Persons of different religious belief</b>		√	
<b>Persons of different political opinion</b>		√	
<b>Persons of different racial groups</b>		√	
<b>Persons of different age</b>		√	
<b>Persons with different marital status</b>		√	
<b>Persons of different sexual orientation</b>		√	
<b>Men and women generally</b>		√	
<b>Persons with and without a disability</b>	√		
<b>Persons with and without dependents</b>		√	

**Many thanks, in advance, for reporting to the Commission on your implementation of the duties during 2003 – 4. Please ensure that your completed progress report is forwarded to the Commission by 31 August 2004. This will enable us to produce and publish the overall progress report for the period in a timely way.**

**If a final signed off version of your report is not submitted by the closing date please ensure that the Commission receives a 'draft' report by that date.**

**Information in progress reports that do not meet the deadline date for submission will not be considered in the overall progress report for the year.**