

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

### **1 Introduction**

In accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is obligated, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across the categories specified within the legislation.

To fulfil these statutory duties, the Council has developed and implemented an Equality Scheme, which outlines the framework through which equality of opportunity and good relations are mainstreamed within its functions and decision-making processes

In compliance with the requirement set out in Chapter 10, paragraph 10.1 of the Equality Scheme—mandating a review at least once every five years—the Council has undertaken a formal review of the Scheme. This review has been conducted in accordance with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance titled "*Guidance on Conducting a 5-Year Review of an Equality Scheme*" (July 2016).

### **2 Review**

The purpose of the review is to examine the arrangements that have been in place and how effective Council has been in complying with its section 75 duties.

The Equality Commission has stated that a review should be based on evidence, and in its guidance details examples of evidence that Council may wish to consider when undertaking the review.

In the following section, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has detailed several examples of good practice and outlined how Council is meeting the requirements set out by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI).

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

### **3 Evidence examples**

#### ***Section 75 annual progress reports that the public authority has completed***

- (i) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has submitted Section 75 annual progress reports in line with The Equality Commission's guidelines each year. The reports are compiled with the support and information of Council Officers from across the Council's Directorates and outlines how each section is meeting the requirements of the Equality Scheme. The completed annual report is presented to the Council's Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee for recommendation followed by ratification at the Council's monthly meeting. During the reporting period all annual reports on progress were submitted to the ECNI before the 31 August deadline.

#### ***Evidence that senior staff are complying with their scheme commitments and providing appropriate leadership***

- (i) The Head of Corporate Policy regularly attends meetings of the Council's Senior Management Team and Corporate Management Team to advise, guide and update officers on Council's statutory obligations. The guidance is then disseminated across departments and to officers to ensure Council meets its obligations.
- (ii) Officers continue to utilise the council's corporate reporting template which was introduced during the previous five-year review period. The reporting template enables officers to confirm they have given due regard to the any equality and good relations matters and that an equality screening has been completed, if required.

Officers can also detail in the report any consultations proposed to be undertaken will meet the requirements as set out within the Council's Equality Scheme. This template also allows the Corporate Policy and Equality Officer to follow up with officers on the completion of equality screenings and consultations.

## Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme

- (iii) Council continues to provide equality screening training for Council officials. This training is provided to new employees as well as refresher courses for other officers.
- (iv) One-to-one guidance, advice and support is also provided to officers as and when required by the Head of Corporate Policy and the Corporate Policy and Equality Officer.
- (v) The Council's new online E Learning Platform also provides greater access and availability for council employees to avail of all training. Examples of training provided over the five-year period is detailed below:

Training Programme	Participants
Introduction to Health and Safety	For all employees
Equality Screening and Equality Impact Assessments	Senior management, Heads of Service, employees
Equality Scheme and diversity awareness	Compulsory for all employees
Dignity at Work	For all employees
Code of Conduct	For all employees
Recruitment and Selection	Compulsory for staff with line management responsibility and involved or likely to be involved in Recruitment & Selection
Investigations Officer	Nominated employees
Modern slavery and human trafficking	For all employees
Safeguarding awareness training	For all employees
Women in leadership – building your potential	Nominated employees
Irish Language training	Nominated employees
Let's talk Menopause	Any employee who wished to attend
Online training on domestic abuse and sexual violence policy	Nominated employees

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

Queer possibility & LGBT+	Open to any employee who wished to attend
Disability Awareness – delivered by CEDAR Foundation	Nominated employees
Ulster Scots training – delivered by Ulster Scots Community Network	Open to any employees who wished to attend

As the reporting period covered the COVID pandemic years many of the training programmes were delivered online.

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.

The Council's Learning and Development Manager undertakes evaluation of the Council's corporate training.

- (vi) The Chief Executive's Equality and Good Relations Reference Group continues to be the Council's vehicle for considering and discussing politically sensitive issues with a view of reaching a common understanding, agreement and actions. The Reference Group operates under Chatham House Rules and are not formally minuted meetings. Recommendations from the Reference Group are provided in Officer reports to the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee. The Reference Group has held twenty-two meetings during the five-year review period.
- (vii) In line with its commitment to accessibility and communication the Council's Bilingualism Policy sets out the Council's commitment to facilitate and encourage the promotion and use of both the Irish language and the English language in the Council area. In promoting its civic leadership role, the Council continues to mainstream the use of the Irish Language as part of its overall Corporate Communications Strategy through the principle of progressive realisation. This enables the use of Irish to be an effective means of communication for citizens. Within Council, an online service has been developed by the Irish Language unit to allow council employees to request translations for

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

council services and communications in an effective and efficient timeframe.

### ***Evidence that decision – makers are aware of their obligations***

- (i) The Council's Directorate Business Plans makes direct reference to the Section 75 statutory duties and actions relating to the implementation of the Council's Equality Scheme.
- (ii) To ensure that Council is fulfilling its statutory obligations, the following responsibilities are included in all job descriptions of Council employees:
  - Promote diversity across the organisation and in the Department by adhering to the Council's Equal Opportunity policies and procedures and avoiding all forms of discrimination both as an employer and a service provider.
  - Promote Equality and Diversity across the organisation by demonstrating an open commitment to and actively promoting and celebrating diversity, promoting social inclusion and community cohesion.
- (iii) Elected members also continue to participate in various training programmes including Equality and Good Relations, Code of Conduct, Equality Screening and Cultural Awareness training. The training equips Elected members with the relevant expertise and knowledge ensuring that consideration is given to section 75 in the decision-making process within Council.
- (iv) The Corporate Policy Section has produced guidance and direction on policy development and policy review processes. The importance of policy development and reviews is directed by the Council's Senior Management Team and Officers must comply and review within a four-year period or sooner if required. To ensure access to information, all policies are placed on the Council's website as well as the Intranet and the Council's R Drive.

