

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Progress Report 2006 - 2007

Newry and Mourne District Council

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Authority Annual Progress Report 2006 - 2007

Introduction

This report covers the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007 and has been submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland following its adoption by Newry and Mourne District Council at its Monthly Council Meeting held on 3 September 2007.

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 twelve sections encompassing important developments in the effective implementation of Newry and Mourne District Council's Section 75 duties.

Name of public authority

Newry & Mourne District Council

Equality Officer

Colin Moffett
Newry and Mourne District Council
Monaghan Row
Newry
Co Down
BT35 8DJ

Telephone: (028) 3031 3081

Fax: (028) 3031 3077

Email: Colin.Moffett@newryandmourne.gov.uk

Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?

Response

While the Council views all of its programme as work in progress, the key policy/service developments made by Newry and Mourne District Council to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations included:

- Undertaking a Good Relations Audit has reviewed the delivery of the good relations programme in light of the Racial Equality Strategy and A Shared Future document. The audit identified four strategic areas of work: mainstreaming, engagement, Black and Minority Ethnic community and symbolism.
- The ongoing implementation of the Council's Disability Employment Action Plan and Policy which has been invaluable in assisting the Council in the development of our Disability Action Plan which is to be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland by 30 June 2007.
- Continuing to avail of opportunities to meet with numerous community and voluntary organisations for the sharing of information. A vital part of this has been the Mayor's Programme where numerous community and voluntary organisations are invited to receptions in the Council Offices. While these events have allowed Council Officers and Councillors to talk about their work, the question and answer sessions have proved to be beneficial in allowing groups and individuals to raise issues of concern directly with the Council Officers and Councillors present.
- Adopting the Declaration of Principles on Gender Equality. This has also led to the appointment of a Gender Diversity Champion and the development of a Gender Action Plan which will have a direct impact for both Elected Members (Councillors) and employees.
- Continuing to mainstream equality objectives into the corporate structure and performance improvement. This has included an ongoing process to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations into decision-making and service delivery which has meant the screening of all new or proposed policies, regular service reviews and further amending procedures such as the Council's grant application form and assessment process.

- With regard to the Council's Voluntary Contribution process two of the ten questions on which each applicant's project is assessed relate directly to how the project promotes equality of opportunity and improves good relations.
- The implementation of a structured formal appeals mechanism for applicants who are unsuccessful in the Voluntary Contribution process.
- The Good Relations Grant Programme which provides financial assistance for groups and organizations addressing issues of good relations within the community.
- Acknowledging the growing numbers of migrant workers within the Newry and Mourne District Council area. This has led to the Council taking forward a number of projects aimed at addressing the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents. One such initiative is the Challenge of Change project which is a partnership between Newry and Mourne Council and Louth County Council. This will formally begin during 2007-2008, and will examine the barriers to services and cultural awareness in the Councils.

The Council's ongoing commitment to engagement through civic dialogue and community dialogue is illustrated by:

- The Council's Household Panel now meets on a bi-monthly basis, rather than on a quarterly basis. It is attended by Members of the Council's Senior Management Team, and it has continued to be an effective means of assisting the Council directly engage with citizens and seek views on Council policies and the delivery of services. Indeed, two of the meetings solely considered the Council's delivery on its Section 75 Statutory Duties and our Five-Year Equality Scheme Review Report.
- Ongoing meetings of the Newry Good Relations Forum. The aim of the forum is to positively contribute to good relations in Newry between people of different political, religious and ethnic background and improving relationships between Newry and other parts of the district of Newry and Mourne. This forum provides 'quiet' space for citizens of the Newry area to discuss, debate and challenge perceptions so enabling participants to improve understanding both their own and other participant's views on issues impacting upon the area.

