



**Eastern Health And Social Services Council**

**Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998**

**Progress Report**

**1 April 2002 To March 2003**

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## **1.0 Preparation of Equality Scheme**

The Equality Commission approved the Council's Equality scheme in May 2001. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> progress report submitted to the Commission.

## **2.0 Strategic Implementation of the S75 Equality Duties**

The Council continues to produce its Annual Work Programme, which includes equality, human rights and good relation objectives. This programme is circulated to all Council Members, staff and is available on the Council's website.

All job descriptions are revised on an annual basis ensuring that S75 obligations are included these are then reviewed yearly at staff performance appraisals. This year the Council have employed new members of staff, including the arrangement of a Job - Share opportunity and the appointment of a Senior Manager who's job includes the development of the Council's equality scheme.

All new members of staff have had equality training and existing staff have received updates in the last year.

There are 30 Council members who act in an unpaid capacity they also receive training and regular updates on the statutory equality duties.

The equality obligation is high on the agenda within Council and progress is reported at team meetings, senior management meetings, and Council meetings and with the other Health and Social Services Councils on a regular basis.

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.

The Eastern Area's Good Practice Review – Access to Information is currently being undertaken and will be submitted to the Regional Steering Group for review and then for circulation.

The Council's library database has undergone an inventory exercise, which informs staff and members of the literature held on the 9 categories. This inventory has been as part of the wider exercise with the Eastern Area Group.

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.

Teambuilding exercises have been conducted in the last year, which not only focuses staff on the role and activities of the Council but also on the promotion of good relations within the workplace.

Through our facilitation of various focus and public group meetings of 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.

Currently the Good Practice Group is co-ordinating Diversity training with the Inter-Faith Forum. The Council will avail of this training that focuses on good relations.

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.

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

The Council as part of the family of public bodies in Health, Social Services and Public Safety have 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. The Chairman has directly been involved in the EQIA on the Oral Health Strategy.

Jointly the four Councils will conduct a local EQIA following completion of the Good Practice Reviews on User Involvement and Access to Information. Therefore no screening report has been submitted to the Equality Commission. The Chief Officer (Jane Graham) on behalf of the four Councils has already written to the commission on this issue on 16 April 2002.

### **4.0 Communication and Training Provision**

New members of staff receive Equality training ranging from general awareness to specialist training on EQIA's, screening and consultation. This training has been arranged jointly with the Eastern Area Good Practice Group and has been provided by Focus Consultancy and Jones & Cassidy. Feedback on this 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.

Every opportunity is taken to promote and communicate the Council's equality objectives in public statements, interviews, responses to consultation

documents and representing the public interest on committees and working groups.

## **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.

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.

The Regional Equality Steering Group commissioned an Equality Information Subgroup to consider the availability of information relating to Section 75 categories, information gaps and how information needs could be assessed. A Regional Equality Liaison Panel has been established with the purpose of providing an initial view on proposed consultations. The panel includes members from the 9 equality categories. Meetings are held on a regular basis as a forum through which equality consultations can be initiated, and issues of concern raised from the voluntary and community sector. During 2002/03 the panel has matured, and has now become an effective mechanism through which the views of section 75 categories of people can be heard.

The Council staff are committed to providing a high standard of service to the public. It undertakes satisfaction surveys of the service provided by the Council as part of its Annual work Programme.

## **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

A Council Member who is visually impaired receives all communication from the Council on audiotape.

Recently the Council has set-up its own website, [www.ehssc.org](http://www.ehssc.org) The Equality scheme, minutes of Council's monthly public meetings and research reports conducted by the Council can be downloaded from the site. 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. The website has been constructed following the 'Bobby Test' principles.

The Council meetings are held throughout the Eastern Board area in publicly accessible venues and times are rotated to facilitate public attendance. Notices of our meetings are circulated to 300+ community and voluntary groups and we have 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.

The Eastern Area's Good Practice Review – Access to Information is currently being undertaken. An information package 'Cracking the Information Barrier: The 5Cs of information Provision' has been devised following widespread consultation. The Council have provided assistance and guidance in the area of public involvement.

## **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.

The Council are currently awaiting the Good Practice Review conducted by the Southern Health and Social Services Area on the complaints procedures within the Health and Social Services to assess impact on their service.

## **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 and is also reviewed in conjunction with the other Health and Social Services Councils.

The delay in the Good Practice Reviews has had an adverse impact on our progress to carry out an EQIA on one of our policies, in relation to liaison with community and voluntary groups.

## **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.

As a member of the Eastern Area Best Practice Group we meet on a bi-monthly basis with all parties to share learning and agree on the best way forward. The Council has been involved in identifying users of the Health and Social Services inclusive of the specific 9 categories, to participate in a focus group to seek their views on the Good Practice Review 'Cracking the Information Barrier' - Access to Information a guide for Health Service staff.

When consulting with the users of the Maternity Service in response to the consultation document about the Central Belfast Maternity Hospital, the Council approached various women's groups. Three focus group meetings in venues accessible to the women were arranged. Representatives from ethnic minorities' and the lesbian community were included in those groups. When planning events, participants are invited to indicate any particular requirements in relation to communication, mobility or transport.

## **10.0 Impacts and outcomes**

The Council, as a small organisation, do not devise new policies very often. 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.

## **11.0 Additional Information**