

Derry City and Strabane District Council Equality Scheme Five Year Review Report

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Equality Officer: Hollie Carroll

hollie.carroll@derrystرابane.com

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Executive Summary

a) To what extent has your public authority's approved scheme provided a workable basis for mainstreaming the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations into policy-making over the past five years?

b) What key lessons have been learnt over the past five years in terms of effectively implementing the approved equality scheme?

c) What more needs to be done to achieve outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories?

Derry City and Strabane District Council's Equality Scheme has provided staff and elected members with detail on how to fulfil its duties on a workable basis i.e. the practical steps that must be taken to comply with Section 75 of the NI Act.

The Senior Leadership Team has promoted the Equality Scheme to staff and to elected members. Council has employed a resource to support the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer to deliver the Scheme and action plans and to provide specialist advice to staff.

The key lessons learned include:

- Council could strengthen its approach by including screening documentation with relevant committee reports and requiring senior leaders (Directors, Heads of Service or Lead Officers) to sign off the outcome of screening exercises (along with a record of the officer responsible for drafting the policy)
- Council could enhance its transparency by ensuring publication of all policies and screenings on our website as they are approved and/or quarterly

To achieve outcomes for individuals from the nine equality categories Council could strengthen its relationship with those on our consultee list via further development and enhancement of the Equality and Assurance Oversight Group and encouragement of direct engagement with representative groups/individuals.

Background

1. A general introductory statement specifying the purpose of the scheme and the public authority's commitment to the statutory duties.

As a public authority with a section 75 Equality Scheme this Council is obliged to review the Scheme 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 sub-paragraph, whichever is later, review that scheme and inform the [Equality] Commission of the outcome of the review.”¹

The Scheme was first submitted to the Commission for approval in 2017, and was reviewed 3 years later in 2020, with no changes made. This review takes place within 5 years of the 2020 review. The Commission will be informed about the outcome of this review.

Reviewing the operation of the Equality Scheme

Council's Equality Scheme describes certain arrangements that we set up and which we are 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.²

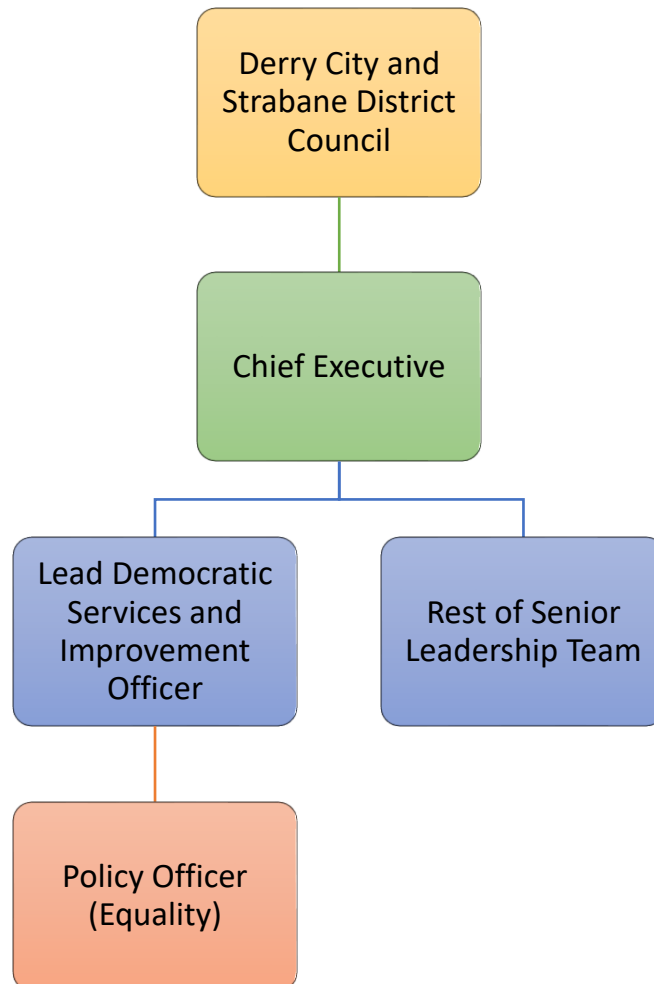
This includes arrangements for (a) training staff, (b) assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity, and (c) monitoring any adverse impact of those policies that have been adopted.