- The three-day 'Challenge of Change Convention' in Newry, 5-7 June 2006. It was organised by Newry and Mourne District Council, Belfast City Council and Louth County Council, and facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland. The Convention's theme was the challenge of diversity in a society still struggling with division. It had international speakers such as Professor John Paul Lederach, Mr Trevor Phillips, CRE, Dr Jeff Crisp, Mr Bob Collins, ECNI, and Dr Duncan Morrow, CRC and attracted over 340 delegates, including groups from Oldham, Birmingham and Burnley.
- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

Response

While the Council will continue with its overall programme to implement its Section 75 statutory duties, the main initiatives for the coming year will be to:

- Deliver assistance and support to Council Departments in relation to equality screening, consultation, decision-making and policy development.
- Mainstream equality issues within the Council and in partnership with others within the district.
- Encourage civic dialogue and engagement through meetings of the Good Relations Forum and Household Panel.
- Co-ordinate the implementation of its Disability Action Plan which must be submitted to the Equality Commission by 30 June 2007.
- Further development implementation of the Council's Good Relations Plan taking account of the of the 2007-2007 Good Relations Audit.
- Take forward the Challenge of Change project. This will encompass a number of projects aimed at addressing the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents. It is a partnership between Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council, and will examine the barriers to services and cultural awareness in the Councils.
- Further develop and implement its Gender Action Plan.
- Co-ordinate and implement relevant training which will raise awareness and understanding of equality issues.

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2006-07.

Response

During the period 2006-2007 Newry and Mourne District Council has continued to allocate both direct physical and financial resources to enable the implementation of its Section 75 statutory duties. This is structured as follows:

- 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, good relations, performance management, 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 Internal Good Relations Officer and External Good Relations Officer also have a specific role in promoting good relations. The Equality Unit is currently in the process of undertaking the Chartermark assessment.
- Whilst the Council does not have a specific budget allocation to deliver equality scheme commitments, the Equality Officer was allocated £9950.00 in the period 2006-2007 for Training, Positive / Affirmative Action and Consultancy fees. In the previous financial year 2005-2006 this figure was £9000.00.

Newry and Mourne District Council believe it has continued to deliver upon its commitment to progress the equality statutory duties during the period 2006-2007. As a civic leader, the Council has maintained the development of equality and good relations objectives through:

- An Equality Unit encompassing the functions of equality, continuous improvement, good relations, public relations and communications.
- Undertaking another Good Relations Audit. This has reviewed the delivery of the good relations programme in light of the Racial

Equality Strategy and A Shared Future document. In accordance with the Good Relations audit it was decided that good relations within Newry and Mourne should be defined as, 'enabling the continued development of an inclusive district through the building of good relations and trust thereby enabling mutual understanding and respect for the diverse cultures and heritages of the district'. The audit identified four key themes: mainstreaming, engagement, Black and Minority Ethnic community and symbolism. This has helped develop the strategic direction for an effective action plan which will be delivered by the Council's Internal and External Good Relations Officers.

- As a key feature of the 'Women in Local Councils' initiative, the Council has appointed the Director of Administration as its Gender Diversity Champion. As a further commitment to this initiative the Council has adopted the Declaration of Principles on Gender Equality. This will mean the development of a Gender Action Plan which will have a direct impact for both Elected Members (Councillors) and employees.
- In addition to the monthly Equality Committee meetings, the Council has continued to mainstream equality objectives into the corporate structure and performance improvement. There has been an ongoing process to mainstream equality of opportunity and good relations into decision-making and service delivery which has meant the screening of all new or proposed policies, regular service reviews and further amending procedures such as the Council's grant application form and assessment process.
- With regard to the Council's Voluntary Contribution system two of the ten questions on which each applicant is assessed relate directly to how the project promotes equality of opportunity and improves good relations. The Council has now also adopted a structured formal appeals mechanism for those applicants who are unsuccessful in this process.
- In acknowledging our duty of care towards employees and recognizing the sensitivity and personal nature of many issues the Council continues to provide a 24 hour Careline with Staffcare. Being confidential and independent, gives confidential advice and support and the service complements line management, personnel and occupational health.

