



Equality & Diversity
in Local Councils

Equality and Diversity Group

Strategy and Action Plan

2019 - 2021

September 2019

1. Background

The purpose of the Equality & Diversity Group is to prioritise and influence equality, good relations and diversity initiatives across local government. The Group attempts to bring together the equality, good relations and diversity practices across the sector and in so doing, seeks to integrate the priorities of the Group with the ongoing work of individual councils.

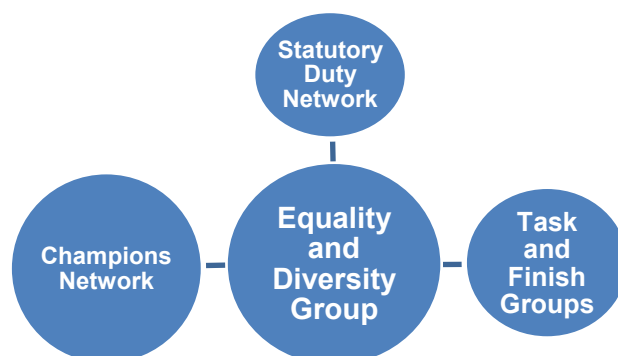
The Group has responsibility for:

- the development of the overall strategic direction for equality, good relations and diversity initiatives in local government
- determining priorities and setting objectives
- monitoring progress and reporting to the Local Government Staff Commission and Solace on a regular basis

The Group was first constituted in 2011 and was re-constituted in 2015 in the light of the reform of local government. A new Chair, who is the Chief Executive of one of the 11 councils, was appointed by Solace in 2019.

A key feature of the work of the Equality and Diversity Group is the Diversity Champions' Network which is made up of the elected member(s) and officer(s) Champions in each council. The role of the Diversity Champion is to champion equality, good relations and diversity in individual councils and, where appropriate, to act as first point of contact for enquiries and provide advice, guidance and support on equality, good relations and diversity issues within the organisation. The Network provides a forum of support and networking for the Diversity Champions and meets quarterly to provide training and development opportunities for the Champions.

Sub groups such as the Statutory Duty Network continue to meet, together with specific task and finish groups which will be established as required.



2. Membership

The membership of the Equality and Diversity Working Group is drawn from stakeholder bodies across the local government sector and includes Chief Executives, Diversity Champions, Equality Officers Good Relations Officers and HR Officers in councils, trade union officers and Staff Commission members, as well as representatives from external stakeholder groups.

The current membership comprises:

Chair (Solace)	Anne Donaghy, Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim BC
LGSC	Lindsay Boal, Commission Member Monica Burns, Commission Member Willie Francey, Commission Member Bernie Kelly, Commission Member Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Services
Disability Action	TBC
Diversity Champions	Cllr Michael Goodman, Antrim and Newtownabbey BC Cllr Cáthal Mallaghan, Mid Ulster DC
Community Relations Council	Jacqueline Irwin, Chief Executive
Equality Commission for NI	Patrice Hardy, Equality Manager Kevin Oakes, Equality Officer
NIPSA	Geraldine Alexander, Assistant Secretary
PPMA NI	Susan McCague, HR Officer, Newry, Mourne and Down DC
Statutory Duty Network	Mary Hanna, Policy & Diversity Officer, Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon BC
DemocraShe	Bronagh Hinds
Equality Coalition	Robyn Scott
NILGA	Diane Anderson
Good Relations Officers	Lynsey Gray, GR Officer, Lisburn & Castlereagh CC

The work of the Group is supported by Commission officers, and they also provide a secretariat service at meetings.

There may be occasions whenever additional support may be required by the Group and this support may be provided through task and finish groups. Membership of these groups may include other council officers and elected members, other statutory agencies and partners.

3. Purpose of the Strategy and Action Plan

This document has been developed to guide the work of the Equality and Diversity Group in the longer term, and to focus on the action plan for 2019 - 2021. It was developed following consultation with members of the Equality and Diversity Group, the groups which the members represent, and other stakeholders.

In focussing on these activities, continuing to work with our stakeholders and responding to their needs, the Equality and Diversity Group aims to support and assist councils to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations as an Employer, a Service Provider and a Civic Leader.

