



# **Eastern Health And Social Services Council**

## **Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998**

### **Progress Report**

**1 April 2003 To March 2004**

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## **1.0 Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties**

The Council continues to produce its Annual Work Programme (AWP), which includes Equality, human rights and good relation objectives. This programme is circulated to all Council Members and staff and is also available on the Council's website. Written quarterly progress reports of the AWP are produced and circulated.

A Senior Manager has the responsibility to take the lead in the Equality agenda and all job descriptions are revised on an annual basis ensuring that S75 obligations are included. These job descriptions are then reviewed yearly at staff performance appraisals. All staff have received Equality training and have been updated in the last year.

There are 30 Council members who act in an unpaid capacity; they also have received training and regular updates on the statutory Equality duties.

The Equality obligation is high on the agenda within Council and progress of the scheme is reported at team meetings, senior management meetings, and Council meetings and with the other Health and Social Services Councils on a regular basis. The Council's Yearly Progress reports on the Equality Scheme and feedback reports are available for members and staff.

As a member of the Eastern Area Good Practice Group (GPG) we meet on a bi-monthly basis with all parties to share learning and agree on the best way forward. There are some members of that group who sit on the Regional Equality Steering Group; information is disseminated to all members of the GPG. Currently the GPG have been working on projects such as a Video for those with Learning Disabilities and a 'Diversity Website'.

The Good Practice Reviews were circulated by the DHSSPSNI at the beginning of February 2004. The Four Councils welcome receipt of these reviews in particular that of the Service User Involvement and Complaints.

The Council is also involved at a regional level with all health, social services and public safety organisations in the sharing of information and regional programme of Equality Impact Assessments.

## **2.0 Screening and Equality Impact Assessment Timetable**

The Council as part of the family of public bodies in Health, Social Services and Public Safety has been involved in the regional programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) and Good Practice Reviews. The Council has attended workshops along with others in the HPSS to identify and prioritise policies that require EQIA's. Within the last year a Senior Manager has been directly involved in the EQIA on Post-Mortems

Jointly the Four Health and Social Services Councils will conduct a local EQIA this incoming year on their policy of User Involvement following the publication of the Good Practice Reviews in February 2004. The Four Councils fully intend to engage rural and urban Service Users in this screening process regarding their policy on User Involvement.

Therefore no screening report for the last year has been submitted to the Equality Commission. However the Four Councils have met with the Equality Commission to outline their intentions and restrictions to date.

## **3.0 Training**

New members of staff receive Equality training ranging from general awareness to specialist training on EQIA's, screening and consultation depending upon the level of staff. This training has been arranged jointly with the Eastern Area Good Practice Group and has been provided by Focus Consultancy and Jones & Cassidy and others. Feedback on all training has been very positive and analysis of the training has been circulated within the Eastern Area.

Existing council staff receive, yearly updates in Equality issues through attendance at the Corporate Training held in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board.

All members of staff have received training this year on 'Religious Diversity in the Workplace'. Senior members of staff have received training from the Coalition of Sexual Orientation (CoSO) which will help those members of staff to have a better understanding of how the Council as a service provider and employer can promote Equality of opportunity for people who are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. A senior manager has also been trained through the Regional Interpreting Project on 'Working well with Interpreters'. All of the above training will assist Council staff to be accountable to the Equality objectives.

All training opportunities are highlighted to Council Members.

#### **4.0 Communication**

Every opportunity is taken to promote and communicate the Council's Equality objectives in public statements, on the web site, interviews, responses to consultation documents and representing the public interest on committees and working groups.

The Equality objectives are communicated at all levels within the Council from staff meetings through to Council meetings. The objectives are included in quarterly progress reports of the Annual Work Programme (AWP) and through the Council's Annual report.

The Four Councils have met recently to review their Equality Schemes in terms of timescales, EQIA's and progress to date. This information has been communicated via a meeting with representatives of the Equality Commission.

#### **5.0 Data Collection & Analysis**

The Council regularly undertakes satisfaction surveys and research on different issues of public interest in the Health and Social Services. In the planning of research projects, the Council engages users of the various services as part of the steering group. Once the report has been approved via the steering group, the information is presented to the relevant organisations that either commission or provide the services. This work that the Council undertakes helps to shape and revise policies being developed by other HPSS bodies. Currently the Council is undertaking a survey of Palliative Care Services and has assisted in a user satisfaction survey on the Lymphoedema Service.