- Lone working is also an issue and the Council has the Argyll System for those employees who may work alone, have to attend meetings in remote locations or work alone at night.
- In recognizing the growing numbers of migrant workers within the Newry and Mourne District Council area the Council is currently taking forward a number of projects aimed at addressing the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents of the area. The Challenge of Change project was developed as a partnership between the Council and Louth County Council. The project, which will formally begin during 2007-2008, will examine the barriers to services and cultural awareness in the Councils.
- Newry and Mourne District Council is a member of the Local Government Statutory Duty Network which meets on a regular basis to share information and best practice regarding the implementation of the statutory duties. Within the past year, in light of the increasing expectations placed upon Local Government, the Council has found this has provided a support for informed discussion on the development of the equality agenda within local government, and helped formulate practical responses to the many consultative documents produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Central Government.
- As stated in our progress reports for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, Newry and Mourne District Council worked with the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland and other selected public authorities to develop a Disability Employment Action Plan and Policy. The ongoing implementation of this plan has been invaluable in assisting the Council in the development of our Disability Action Plan which is to be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland by 30 June 2007.
- The Council's Equality Officer and Council's Disability Liaison Officer have also continued to work in conjunction with the Conifers, Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust, to enable further access to opportunities for people with a disability to play an active role in society be it through sporting or social activities. This has included funding an RNIB awareness raising session which enabled people with a disability to learn about new accessible communication systems.

As stated in previous annual reports participative democracy through civic and community dialogue is a key strategy for Newry and Mourne District Council. This approach was illustrated by:

- At the request of the participants, the Council's Household Panel now meets on a bi-monthly basis. Members of the Council's Senior Management Team attend each meeting, and the Household Panel has continued to be an effective means of assisting the Council directly engage with citizens and seek their views on Council policies and the delivery of services. Indeed, two of the meetings solely considered the Council's delivery on its Section 75 Statutory Duties and our Five-Year Equality Scheme Review Report.
- In conjunction with Mediation Northern Ireland, Newry and Mourne District Council continued to co-ordinate and facilitate civic dialogue through hosting the Newry Good Relations Forum. The aim of the forum is to positively contribute to good relations in Newry between people of different political, religious and ethnic background and improving relationships between Newry and other parts of the district of Newry and Mourne. This forum provides 'quiet' space for citizens of the Newry area to discuss, debate and challenge perceptions so enabling participants to improve understanding both their own and other participant's views on issues impacting upon the area.
- As stated in our annual report for 2005-2006, members of the Newry Good Relations Forum and the Belfast Civic Leadership Group undertook a week-long study visit to Amsterdam to learn more about how Amsterdam is managing the process the diversity within society. This helped to develop members' capacity to consider local issues within a wider context, and through the sharing good practice members have been encouraged to turn hindsight into foresight.
- The learning assisted towards the planning of the three-day 'Challenge of Change Convention' in Newry, during June 2006. It was organised by Newry and Mourne District Council, Belfast City Council and Louth County Council, and facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland. The convention's theme was addressing diversity in a society still struggling with division. It has international speakers such as Professor John Paul Lederach, Dr Jeff Crisp, and Mr Trevor Phillips, CRE, Mr Bob Collins, ECNI, and attracted over 340 delegates, including groups from Oldham, Birmingham and Burnley.

During 2006-2007, Newry and Mourne District Council continued to have various committees which comprise Councillors and lay members of the community who have a specific interest and knowledge. Examples of these committees are the Council's Sports Development Committee, Museum Committee, Irish Language Committee and Ulster Scots Committee. It should be noted that each of these committees have specific budgets which allow the committee to allocate funding to the development of the various themes.

Examples of other areas of influence and partnership work include:

- Newry and Mourne District Council Clerk and Chief Executive's membership of both the Northern Ireland Good Relations Panel and Northern Ireland Race Forum. Our Clerk and Chief Executive also Chaired the Review of Public Administration Committee considering Community Planning.
- Newry and Mourne District Council membership of Opportunity Now and the Employees Forum on Disability.
- The Council's Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) is on the Board of Opportunity Now NI which strives to progress gender equality in the workplace.
- The Council's Environmental Health Department, as part of the Southern Group Environmental Health Committee, has produced information and leaflets in many languages such as Mandarin and Chinese, Polish, Russian, and Portuguese.