This will be done by working in partnership with councils:

- to address equality, good relations and diversity issues
- to ensure continuity of the ongoing equality, good relations and diversity activities
- to support cross-sectoral initiatives
- to involve and inform external stakeholders
- to pilot new equality, good relations and diversity initiatives
- to provide training and development initiatives
- to showcase best practice

4. Reporting Mechanisms

Progress on meeting the activities detailed in the action plan will be:

- reported to members of the Equality and Diversity Group at their meetings
- a copy of the minutes of the Equality and Diversity Group meetings will be included on the Staff Commission meeting agendas for information
- a copy of the minutes of the Equality and Diversity Group meetings will be included on the Solace meeting agendas for information
- periodic reports will be sent to councils through the Local Government Staff Commission E-zine, including updates from external stakeholders
- members will report back to, and seek feedback from, the stakeholder group they represent:
 - Solace
 - LGSC
 - PPMA NI
 - Statutory Duty Network
 - Diversity Champions' Network
 - Disability Action

- Community Relations Council
- ECNI
- NIPSA
- Equality Coalition
- Nilga
- Good Relations Officers

5. Equality and Diversity Framework

This strategy and action plan supports the Equality and Diversity Framework which details each Council's:

- statement of intent
- compliance with equality, good relations and diversity obligations

The Framework covers everyone who uses council services, facilities and accesses information.

6. Outcomes/Outputs

Our priorities include actions to help achieve the Draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021 targets including:

Outcome 3: We have a more equal society

Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs

Outcome 8: We care for others and help those in need

Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity

The Strategy and Action Plan will result in the following benefits for the local government sector:

- officers and members will be well informed on equality, good relations and diversity issues
- councils seek to be representative of the communities which they serve
- local government will be recognised for best practice in equality, good relations and diversity
- officers and members will be supported and developed through a coaching and mentoring network

- external stakeholders will have a mechanism to share their views and information with councils
- councils will benefit from cross-sectoral working and initiatives
- councils will be able to demonstrate to their citizens that they are committed to equality, good relations and diversity in the development of policy and the delivery of services to the whole community which they serve

Strategy and Action Plan 2019 - 2021	
Key Strategic Objective: By working with our stakeholders and responding to their needs, we aim to support and assist councils to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations as an Employer, a Service Provider and a Civic Leader	
Equality and Diversity Group Develop partnerships with other equality groups and networks Review the membership of the Group to include other equality groups and networks Revise the Equality and Diversity Framework and relaunch it at an event for Councils Establish sub-groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to develop a strategy on Section 75, equality and good relations data including council statistics, NISRA, community planning and ECNI to identify training required to improve the mainstreaming of the statutory Section 75 equality and good relations duties and statutory Disability Duties 	Ongoing August 19 and ongoing Sept 19 Oct 19 Jan 20
Diversity Champions Review the role of Diversity Champion and provide guidance on how the role should be carried out and how it should link with senior leaders in the council Provide regular training events, for example on the role of Diversity Champions, ethics, dealing with uncomfortable issues/contentious areas	Oct 19 Ongoing – 2 per year
Leadership Work in partnership with the ECNI to promote the implementation of the ECNI 'S75 Demonstrating Effective Leadership Guidance' in councils. Provide a seminar on civic leadership for Diversity Champions and Equality Officers	Sept 19 Feb 20

<p>Partnership Working</p> <p>Build links with the Solace Disability Champion, PPMA, Statutory Duty Network and ECNI and develop ways to work in partnership, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability employability initiatives and targets • Ensure best practice in reasonable adjustment policies • Work with the ECNI to implement the Mental Health Charter across local government • Work with the ECNI to implement the Every Customer Counts initiative across local government • Set up a Regional Health and Well-Being Group 	<p>Sept 19</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Oct 19</p>
<p>Good Practice Examples</p> <p>Develop a mechanism to share best practice examples (including S75 ad DAP) between councils and the wider public sector.</p> <p>Hold an annual seminar to showcase best practice examples</p> <p>Work in partnership with Nilga to include an equality, good relations and diversity award category in the Local Government Awards in Feb 2021</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>24 Sept 19 and annually</p> <p>2020/21</p>
<p>Consultation</p> <p>Develop a mechanism to facilitate consultation events across councils, as required.</p>	<p>Feb 2020</p>



Equality & Diversity
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(Insert Name) Council Equality and Diversity Framework

This Framework details the Council's statement of intent and approach to ensure equality and diversity

Context

Councils are required to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 (the Act). Section 75 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act.

This Framework is designed to assist councils to meet their equality and diversity obligations and to demonstrate their compliance with them.

