

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Public Authority Five Year Review Report on Equality Scheme
(2015 – 2020)
Review March 2020

Background

The Council made a commitment to conduct a 5 year review of its Equality Scheme. The Equality Scheme was approved on 25 March 2015. The Council is required to inform the Equality Commission about the outcome of this review.

The Commission guidance on conducting a 5 year review states the following;

An equality scheme describes certain arrangements that a public authority has set-up and which it is obliged to apply and follow as a means of fulfilling the duties imposed on it by Section 75(1) and (2).i.e. the duties to have-

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

This 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.

Public Authorities who 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 purpose of a 5 year review is to examine how the arrangements have been applied and to assess how effective they have been in assisting public authorities to comply with the Section 75 duties.

Paragraph 3 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.

As a result the only amendments included are an updated organisational chart and 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 Commission in March 2015 has been updated.

Leadership and the Council's commitment to the statutory duties

The support from senior management has ensured that the section 75 duties are integrated throughout the Council's functions. During the 5 year period the Council has produced four annual equality progress reports detailing the Council's progress regarding compliance with the statutory duties.

The Council's covering reports for Committee 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.

The Council's elected members have requested further information in relation to equality screening exercises which has ensured a focus on equality issues in relation to policy development.

The Head of Governance and Democratic Services and the Policy & Diversity Officer regularly discuss equality initiatives and changes to equality policy at the Council's Head of Department meetings. The Policy & Diversity Officer is a member of a number of Council working group/project meetings where initiatives and changes to policy are again discussed.

The Policy & Diversity Officer chairs the staff equality working group. This group consists of staff members from across a number of Council Directorates. This group helps to inform the Council's equality and disability action plans and they relay any changes and updates on equality policy to their respective departments. These have been effective ways of embedding the equality duties into the various Council functions.

To further support the communication of the Council's statutory duties to Council staff, information is placed on the Council's Intranet such as the equality screening template and guidance notes as well as the guidance for developing council policy. The Council's Department Heads are also emailed any updates.

The Council's commitment to Equality has been evidenced through the Borough Community Plan and the Corporate and Business Planning Process. Equality is a cross cutting theme in the Borough Community Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan. Equality measures are included in relevant business plans. A number of equality measures are also included in the Council's Customer Care Action Plan which is updated annually.

Assessing and Consulting on Impact of Policies

In the five year period the Council has produced 10 screening reports and a total of 49 policies. These are available on the Council website at the following link <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/council/policies/> All consultees are informed by e-mail or post of their availability.

Significant stakeholder engagement is undertaken for Council Strategies, Plans and Projects. Mitigations have been considered in a number of policies. Some of the best examples include projects such as the Dromore Public Realm Scheme where there was significant engagement with Disability Groups and a detailed screening exercise was completed. Engagement has again commenced with the groups in relation to Banbridge

Public Realm. The Council's own guidance on Council policy advises officers to issue completed screening exercises alongside consultation documents where possible. As a result, a number of screening exercises have been uploaded to the Council's consultation Hub and issued for consultation alongside other consultation documents. The Equality Commission has recommended this approach as good practice.

The Council has produced 3 Equality Action Plans each with an accompanying Audit of Inequalities and feedback from consultees has influenced the development of these plans. Face to Face meetings have been held with local groups.

Equality Impact Assessments

Over the five year period the Council produced and consulted on two Equality Impact Assessments. They were the Borough Community Plan – Connected and the Local Development Plan – Preferred Options Paper. These plans were subject to the EQIA process because of their strategic importance and their ability to impact on so many people within the Borough. It was acknowledged that it helps set the tone for future project development where the equality and good relations duties will be considered. To ensure the equality duties were mainstreamed from an early stage, as part of the development of the Community Plan 7 thematic action planning teams were set up. Each group agreed a baseline 'needs analysis' and produced a findings report which included identification of potential equality issues.

Monitoring of Adverse Impacts of Policies.

The Council is aware of the importance of monitoring its policies for future adverse impact. Those participating in the Community Planning Process were monitored in accordance with section 75 category and this information was used to inform the Equality Impact Assessment. The Council's Community Planning Department has collated a significant amount of data which has been beneficial and has helped to inform the Council's revised Audit of Inequalities. The Council employs a Statistician which greatly assists Officers when preparing evidence for screening exercises and Equality Impact Assessments. Officers are reminded to include arrangements for monitoring in their screening forms and with an increasing availability of data, this should continue to improve. The Council welcomes the Equality Commission's new publication Section 75-Using Evidence in Policy Making – A signposting guide. This will also ensure more data is accessed for screening exercises.

Staff Training

The Council offers a number of equality and disability training programmes to its staff. The following training has been delivered.