In addition to all of the above, Newry and Mourne District Council continues to avail of opportunities to meet with numerous community and voluntary organisations for the sharing of information and has co-ordinated events and seminars. A vital part of this has been the Mayor's Programme where numerous community and voluntary organisations are invited to receptions in the Council Offices. While these events have allowed Council Officers and Councillors to talk about their work, the question and answer sessions have proved to be beneficial in allowing groups and individuals to raise issues of concern directly with the Council Officers and Councillors present.

Section 2: Screening

- Provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u> ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u> esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter F or R</i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Corporate Wear Policy	R	NO	NO
Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace Policy	R	NO	NO
Dismissal and Disciplinary Procedure	R	NO	NO
Use of Employment Agency Workers	R	NO	NO
Work Shadowing Guidelines	R	NO	NO
Surveillance and Monitoring Policy	R	NO	NO
Proposed decision to sell Derryleckagh Playing Fields to Newry Mitchels GFC	F	NO	NO

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2006/07, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2007-08.

EQIA Timetable – April 2006 - March 2007

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 07 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant equality & good relations categories due to be affected.
Voluntary Contributions Policy	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two of the ten questions on which each applicant's project is assessed relate directly to how the project promotes equality of opportunity and improves good relations • Formal appeal process established for unsuccessful applicants

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2006- March 2007

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
N/A		

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 – March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
N/A		

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

Response

N/A

Section 4: Training

- Outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision, numbers attending, and conclusions from any training evaluations.

Response

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 not just meet the needs of participants over the lifespan of its Equality Scheme but further into the future. Newry and Mourne District 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 emerging issues, in addition to the Council's statutory equality duties to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and to ensuring improved delivery of our services. Newry and Mourne District Council continues to place value on training that is of both a formal and informal nature.

Examples of training delivered or attended by Council Officers during 2006-2007 has included:

- **Recruitment and Selection Interviewing Training** – attended by 21 employees
- **Safer Recruitment and Selection Training** – attended by 2 Officers from the Council's Personnel Section
- **Dignity at Work and Harassment Prevention Training** – this was specifically designed training for 8 employees with current issues within the workplace
- **Interviewee Training** – attended by 12 employees
- **Conducting a Formal Investigation** – attended by 4 employees
- **Investigators Training** – for employees who undertake investigations into grievances, and bullying and harassment. This was attended by 8 employees

- **Child Protection Training** – this was organized for relevant employees and Elected Members
- **Anti-Racism Training** – organized as part of the Anti-Racist Workplace Week this was attended by the Council's Elected Members and members of the Council's Management Team
- **Good Relations Training (Elected Members Forum)** – this was part of the ongoing seminars and facilitated discussion for all the Council's Elected Members
- **RNID Deaf Awareness Session** – this was attended by the Council's Equality Officer

Evaluations of training have enabled participants to indicate their views upon the benefits and relevancy of their training, and identifying further training needs.

Section 5: Communication

- Outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the statutory duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

Response

Newry and Mourne District Council are fully committed to communicating our commitment to the statutory duties. Examples of internal and external communication include:

- The Council's communications strategy has been equality screened and is continuously updated to reflect the changing needs. The Council has also joined the Plain English Campaign. In addition, during 2006-2007 the Council began the development of an Corporate Style Guide that will provide guidance for employees in relation to accessible communication and documents / publications.
- The location of the Council's Corporate Press Office within the Equality Unit. The Corporate Press Office is administered by the Assistant Director of Administration (Equality) and Public Relations Officer. All speeches, press releases, statements and corporate documents continued to reiterate our commitment to equality.
- The Council's website is used to disseminate information. This can be viewed in both the English and Irish language. Documents are provided in a way that they may be downloaded.
- The Mayor, 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.
- Publication of the 'Citizens News' booklet which is available in all accessible formats such as braille, large print, audio transcription, and the Irish language. This is produced on a six-monthly basis and circulated to every household in the Newry and Mourne District Council area.
- Council's monthly internal newsletter – 'The Grapevine'.
- Use of the Equality Unit stand at all promotional events.
- Production of staff information leaflets on a range of issues.
- 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 Conifers

Centre, Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust, the Local Government Staff Commission, Business in the Community, Employers Forum on Disability NI, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

- Presentations and meetings with target groups such as Newry and Mourne Vision Forum and Newry Deaf Club.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research.
- Outline any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

Response

As stated in our previous annual progress reports for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, Newry and Mourne District Council worked with the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland and other selected public authorities to develop a Disability Employment Action Plan and Policy. The ongoing implementation of this plan has assisted with the work towards the development of our Disability Action Plan which is to be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland by 30 June 2007.