The purpose of this 5-year review is to examine how those arrangements have been applied and to assess how effective they have been in assisting Council to comply with the Section 75 duties.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/schedule/9> (accessed 20/05/25)

² See 'Section 75(1) and (2), Northern Ireland Act 1998' at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/section/75> (ccessed 20/05/25)

The structure within which equality sits is shown in the diagram below:



How leaders within the authority are engaged in the scheme's implementation Council's Equality Scheme 2020-2025 was supported and endorsed by a succession of Mayors and by our Chief Executive.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer and the Policy Officer (Equality) have complied with the Scheme's commitments between 2020-2025 by:

- Submitting 5 Annual Progress Reports annually to the Equality

Commission (all of which are available on www.derrystrabane.com)

- Developing and delivering the Equality Action Plan 2020-23 and the Disability Action Plan 2020-23
- Developing the Equality Action Plan 2024-27
- Developing the Disability Action Plan 2024 -27
- Conducting an Audit of Inequalities 2023
- Screening 66 policies and conducting EQIAs as required
- Seeking input from our stakeholders on the Equality and Disability Action Plans, and other policies, including by convening the Equality and Oversight Assurance Group twice each year
- Appraising the Senior Leadership Team of their role in complying with the scheme commitments, through regular meetings (evidence of which is within the minutes of said meetings)
- Briefing elected members on their responsibilities through presentation of the Equality Scheme and the Equality Action Plans and Disability Action Plans
- Providing a 1-1 on-demand advisory service to all policy makers via the Policy Officer (Equality)
- Consulting on policy reviews and policy developments

- Advising policy makers to screen all new and revised policy and providing an advisory and support function to all staff who develop and/or implement Council's corporate policies, strategies and initiatives
- Responding to requests for information in alternative formats

The Policy Officer (Equality) supported the Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer in the delivery of the Council's Equality Scheme and providing specialist support and advice to Council Officers in the development of policy, procedures and practice that is compliant with Council's Statutory Equality Duties. A full time Policy Officer (Equality) was in place until March 2023. A part-time Policy Officer was in place from June 2023 to present.

How the scheme's implementation has benefitted individuals within the Section 75 groups

The table below outlines some examples of how individuals have benefited from the scheme's implementation.

| Section 75 group | Example of how the scheme's implementation has benefitted individuals |
|-------------------------|---|
| Religious belief | The Good Relations Priority Action Plans were screened and developed to be as inclusive and wide-ranging as possible. |
| Political opinion | Directed Intervention Action Plans were screened and submitted to Council. ³ |
| Gender | A motion for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls was developed. |
| Race | The Good Relations Priority Action Plans were screened and developed to be as inclusive and wide-ranging as possible. |

³ There are some areas within the Council area that are subject to a number of unique challenges over the summer period. The Directed Intervention funding is targeted at new and alternative positive activities that will strategically benefit these areas.

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Age | Council was recognised as a UNICEF Child Friendly City and Community and has delivered on its Age Friendly Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025. The Leisure & Sports Pricing Policy took into consideration free and subsidised services for those of different ages. |
| Disability | The Ryan McBride Stadium Accessibility Improvements were important in enhancing accessibility. |
| Marital status | The Policy on Registration and Solemnisation Fees was screened out. |
| Dependants (with or without) | The Home Safety Service has reported an increase in requests for alternative languages by parents. |
| Sexual orientation | The Trans Manifesto was retained in the Equality Scheme. |

Making changes to the Equality Scheme

There are no substantive changes to the Equality Scheme. Our arrangements for consulting, assessing and monitoring policies remains unchanged.

Some small administrative changes have been made, such as updating the term Management Team to Senior Leadership Team. Some context has also been added to Appendix 2.

Good practice

Council's policy and equality team have collaborated with other internal departments to combine 4 screening tools into one document, the Integrated Impact Assessment, thereby mainstreaming equality into the Council's functions.

Over the past five years Council officers have emailed quarterly updates to around 200 stakeholders on its equality emailing list, advising that 66 policies have been screened and the result of those screenings.

Council's Policy Officer (Equality) has delivered regular and demand-led training on the Equality Scheme, screening and EQIAs.

Council has set up working groups to discuss/address specific issues which may have equality/good relations implications, for example the centenary working group, the bonfire working group, the language working group and the LGBTQIA+ working group.

The Council awaits the guidance being developed by the Equality Commission following the judgment of *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers*.⁴ A special meeting of the Derry City and Strabane District Council LGBTQIA+ Working Group was held on 29th September 2025, during which members agreed to maintain the Trans Manifesto within the Equality Scheme. This decision was communicated at a meeting of the Equality Assurance Oversight Group on 3rd November 2025.

Challenges

In September 2025 Council received a series of recommendations from the Equality Commission as part of the Investigation Report of a complaint alleging that Derry City and Strabane District Council failed to comply with its Equality Scheme.⁵ Council will report its actions on these recommendations within six months of the issuance of the report.

Next steps

The law requires that Derry City and Strabane District Council inform the Equality Commission NI about the outcome of this review. Council will share a summary of the main findings of this report with the Commission, focusing on:

- How the scheme's implementation has benefited individuals within the Section 75 groups
- How leaders within Council are engaged in the scheme's implementation
- Challenges Council has overcome, as well as lessons learned and examples of good practice.

The Equality Scheme will be reviewed again by February 2030.

⁴ 16th April 2025

⁵ <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/Public%20Authorities/Investigation-report-DCSDC-Sept-2025.pdf> (accessed 31/10/25)