



Equality Scheme 2017 - 2022 Five Year Review

Background

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Equality Scheme describes arrangements that were established, which we are obliged to follow, in order to ensure that our statutory duties are fulfilled in relation to Section 75 (1) and (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These statutory duties require the Council to have:

- Due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and
- Regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.³

The Scheme includes arrangements for (a) training staff, (b) assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity, and (c) monitoring any adverse impact of those policies that have been adopted.

The purpose of this five-year review is to examine how these arrangements have been applied and to assess how effective they have been in assisting the Council to comply with the Section 75 duties.

All Public Authorities, which have Section 75 equality schemes, are obliged to review those schemes periodically:

'A public authority shall, before the end of the period of five years beginning with the submission of its current scheme, or the latest review of that scheme under this subparagraph, whichever is later, review that scheme and inform the [Equality] Commission of the outcome of the review.'

The Equality Commission guidance states that public authorities are not obliged to make changes to their scheme. They may need to make minor changes such as a change to a name or address but only where the public authority wishes to make substantive changes, is there a requirement to consult and re-submit the scheme to the ECNI.

'Equality schemes may need to be amended to ensure that they are up to date to reflect any changes that have been made to a public authority's organisational structure, functions or contact details. Such changes should be communicated to consultees however these changes would not require that a new scheme be developed for Commission approval.'

As a result, the only amendments included are an updated organisational chart to reflect the new organisational structure of the Council (Appendix 1), an updated list of consultees which is included in Appendix 3 and a revised timetable of measures which is included in Appendix 4.

As there are no significant changes to the Council's scheme, the Scheme as approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in February 2017 has been updated

accordingly.

When the review is Committee approved, and full Council ratified, there is a requirement to inform the Equality Commission of the review and its outcome.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Equality Scheme

The Council's Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on 22 February 2017.

The Council's current Equality Scheme can be viewed online via the Council's website - <https://www.fermanaghomagh.com/app/uploads/2017/02/170222ApprovedFODCEqualityScheme.pdf>

The Council's Commitment to the Statutory Duties (Senior Management and Elected Members)

The Equality Scheme and the responsibility for its implementation was placed within the Chief Executives Directorate, for much of the last five years and indeed from the commencement of the new Council in 2015. However, despite this, all other Directorates had responsibilities for Equality and various aspects of the Equality Scheme, ensuring that their service areas are in compliance.

Going forward, the responsibility for the Equality Scheme will be placed within the Corporate Services and Governance Directorate, however there will be no change in the requirement for all directorates and services to have a responsibility to ensure their compliance.

The continued support from senior management has ensured that the section 75 duties are integrated throughout the Council's directorates, services and functions. During the five-year period the Council has produced four annual equality progress reports detailing the Council's progress regarding compliance with the statutory duties.

The Equality Scheme, during this period, was overseen by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services. The fact that this person attended all Senior Management Team meetings, as well as ensuring that Equality Screening is mandatory for all new/revised Policies, demonstrates the importance placed upon the Section 75 Duties by the Council. Section 75 plays a key role on the Strategic Management and Planning within the Council.

The implementation of the Statutory Duties is kept under regular review and is discussed regularly with the Senior Management Team, with reports being made to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee – which are then subsequently ratified by the full Council.

The Council's covering reports for all Committee meetings include a section where Officers must outline the equality and good relations implications. Officers are regularly advised on the importance of completing this section. The Council's own guidance on developing Council policy has ensured that Officers appreciate the importance of subjecting policies to

equality screening at an early stage and attaching screening exercises to all Council policies prior to issuing for consultation and getting Council approval.

To further support the Council's commitment to the statutory duties, information is placed on the staff intranet including:

- Equality Screening Template.
- Committee Report Template (including guidance on how to complete this).

All staff will receive an update on the Council's statutory duties as part of their induction – a presentation is made detailing the duties and what this means for them as employees. These induction sessions usually take place every six months.

The Council's commitment to Section 75 is also evidenced through the 2030 Community Plan. Within the Community Plan 'equality, inclusivity and diversity' are identified as some of the shared values and principles which underpin the vision. The cut across all themes and outcomes and 'are placed at the core of all services and actions, as we work towards achieving a shared future for all'.

A full break down of employee and Elected Member training sessions is contained later on in this review document within the Training section.

The Council also has a Disability Advisory Group which consists of seven Elected Members and eight Volunteer Members who represent various disability organisations or people with various disabilities. This group offers advice on Council services and facilities in relation to matters concerning disability and accessibility. All minutes from this Group are then taken to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee for noting by all Elected Members.

Assessing and Consulting on Impact of Policies

In the previous five-year period the Council has produced 10 screening reports for all of the policies and decisions that have been screened. Indeed, all of these reports are available to be viewed on the Council website.

There is significant stakeholder engagement undertaken for all Council Strategies, Plans, Policies and Projects and mitigations have been considered for several policies. Some good examples include projects such as the Enniskillen Public Realm Scheme which included significant engagement with Disability Groups as well as the Council's Disability Advisory Group and Access and Inclusion Steering Groups. A detailed screening exercise was also completed on the project.

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have utilised new online methods of consultation, such as online video meetings including:

- Webex.
- Microsoft Teams.
- Zoom.

These methods of consulting were very useful and successful for engaging with younger people – a traditionally hard to reach demographic.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, over the last five-year period, has also produced two Equality Action Plans each of which were influenced by the feedback from consultees during the consultation phase.

Equality Impact Assessments

During the five-year period (2017-2022), the Council undertook one Equality Impact Assessment process, covering:

- The Revised Street Naming and Numbering Policy (including Dual Language Street Signs)

This EQIA process closed on Friday 15 October 2021 and the report on this EQIA is expected to be taken to the Council's Regeneration and Community Committee in December 2021.