For Newry and Mourne District Council civic dialogue and relationship building initiatives continues to be key motivators for enabling individuals, groups and organisations to live the spirit of the statutory duties, so creating informed decision-making process. It is on this basis that to further supplement available statistics and research the Council continues to look to develop and enhance the quality of its relationships and links in the voluntary, community and private sectors.

A variety of these have been established and these include:

- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Local Government Staff Commission Statutory Duty Equality Network
- Community Relations Unit, OFMDFM
- Southern Region Community Relations Officers Forum
- Membership of Opportunity Now / Business in the Community
- Social Security Agency
- Membership of Employers Forum on Disability and Business in the Community
- Links with locally based community networks e.g. ROSA, ROMAL, Confederation of Community Groups,
- Newry Visually Impaired Persons group, Newry Vision Forum
- Newry and Mourne Deaf Club, RNID 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 other organisations such as NICEM, Coalition on Sexual Orientation, Mediation Northern Ireland and the Parades Commission etc.
- Internet research

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Detail any initiatives/steps taken during the year to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

Response

During the period 2006-2007 Newry and Mourne District Council continued to liaise with service providers, individuals and consultants such as Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust, Social Security Agency, RNID, RNIB, Disability Action, Newry Visually Impaired Group, Newry Vision Forum, Visual Access Northern Ireland, Newry Deaf Club and Newry and Mourne Users Consortium. This has also meant seeking advice and support from organizations such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Local Government Staff Commission, Business in the Community, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ulster Scots Agency, POBAL, and the Plain English Campaign.

People can choose to contact the Council in person, telephone, email, fax and in writing in a language of their choice. As a matter of good practice, Newry and Mourne District Council makes all corporate documents available in alternative formats such as large print, audio CD, Braille and the Irish Language. The Council has also continued to produce relevant documents and information leaflets in Mandarin and Chinese, Polish, Russian, Italian, Portuguese and Ulster Scots.

However, following consultation with Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust, many of the documents are now purely provided on request, which has led to a cost effective approach to providing documents in alternative formats.

Newry and Mourne also advertises widely using the six local weekly papers, to communicate Council events and services such as changes to bin collection, funding opportunities, sporting summer schemes etc. The Council also uses the Northern Ireland national press to advertise certain job opportunities etc.

In addition, Newry and Mourne District Council engaged directly with stakeholders to discuss and provided information regarding services provided by the Council.

Various initiatives have been undertaken to improve access to services. Examples of this include:

- Meetings of the Household Panel are now bi-monthly rather than quarterly. Members of the Council's Management Team also attend these meetings.
- Monthly meetings of the Good Relations Forum and quarterly meetings of the Steering Group.
- Question and answer sessions with groups and individuals who are visiting the Council as part of the Mayor's programme. This has enabled groups and individuals to raise issues directly with the relevant Council Officers responsible for particular services.
- 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.
- Information seminars run in conjunction with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Employer's Forum on Disability Northern Ireland, the Local Government Staff Commission, Opportunity Now and Business in the Community.
- Participating and speaking at meetings of Newry Visually Impaired Club, Newry Users Group, Newry Vision Forum, Shopmobility etc
- Partnership events involving the Investing for Health, Community Safety Partnership, Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens Consortium, Conifers Resource Centre etc
- Information events regarding the Council's Good Relations Small Grant programme and Voluntary Contribution grant process.

Various systems of monitoring access to information and services are in operation such as:

- The Council's Customer Services Section monitors refuse collection and the numbers of households receiving assisted bin collections.
- The Council's Good Relations Section monitors and evaluates the impact of funding provided to groups through its small grant programme.
- 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.

- The Council's 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.