The Framework covers everyone who uses the Council's services, our facilities and accesses our information, including:

- Customers of the Council
- Members of the Public
- Partners and Other Stakeholders
- Contractors who deliver services on behalf of the Council
- Council Elected Members
- Council Employees
- Trade Unions
- Voluntary and Community Sector
- Business Sector
- Other Public Sector Bodies

In order to assist with the implementation of this Framework the Council has appointed a Councillor and Officer to **champion** equality and diversity across the Council by driving positive actions and acting as a contact point for issues relating to this equality and diversity framework.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE FRAMEWORK

Principle 1: Ensuring we work in a non-discriminatory environment, promote equality, and model best practice in equality and good relations

It is everyone's responsibility to:

- Treat everyone equally and with dignity and respect
- Think about how our actions affect others
- Help people change for the better through example by challenging unacceptable behaviour or language
- Be knowledgeable by taking personal responsibility for training around equality and diversity and good relations (mandatory training for all Elected Members, Council staff and managers is in place)

Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance:

NI Code of Local Government Conduct, Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees, (*Chartermark, Customer Service Standards, etc*)

Principle 2: Ensuring all our decisions are based on evidence to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations

We will:

- Ensure that all policies, projects and programmes of work are screened and, where appropriate, impact assessed
- Publish all screening outcomes including any mitigation or alternative policies considered
- Involve the customers of the council, trade unions, business sector and voluntary and community sector on an on-going basis to assist us in the review and development of existing and new policies

Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance:

Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan, Progress Reports, Screening Reports

Principle 3: Providing access to services, facilities and information

We will take steps to improve access to services, facilities and information and be open about what we can and cannot do:

We will:

- Involve customers and stakeholders in the design, prioritisation and review of services
- Monitor and review services regularly to identify any under-representation or discrimination
- Make sure information is accessible using Plain English and other accessibility standards
- Provide alternative formats, translations and interpreters when needed
- Make sure buildings are accessible and welcoming to all
- Make sure meetings and events are easy to access

Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance: Equality Scheme, Disability Action Plan, Translation and Interpretation Policy, Good Relations Strategy, (*Chartermark, Customer Service Standards, etc*)

Principle 4: Recruiting and employing people fairly

The Council will make sure that we provide equality of opportunity to all in employment.

We will:

- Use non-discriminatory job criteria
- Take positive action to ensure a diverse workforce
- Apply fair selection procedures
- Monitor and review employment practice
- Make reasonable adjustments
- Support staff through appropriate networks

Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance: Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection, Local Government Competency Framework, Staff Handbook, Welcoming Statement

Principle 5: Responding to and learning from complaints and incidents in a positive and pro-active way

Everyone has the right to complain about discrimination and harassment in good faith, without being victimised at any time.

We will:

- Handle complaints and grievances properly
- Resolve matters positively
- Respond to incidents of prejudice or hate crime

Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance: Complaints Policy and Procedure, Grievance Procedure, NI Code of Local Government Conduct, Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees (*Chartermark, Customer Service Standards etc*)

MONITORING

The Council will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Framework and will engage with Councillors, employees and the trade unions regarding any proposed changes to policies or practices.

Signed:

Council Mayor/Chair

Council Chief Executive

Date:



Equality & Diversity in Local Councils

Mr A Tohill
Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council

Dear Anthony

Strategy and Action Plan 2019 – 2021 and Equality and Diversity Framework

Please find attached for your information, a copy of:

- The Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2019 – 2021
- the Equality and Diversity Framework

These documents were formally launched at an Equality and Diversity Seminar which was held in the Castle Tower School in Ballymena on 24th September 2019.

The Strategy and Action Plan sets out a workplan for the Equality and Diversity Group over the next 3 years. It was developed following a stakeholder event in February and a consultation process with all councils, the NI Housing Executive and external stakeholders.

The Equality and Diversity Framework is designed to assist councils to meet their equality and diversity obligations and to demonstrate their compliance to them by endorsing 5 Principles:

- Principle 1: Ensuring we work in a non-discriminatory environment, promote equality, and model best practice in equality and good relations.
- Principle 2: Ensuring all our decisions are based on evidence to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.
- Principle 3: Providing access to services, facilities and information.
- Principle 4: Recruiting and employing people fairly.
- Principle 5: Responding to and learning from complaints and incidents in a positive and pro-active way.

I would now seek your co-operation in having the Equality and Diversity Framework endorsed by your Council.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anne Donaghy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'D' and a trailing flourish.

Anne Donaghy
Chair
Equality and Diversity Group