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

### ***Good Practice measures undertaken by public authorities***

- (i) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council continues to be an active member of the Local Government Staff Commission Statutory Duty Network. This network continues to be a space for officers from all councils to meet to share examples of best practice and provide advice, guidance, knowledge and expertise on issues relating to equality related matters. Since the last five-year review, the Council's nominated officer has worked with colleagues from various Councils to produce a Diversity Ambassadors Network which has been endorsed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.
- (ii) The Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Shared Schools programme is a district wide scheme which brings together young people from different community backgrounds to deliver programmes with the aim of building relationships and provide a greater understanding of diversity and inclusion.
- (iii) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Directorate have continued to work to ensure that events held across the district are inclusive. Accessible toilet facilities are available at several events including the St Patrick's day events in Newry and Downpatrick, Wake the Giant in Warrenpoint, the Eats and Beats Festival in Newcastle and the Newry Christmas light switch on event. Other examples of inclusivity include the Footsteps in the Forest festival held sensory sessions, Irish language specific sessions and Newry Arts Festival held musical workshops focusing on sensory development and people with dementia.
- (iv) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Active and Healthy Communities Directorate continue to provide specific leisure programmes for people with disabilities. Programmes of support include dedicated Autism swim sessions, youth disability multi sports sessions, the Step into Health – Physical Activity Referral Programme, and a Buddy Card system.

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

- (v) The twenty-two meetings of the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group held over the five-year reporting review covered a variety of issues and discussions. Notice of Motions referred to the Reference Group for consideration included the impact of misogyny and transmisogyny, school uniform policy, ending violence against women and girls and support for the development of Ulster Scots. The Reference Group also considered and developed a process and policy for considering requests to place artworks/sculptures on Council property as well as detailed discussions on town and village signage. Members also reached consensus on recommending additional financial assistance funding programmes for the community which included a fund to commemorate the Centenary of Northern Ireland and King Charles III Coronation funds.
- (vi) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council continues its participation in the Local Government Staff Commission's Equality and Diversity in Local Council's initiative and appointment of Diversity Ambassadors. One officer and four councillors are the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Diversity Ambassadors.
- (vii) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's District Electoral Area Forums are the Council's model of engagement and provide opportunities for all sections of the community to participate in discussions and operate as part of the decision-making process. Initiatives undertaken include building resilience courses for primary school aged children, positive aging events and warm space open house schemes as well as addressing multi agency approaches to local issues.

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

### ***Examples of collaborative working in relations to scheme development, screening, impact assessment, consultation and monitoring***

- (i) As previous detailed, Council's Head of Corporate Policy and Corporate Policy and Equality Officer provide training, advice and guidance on equality screening policies as well as dedicated independent training programmes. During the five-year review period 124 equality screenings were completed. Quarterly policy screening reports are tabled at the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee. All equality screenings are available to access on the Council's website. Consultees on the equality database are also notified by email.
- (ii) In relation to consultation, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Consultation and Engagement toolkit sets out Council's commitment to ensuring a comprehensive corporate approach is taken to actively encourage participation. During the review period, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council developed two Corporate Plans (2021- 2023 and 2023-2027). The Corporate Plans outline the Council's commitment and promise to deliver services to residents. Comprehensive consultation undertaken included an online public survey alongside a represented sample of over 700 residents aged 16 plus from across the district to gather views on issues such as services, health and well-being and the economy. Workshops were also held with specific section 75 groups and officers from the Corporate Policy Section also attended each of the Council's DEA Forums to engage with members.
- (iii) When undertaking the Council's new Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan 2023-2027, Council undertook a robust consultation process to ensure that all voices were heard. An online comprehensive survey, prepared by the Council's Evidence and Research team was available on all council online media channels for resident and targeted consultation workshops with young people and people with disabilities were also held.



## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

***Any investigations that the Commission has conducted in relation to any such complaints and any resulting recommendations that the commission has made.***

- (i) No Investigations have taken place during the review of the five-year period.

***Complaints received under an equality scheme's complaints procedure***

- (i) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council did not receive any complaints under the equality scheme's complaint procedure during the reporting period.

### **Conclusion and Lessons learned**

This review has been conducted in a manner broadly aligned with the process used for preparing the Council's Annual Progress Reports, as required under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. However, beyond fulfilling a statutory requirement, the review has also provided Newry, Mourne and Down District Council with a valuable opportunity for strategic reflection on how the Equality Scheme has been embedded into the organisation's policies, practices, and culture over the past five years.

Through this process, the Council has examined key actions taken to promote Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations, enhanced staff training and awareness, and ensuring equality considerations are consistently integrated into policy development and service delivery.

The Council acknowledges the continuous and evolving nature of its responsibilities under Section 75 and is committed to further embedding equality and good relations into all aspects of its governance. The revised Equality Scheme reflects this commitment and sets out clear actions and monitoring frameworks designed to support full compliance with statutory duties.

## **Five - Year Review of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme**

Looking ahead and lessons learned from undertaking the review, the Council will continue to engage with internal and external stakeholders to ensure its approach remains inclusive, transparent, and responsive to emerging needs. The commitments outlined in the revised Scheme will also guide the Council's efforts to track progress, evaluate impact, and drive continuous improvement in promoting equality and good relations across the district.