Section 8: Complaints

- Identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
 - received by the authority;
 - resolved by the authority (including how this achieved);
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

Response

Newry and Mourne District Council received one Section 75 complaint during 2006-2007. This complaint related to the terminology used on an invitation issued on behalf of our Mayor Pat McGinn and Chairmen of Down District Council (Cllr Carmel O'Boyle) and Banbridge District Council (Cllr Jim McElroy). (Both the office holders in Banbridge and Down District Councils refer to themselves as 'Chairman'.)

The complainant disagreed with the use of the term 'Chairmen' on the invitation and found the wording offensive. This was referred to both the Council's solicitor and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland for guidance on whether its use is offensive and whether the Council in fulfilling its public duty was failing to adhere to their equality duties.

The complainant was advised that our legal advice stated that whilst 'Chairmen' may be a term that some might find offensive there is nothing to suggest, within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, that its use by a District Council on an invitation to a social event would be in breach of the District Council's duty in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

In light of the Equality Commission's advice relating to gender neutral language, the legal guidance was considered at the Council's Staff and Policy Committee in May 2006. At this meeting it was agreed that Council leave the decision to individual Chairs as to whether or not they wished to use the title 'Chairman'. The complainant was advised of this decision.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

Response

Newry and Mourne District Council's Equality Unit has responsibility for co-ordinating and managing Section 75 consultation exercises and processes.

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.

All levels of engagement with groups and organizations, be they formal or informal, are viewed by Newry and Mourne District Council as being an opportunity to better understand views and opinions regarding the Council, its policy and its delivery of services.

In view of the limited nature of engagement and feedback based purely on using written consultation, Newry and Mourne District Council prefers a more qualitative interactive approach to engaging consultees. This ensures 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.

During the period 2006-2007, Newry and Mourne District Council used various mechanisms to engage and consult.

Examples of these included:

- our Household Panel,
- Mayor's programme of hosting visits of community and voluntary organisations to the Council,
- the Newry Good Relations Forum,
- the Challenge of Change Convention,

- interagency roundtable discussions,
- work with the Newry Vision Forum,
- providing numerous presentations to groups such as to Newry Visually Impaired Group's visit to the Council hosted by the Mayor. These provided time for direct engagement through question and answer sessions where groups and individuals could raise issues of concern directly with the Council Officers and Councillors present.
- events such as 'I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here' which enabled young people to interact with Councillors online.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

Response

Newry and Mourne District Council has had an active Community Relations / Good Relations Programme since 1989. The Council receives 75% of programme funding from the District Council Community Relations Programme and an annual strategic plan must be submitted to the Community Relations Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for approval.

During 2006, Newry and Mourne District Council provided the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland with a case study of their work detailing the evolution of the Council's Good Relations Programme. This can be accessed within Chapter 5 of the Equality Commission's consultation document, 'Promoting Good Relations – A Guide for Public Authorities'.

The Council's Good Relations Programme continues to be underpinned by work undertaken during the Relationships in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence initiative (REDI). Details of the REDI initiative with the University of Ulster and Counteract can be accessed in the University of Ulster's Summary Report, 'Investing in Trust Building and Good Relations in a Public Sector Organisation'. (ISBN 1-85923-167-5)

During 2006-2007 the Council commissioned a further Good Relations Audit. This reviewed the delivery of the good relations programme in light of the Racial Equality Strategy, A Shared Future document and Triennial Action Plan.

The audit helped develop the strategic direction for an effective action plan which would have both an internal and external dimension, and be delivered by the Council's Internal and External Good Relations Officers. It defined that good relations within Newry and Mourne should be, 'enabling the continued development of an inclusive district through the building of good relations and trust thereby enabling mutual understanding and respect for the diverse cultures and heritages of the district'.

The current focus of Newry and Mourne District Council's Good Relations programme is primarily on raising awareness and understanding, and encouraging relationship building through providing space for difficult conversations to take place between citizens of different backgrounds and traditions.