Monitoring of Adverse Impacts of Policies

The Council is aware of the importance of monitoring its policies for future adverse impacts.

Those interacting with the Council are often anonymously monitored for their Section 75 category and the Community Planning section has collated a significant amount of data (and partners) which has been extremely beneficial and will be used to form future Audits of Inequalities, Equality Action Plans, etc.

The Council has also employed a Statistician for several years and this greatly assists Officers when preparing evidence for Screening and EQIA (if required).

All staff are reminded to include arrangements for monitoring in their Screening documents and with the ever increasing availability of data and evidence, this should continue to improve.

Training for Employees and Elected Members

Throughout the last five-year period, the Council has offered several equality and disability related training programmes. Each of these sessions are detailed within the Annual Progress Reports and a brief overview is contained below.

2016/2017 Reporting Period:

- Sign Language Training
- Autism Awareness Training
- Deaf Awareness Training

2017/2018 Reporting Period:

- Dementia Awareness Training.
- Autism Awareness Training.
- Sign Language Training.

2018/2019 Reporting Period:

- JAM Card training.
- Dementia Awareness Training.
- Traveller Cultural Awareness Training.

2019/2020 Reporting Period:

- Equality and Section 75 Awareness Raising – Implications for you as a Councillor.
- Deaf Awareness Training.
- Basic Sign Language Awareness Training.
- Learning Disability Awareness Training.
- Gender identity Awareness Training.
- Mental Health Awareness Training.

Additionally, during this reporting period, unfortunately there were two training sessions (Visual Awareness Training and Transgender Inclusion and Awareness Training) that did not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Both sessions will take place will be rearranged to take place #when it is safe to do so, in person.

Public Access to Information and Services

Throughout the five-year period, the Council has continued to ensure that key information and documents have been made in alternative formats upon request.

Some other examples of good practice which the Council has implemented over the five year reporting period include:

- The introduction of an accessibility and translation tool for the Council website (2017). The new tool replaced the limited Google Translate function and allows website users to:
 - Translate entire webpages (accurately) into 97 different languages.
 - Read webpages aloud in a human-sounding voice.
 - Read PDFs in their accessible formats.
 - Highlight each word as it is spoken, to show users where you are on the page.
 - Magnify text to a user's preferred font size and font style.
 - Convert 'selected text' into MP3 Audio format files.
 - Mask information on the screen, in order to help users focus on a particular area.

These improvements assist several groups of people including people who have a visual impairment or sight loss, people with dyslexia as well as those for whom English is not a first language.

- Access Guides have been developed for all Council venues and facilities. Visual Guides have been developed for several Council venues and facilities which allow people to obtain a visual understanding of the venue before visiting. These videos outline reception areas, where to go and what to expect. Sign Language Interpreters are provided at all council events, as well as key meetings where required i.e. meetings of the Access and Inclusion Steering

Groups, etc.

Installing new Pool Pods within the swimming areas of both the Fermanagh Lakeland Forum and Omagh Leisure Complex – allowing for better access to swimming for people with disabilities.

- Purchasing hearing loop systems for all Council venues and facilities.
- Introduction, and Development, of the Personal Assistance Support Scheme – which permits people with disabilities to bring a carer with them to the two theatres in the District for free.
- Achieving the Autism Impact Award for both The Townhall in Enniskillen and The Grange in Omagh.
- Organising a mobility ramble of Enniskillen town centre ahead of the upcoming works on the Enniskillen Public Realm Scheme. This included members of the Disability Advisory Group, Elected Members and relevant Council employees.
- Development of an Age Friendly Strategy.
- Annual conferences and events organised to celebrate International Day for People with Disabilities.
- Procurement of a Sign Video Relay system to provide assistance to people who are deaf or are hard of hearing.
- Provision of JAM (Just a Minute) Card Training to Council employees and hereby making the Council 'Jam Card Friendly'.

Complaints

During this five-year reporting period the Council received two complaints in relation to Section 75 and its Equality Scheme. Both complaints were received in March 2019 and were relating to an issue with an 'Expression of Interest' for a Council venue and area of land.

An internal investigation was commenced within the 2018/2019 reporting period, and the Head of Policy and Strategic Services responded to both complaints within the one-month time limit. Both responses were issued within the 2019/2020 reporting period and no further correspondence has been received.

The Council is not aware of any other complaints under Section 75, and is not aware of any complaints referred to the Equality Commission under Section 75, during the five-year period.

Overall Implementation of the Equality Scheme

Over the last five year reporting period, there has been significant commitment from the Council's Senior Management Team and Elected Members, which has supported the implementation of the Scheme.

Training has been arranged and delivered across all Council directorates, ensuring that there are ample opportunities to learn about the various issues that need to be addressed within the organisation.

Customer service is a key Council priority and as such the Council's customers come from

a range of Section 75 categories with a range of varying needs. Various policies which have been put in place recognise this diversity for example:

- JAM initiative.
- SignVideo Relay Service.
- Development of the Access and Visual Guides.
- Accessibility and interpretation tool for the website.

More policies are being subject to the Equality Screening process, however there are challenges recognising exactly what a policy is for the purposes of Section 75. However, ongoing publications released from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and further staff training following this review of the Equality Scheme, should help to address this.

Each year, more data is being used, and accessed, to assist with the screening of policies and this in turn allows us to improve the quality of each screening.

Conclusion

Following the review, it is suggested that only minor amendments are made to the Council's Equality Scheme, namely:

- Including an updated organisational structure, which will be updated as required going forward (Appendix 1).
- Including an updated list of consultees (Appendix 3).
- Including a revised timetable of measures (Appendix 4).