During any consultation process the Council endeavours to seek the views of the users of the service using a variety of methods including questionnaires or focus groups. The views of those consulted with, are included in all Council responses.

The Council routinely collects data of the service users who contact the Council to avail of our services or who are involved in any aspect of the research projects. This data includes age, gender, persons with dependants and persons with a disability.

In this incoming year the Four Councils will be involving Services Users from the S75 categories to assist in the formulation of their policy on meaningful User Involvement taking into consideration the Good Practice Review

## **6.0 Information Provision and Access to Services**

The Council's approved Equality scheme has been circulated to all members and staff. The scheme is available to any group, organisation or person free of charge. We will provide different formats on request including the following:

- On audiotape
- By email
- In larger print
- In other languages
- On disk and
- In Braille

The Council's Equality scheme, minutes of Council's monthly public meetings and research reports conducted by the Council can be downloaded from the website, [www.ehssc.org](http://www.ehssc.org). The Council's website has an interactive page making the Council more accessible to the community. The Council's website also includes a children's section. It has also been constructed following the 'Bobby Test' principles.

The Council meetings are held throughout the Eastern Board area in publicly accessible venues. Times are rotated to facilitate public attendance. Notices of our meetings are circulated to 300+ community and voluntary groups and there is an agenda item, which permits issues to be raised by members of the public. When planning events participants are invited to indicate any particular requirements in relation to communication, mobility or transport and diet. All of the Council meetings are held in buildings that are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

## **7.0 Complaints**

The Council has not received any Section 75 complaints during the period covered by this report. However, the Council has assisted individuals to make complaints to other organisations within this category. In terms of the Council's

role in assisting complainants through the complaints procedure the Senior Managers are kept updated as to what a complainants rights are in relation to S75 obligations and will advise them accordingly.

Following the publication of the Good Practice Review, the Council will review their current procedures.

## **8.0 Timetable**

The timetable contained in our Equality Scheme is regularly reviewed to monitor progress. This is reported on a quarterly basis to the Council Members and staff. It is also reviewed in conjunction with the other Health and Social Services Councils.

Following a recent meeting with the Equality Commission the Councils will be conducting a joint EQIA this year in relation to User Involvement

## **9.0 Consultation**

The Council in its response to consultation documents, new policy and research projects, regularly conducts consultation exercises being inclusive of the 9 categories.

Methods of consultation have varied from large public meetings to small steering groups and one to one interviews.

This year the Council conducted several focus groups both rural and urban in the Eastern Area in relation to the consultation on Community Midwifery Units. Representatives from ethnic minorities' and the lesbian community were included in those groups. The views of those consulted with were included in the Councils response.

As a direct result of a complaint to a change in service provision in terms of disabled access, the Council set-up focus groups with the service users to address this issue with the Trust. The outcome of these focus groups has resulted in a users forum being formed and the users being consulted about the on-going developments of this service.

The Council also set-up a steering group for the research project into the Palliative Care Services within the Eastern Area. This group consists of service users, service providers and commissioner.

When planning any of the events, the Council will invite participants to indicate any particular requirements in relation to communication, mobility or transport.

## **10.0 The Good Relations Duty**

The Council is committed to its obligations in terms of the Good Relations Duty. This has been evident by ensuring all Council staff attend training.

Promoting good relations between political and religious groups is ongoing in the daily work of the Council staff. Interview panels for Council staff are not biased towards any section of the community.

The promotion of good relations in the workplace is on a daily basis. All members of staff have attended 'Religious Diversity in the Workplace' training that will help to increase staff awareness in recognising and responding to the needs of our clients and also to each other.

Through our facilitation of various focus and public group meetings and user participation, the Council promotes good relations by ensuring each member of the community who attends, is given an equal opportunity to express their views and opinions without being biased to any.

Council members consist of people from various sections of the community.

## **11.0 Impacts and outcomes**

The Council, as a small organisation, do not devise new policies very often. However any new policies will be assessed to ensure that it complies with our statutory Equality duty.

The Council fully accepts its responsibility under the S75 legislation. To facilitate this we have worked collaboratively with many organisations both statutory and voluntary, in a number of initiatives.

We will continue to provide assistance, guidance and support to a number of organisations in developing public involvement initiatives within the Health and Social Services.

The Council will be reporting on the outcome of the focus group meetings regarding the joint Councils policy on Liaison with Voluntary and Community sector in the next progress report.