The Good Relations audit identified the following four key strategic areas of work:

- **Mainstreaming** – of Good Relations both within Council and within the community. The aim of mainstreaming is to bring Good Relations to the heart of the Council and Communities thought processes in terms of their development and structure. This will be achieved through examples of good practice, opening communication, development of partnerships and training.
- **Engagement** – of the community and Council in Good Relations projects to make it a real and tangible process.
- **BME Community** – there is a growing BME community within the Newry and Mourne district. The aim of this area is to address the needs of the BME community on a partnership basis. The action plan will address the needs externally with the community and the service delivery of the Council internally.
- **Symbolism** – This will address the physical manifestations within the District such as flags, emblems, and sectarian graffiti. The aim of this area is to work with the community to address symbolism whilst addressing the policy areas within Council.

Under the four strategic areas above, Newry and Mourne District Council's programme of work has included:

- Good Relations Grant Programme - this provides financial assistance for groups and organizations addressing issues of good relations within the community. It is administered by the External Good Relations Officer, and all programmes which receive funding are evaluated to identify the benefits and outcomes of the projects.
- Good Relations Forum – as already stated in this report the Council views facilitating and co-ordinating community discussion and dialogue as a key element of building and sustaining relationships. The Newry Good Relationships Forum, co-ordinated by the External Good Relations Officer, is widely regarded as a model of good practice both in Northern Ireland and also in Great Britain.

- Challenge of Change Convention (5 -7 June 2006) – As stated in our annual report for 2005-2006, members of the Newry Good Relations Forum and the Belfast Civic Leadership Group undertook a week-long study visit to Amsterdam to learn more about how Amsterdam is managing the process the diversity within society. The learning assisted towards the planning of the three-day ‘Challenge of Change Convention’ in Newry, during June 2006. It was organised by Newry and Mourne District Council, Belfast City Council and Louth County Council, and facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland. The convention’s theme was addressing diversity in a society still struggling with division. It has international speakers such as Professor John Paul Lederach, Trevor Phillips, Dr Jeff Crisp, Eddie McVeigh and Dr Duncan Morrow, and attracted over 340 delegates, including groups from Oldham and Burnley.
- Elected Members Forum – this is co-ordinated by the Internal Good Relations Officer. Working in partnership with the Community Relations Council, it is facilitated by Dr Duncan Morrow and operates under Chatham House Rules. The aim of the forum is to provide Councillors with an opportunity to engage in facilitated discussion about good relations based issues outside of the Council Chamber, with no press present. This continues to be a valuable mechanism for meaningful engagement between Councillors.
- Events such as ‘I’m a Councillor, Get me out of here’ which enabled young people to interact with Councillors online.
- Support for a programme of cross community events with a particular focus upon diversity and a programme of events aimed at increasing understanding of cultural traditions and identity.
- Providing advice and support to Departments, employees, individuals, groups and external organizations such as the Community Safety Partnership, Drugs and Alcohol Partnership and SELB Youth Service.
- Influencing policy and enabling informed decision-making through participation on various committees such as the Council’s St Patrick’s Day Committee and Ulster Scots Committee, and contributing to projects delivered through Newry Museum, Neighbourhood Partnership, Local Strategy Partnership and Community Services Section 9(Community Support Plan).
- Continuing to mainstream a good relations ethos throughout the Council through the REDI initiative.

- In recognizing the growing numbers of migrant workers within the Newry and Mourne District Council area the Council is currently taking forward a number of projects aimed at addressing the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents of the area. The Challenge of Change project has been developed as a partnership between the Council and Louth County Council. The project, which will formally begin during 2007-2008, will examine the barriers to services and cultural awareness in the Councils.

As stated previously, fuller details of some of these initiatives are contained within Chapter 5 of the Equality Commission's consultation document, 'Promoting Good Relations – A Guide for Public Authorities'.

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments

Response

Newry and Mourne District Council would like to commend the Equality Commission on a much improved reporting template which we believe has allowed us to better report progress on implementation of our Section 75 duties.

While this report has provided examples of ongoing work, it should be acknowledged the programme is always work in progress. The Council believes that working to develop and maintain sustainable relationships is the key principle underpinning civic society, and initiatives centred around structured dialogue processes such as household panels, community forums and Councillor forums are pathways to this.

While Newry and Mourne District Council believe we have strived to develop examples of good practice, it must be recognised that these are initiatives which have worked for us, and not all initiatives are directly transferable to other Local Authorities within Northern Ireland.