Training	In attendance
Equality and Disability Training	232
Policy Screening, Rural Needs and Equality Impact Assessment Training	105
Mental Health Awareness	37
Autism Awareness	31
Autism and Social Stories	11
Makaton Language Training	44
Communication and Makaton	10
Jam Card Training	212
Dementia awareness	23
Dementia and ADHD	5
Traveller awareness	19

The Policy & Diversity Officer delivers the Equality and Disability Training programme regularly throughout the year. There are two different programmes, one tailored for frontline staff and one for Managers. The Policy & Diversity Officer also delivers Policy Screening, Rural Needs and Equality Impact Assessment Training. Delivering the programmes provides the staff with an opportunity to discuss situations they have encountered and explore real life scenarios through case studies. This ensures they have more confidence in delivering our services to a wide range of customers. Evaluations have shown that staff have benefitted from the training most where practical scenarios were explored and examples used were most closely related to their area of work. In addition, specific programmes in relation to mental health, autism awareness, dementia awareness and traveller awareness have been offered to staff.

Elected members also attended training delivered by the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council.

Public Access to Information and Services

The Council has ensured that key information and documents have been made available in alternative formats on request.

- A procedure for translation and interpretation was developed and it provides staff members with information on how to provide interpretation and translation services as and when required. The Council's telephone interpreting service is provided by thebigword. Face to Face interpreting is provided by local organisations such as STEP. Written translations have also been provided. The Council also has a list of providers for producing alternative formats such as large print, audio and easy read.

- An Accessible Communications and Inclusive Language Guide has been developed. As well as ensuring compliance with section 75, accessible communication is central to ensuring the Council provides good customer service and customer service has been identified as one of the Council's top priorities. An Inclusive and Accessible Events guide has also been developed to assist event organisers address accessibility at events.

- Recite Me was added to the Corporate and the GetActive ABC websites which will ensure they are accessible for people with sensory impairments.

- The AccessAble initiative was extended across the Borough. AccessAble is an Access Guide. A range of venues within the Borough have been surveyed which will ensure that disabled people and their families can make informed choices about where they want to visit. The Access Guides are available on www.AccessAble.co.uk.

- In 2018 the Navan Centre received the Autism NI Impact Award which recognises organisations that strive to be more accessible for customers with Autism. Reasonable adjustments in place include two Autism Champions, sensory equipment, visual aids for use throughout visit, relaxed educational visits on request, VIP band system to enable staff to support visitors with hidden disabilities.

- In November 2018 the Council officially became a JAM Card friendly organisation. The card or app can be used to alert staff in our facilities that the person needs a little bit of patience and understanding when interacting.

- Following engagement with the Alzheimer's Society, the Market Place Theatre hosted its first Dementia Friendly Screening in September 2019 and went on to have a total of four screenings during the reporting period. These screenings are different from standard screenings in the following ways;
 - Numbers are limited to accommodate wheelchair users and carers
 - The studio theatre is set out cabaret style with tables and chairs. This eases access for those with mobility problems.
 - House lights are illuminated and doors remain open.
 - Subtitles are displayed for those who have hearing difficulties
 - Refreshments are provided throughout the screenings
 - Only staff that have completed Dementia Friendly Training can work at these events.

These policies and initiatives ensure that our information and services are inclusive.

Complaints

In March 2016 the Equality Commission contacted the Council to advise that it had received a potential complaint of failure to comply with an approved Equality Scheme in relation to a Council policy. In August 2016 the Equality Commission advised the Council that its Statutory Duty Investigations Team would not be authorising an investigation of the complaint because the Council policy was due to be reviewed.

In May 2019, the Council received a complaint and was requested by the complainant to consider it in accordance with its Equality Scheme Complaints procedure. In accordance with its procedure the Council provided a response and advised the complainant that it did not believe it had failed to comply with its Equality Scheme. The complainant contacted the Equality Commission regarding his complaint. The Council has not received any further update.

Overall implementation of the Equality Scheme

In the last five years, there has been commitment from the Council's senior management team and elected members which has supported the implementation of the Scheme. Ongoing training of staff and the mainstreaming of equality into the Corporate and business planning process has also been effective. The Policy & Diversity Officer has delivered this training which has ensured that there is an opportunity to learn about the issues that need to be addressed within the organisation and a better understanding of the issues that impact on staff. Customer care is one of the Council's top priorities and our customers fall into a range of section 75 categories with a range of needs. The various policies and initiatives in place such as JAM, AccessAble, translation and interpretation services recognise the diversity of our customers.

More policies are being subject to the equality screening process but there are still challenges in recognising what is a policy for the purposes of section 75. During training delivery it is clear that this has confused staff but it is anticipated that regular training should help to address this. The Council welcomes the Equality Commission's new publication Section 75-Using Evidence in Policy Making – A signposting guide. This will also ensure more data is accessed for screening exercises and the quality of screening exercises continues to improve. This document has been placed on the Council's Intranet and issued to the Heads of Department to be shared with staff.